

Accord Coalition
39 Moreland Street
London
EC1V 8BB

t: 020 7324 3071
f: 020 7079 3588
e: paul@accordcoalition.org.uk
w: <http://www.accordcoalition.org.uk/>



believing in children, learning together

Pupil admissions

Accord opposes religious discrimination in pupil admissions both as a matter of principle and because of the negative unintended consequences of such arrangements.

Firstly, Accord considers such discrimination to be wrong because it is discrimination. Although the legality of whether faith schools should discriminate against pupils and their families on religious grounds in their admissions is contested, such practices are so far removed from societal norms that faith schools have been given exemptions from equality and human rights legislation so as to enable them to operate in this way.

It is argued that faith schools need to select on religious grounds to allow them to maintain their ethos. Accord does not take a view on the desirability of schools having a religious or philosophical ethos, and while it considers religious selection in admissions unjust, it also views it as a legally disproportionate response for its stated aim. A significant minority of faith schools do not select pupils on religious grounds (which Accord commends), yet are still able to maintain their ethos.

Secondly, Accord thinks discrimination in pupil admissions should also be brought to an end because of the wider damage it can cause to society. By dividing and segregating children on religious grounds in schools we create environments where children grow up more removed from those of different backgrounds, and this can help to create communities where mistrust between groups can more readily develop, potentially storing up problems for the

"I do not see how any man, wishing well to the public peace, and who looks to Ireland as his country, can think that peace can ever be permanently established, or the prosperity of the country ever well secured, if children are separated at the commencement of life on account of their religious opinions. I do not know any measure which would prepare the way for a better feeling in Ireland than uniting children at an early age, and bringing them up in the same schools, leading them to commune with one another, and to form those little intimacies and friendships which often subsist through life"

Dr James Doyle, Roman Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, before a Committee of the UK Parliamentary in 1830

future in terms of community cohesion. Division on the grounds of religion also has added complexity, as it can serve as a proxy for division on the grounds of race, ethnicity, and increasingly also by socio-economic group.

In contrast we know that mixed schooling has a positive effect upon community cohesion and the growth of mutual understanding, as shown by a variety of pieces of research. Among the key findings of 'Social Capital, Diversity and Education Policy', by Professor Irene Bruegel of the London South Bank University Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group (2006) were that:

"Friendship at primary schools can, and does, cross ethnic and faith divides wherever children have the opportunity to make friends from different backgrounds. At that age, in such schools, children are not highly conscious of racial differences and are largely unaware of the religion of their friends ... There was some evidence that parents learned to respect people from other backgrounds as a result of their children's experiences in mixed schools." (p2)

'Identities in Transition: A Longitudinal Study of Immigrant Children', by Rupert Brown, Adam Rutland & Charles Watters from the Universities of Sussex and Kent (2008) found that:

"... the effects of school diversity were consistent, most evidently on social relations: higher self-esteem, fewer peer problems and more cross-group friendships. Such findings show that school ethnic composition can significantly affect the promotion of positive intergroup attitudes. These findings speak against policies promoting single faith schools, since such policies are likely to lead to reduced ethnic diversity in schools."(p9)

Meanwhile, the 2001 'Oldham Independent Review', which was commissioned by the Government, Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council and the local police authority after race riots in the town that year found that:

"Educational mixing: This is closely linked to residential, and in our view it is desirable in principal that as many schools as possible, should have mixed intake so that children growing up can learn one another's customs and cultural backgrounds and accept that stereotypes and racism are unacceptable." (p7)

In contrast, religious selection in faith schools has been blamed on exacerbating ethnic division. At the launch of 'The Cattle Report into Community Cohesion in Blackburn with Darwen' (2009) its author, Prof Ted Cattle, stated that faith schools with religious admission requirements were "automatically a source of division" in the town.

Research from the *Guardian* from March 2012 also demonstrated how faith schools are increasingly serving the better-heeled in their communities. The paper found that 76% of Catholic primaries and 65% of Catholic secondaries in England had a smaller proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (a government bench mark for deprivation) than would be expected if they were representative of the children living in the area covered by the first

three digits of their postcode, while for Church of England primaries this figure was 63.5% and 40% for Church of England secondaries.

Rather than dividing children on religious grounds, the Accord Coalition and its supporters instead want classrooms to be as diverse as the area from which schools draw their pupils, as they believe mutual understanding will best grow through such a shared civic life, and because they view mutual understanding as vital to the future wellbeing and happiness of society.

The Accord Coalition calls on the Government to remove the ability of faith schools to treat children differently according to their faith and discriminate in their pupil admissions.

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, who want state funded schools to be open and suitable to all children of every background, no matter what their parents' or their own beliefs, and who 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 and the race equality think tank The Runnymede Trust.