

Accord Coalition briefing in support of amendments to the Education Bill at the Report Stage for fair admissions



May 2011

The Report Stage and Third Reading of the Education Bill are scheduled to take place this coming Wednesday (May 11th). We are writing to urge that you support two amendments to Clause 34 of the Bill from the Labour front bench, which will ensure that two safeguards that help ensure admissions in schools are fair are retained.

The two amendments are as follows:

- an amendment to section 2 of Clause 34, so that the duty upon local authorities responsible for education to organise a School Admission Forum is retained
- an amendment to section 3 of Clause 34, so that the power currently enjoyed by the school adjudicator to amend any aspect of a school's admissions arrangements that are judged to be in breach of the Schools Admissions Code is retained

Duty on local authorities to organise a School Admission Forum

We believe this duty on councils should be kept, as School Admission Forums help to ensure that admission policies in a local area are fair, do not cause other admission authorities undue problems and that they adhere to the Schools Admissions Code.

Academy schools are their own admission authority, so the expansion of academy schools will only increase the value of having a better coordination of local admission policies, which can be delivered via Admission Forums. We therefore urge members to retain this duty.

Freedom of the school adjudicator to amend any aspect of a school's admissions arrangements

Successive annual reports of the Chief Schools' Adjudicator have shown particular problems with the admission policies at schools that are their own admissions authority.

Similarly, as more and more schools are set to control their own admissions through the academies programme, recent history suggests that problems with schools breaching the code will only further increase.

We believe therefore that retaining the freedom for the school adjudicator to consider and propose changes to any part of a school's admissions arrangements when investigating a complaint would prove increasingly beneficial. We believe it would also be a particularly prudent

measure, as the Government has announced that it is to slim down the Schools Admissions Code, and given that untested education providers are set to enter the state funded school sector through the academies and free schools programmes.

We believe that as schools are given greater freedoms, it follows at the very least that current protections that help ensure schools do not abuse new freedoms over their admissions (whether by accident or design) should be retained.

We urge you to support these two amendments.

If you have any queries please contact the Accord Coalition:

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About the Accord Coalition

The Accord Coalition is a campaign coalition, launched in 2008, which brings together a wide range of organisations, both religious and non-religious, that are concerned that restrictive legislation around admissions, employment and the curriculum in state funded faith schools can serve to undermine community cohesion and not adequately prepare children for life in our increasingly diverse society.

Accord's growing list of members and supporters includes the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, the British Humanist Association, the Christian think tank Ekklesia, the British Muslims for Secular Democracy, The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, the race equality think tank The Runnymede Trust and members from the four largest groupings in parliament.

Accord wants all state funded schools to be open and suitable to all children of every background, no matter what their parents' or their own beliefs. We would like classrooms to be as diverse as the local area from which the school draws its pupils, as we believe that mutual understanding will best grow through a shared civic life, and because we view mutual understanding as vital to the future wellbeing and happiness of society.

Accord is very worried that rather than acting as engine rooms of cohesiveness, through legislative freedoms, some schools can instead help to create environments where mistrust between groups can more readily grow, such as through providing a narrow curriculum about the beliefs of others, and by segregating children and teachers on the grounds of religion. We note that segregation on the grounds of religion can also lead to segregation on the grounds of race and ethnicity too.