



2019-0033230POTA

Lord Agnew Kt DL

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System
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The Reverend Stephen Terry, Chair
Accord Coalition for Inclusive Education
39A Moreland Street
London
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2nd October 2019

Dear Rev. Terry,

Thank you for your letter of 13 September, addressed to the Secretary of State, regarding religious selection at faith free schools. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

The Government is committed to offering parents and children a diverse education system with a wide variety of providers, including faith schools. Faith schools make a significant contribution to the education sector by providing high-quality school places and choice for parents. Faith schools are often popular with parents, whether they belong to a faith or not.

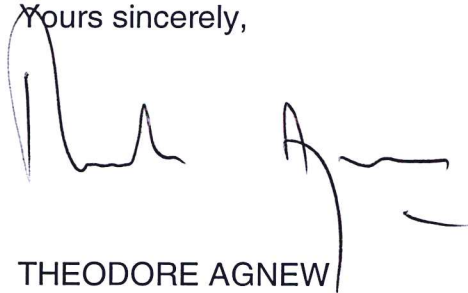
Designated faith schools and academies are permitted, when oversubscribed, to prioritise admissions to children of their faith. This is in recognition of the fact that this is an important way in which faith schools maintain their faith ethos. However, although faith schools may give priority to applicants who are of the faith of the school, they must admit other applicants, if they cannot fill all of their places with such children, and ensure that their admission arrangements comply with the School Admissions Code, which is available at: tinyurl.com/n4v2Jor. Many faith schools choose to open up a proportion of places to children of other faiths or none, and some do not apply any faith criteria at all.

Currently, as you will be aware, all new faith academies and free schools (including those that replace independent schools, but not maintained faith schools that convert to academy status) must admit at least 50% of their intake without reference to faith, when the school is oversubscribed. This is to ensure that, as well as providing additional faith places, such schools also serve their broader local communities. It is also possible for voluntary aided schools to be established, and this would allow the governing body to set their own admissions arrangements, including prioritising pupil by faith.

The Department monitors all aspects of the education system closely, to ensure it is operating effectively and that we can intervene quickly when required. As such, I would like to assure you that we are not planning to remove the 50% cap on new faith academies and free schools, as this is important in ensuring that new free schools serve their communities.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Theodore Agnew'. The signature is stylized with a large initial 'T' and 'A'.

THEODORE AGNEW