

Schools that work for everyone: Government consultation

We would encourage all Catholic schools, teachers and parents to respond to this consultation to welcome the removal of the cap on faith-based admissions. Responses do not have to answer all the questions and can focus on a particular section. Positive case studies of Catholic best practice are always helpful to include.

Visit www.education.gov.uk/consultations to submit your response or email schoolsystem.consultation@education.gsi.gov.uk.

Below is a summary of the CES response to the consultation by section which you may wish to consider when responding.

Faith schools

We warmly welcome the recommendation to remove the cap on faith-based admissions for Free schools. We also welcome the Government commitment and recognition of Catholic schools in their commitment to diversity. Catholic schools are popular with parents and provide high academic standards of education in diverse and inclusive schools. This proposal will enable Catholic dioceses to meet the demand for Catholic places and continue its role in integrating migrant communities into British society.

We have responded below to the alternatives to replace the 50% rule:

Prove that there is demand for school places from parents of other faiths

Catholic schools across England are popular with parents from all faiths and none. 30% of pupils in Catholic schools are non-Catholics. Any new Catholic school would be part of the diocesan strategic plan to meet parental demand for more places in Catholic provisions. Dioceses work close with local authorities to ensure that this also helps meet basic need provision. Any new free school application would only occur if there was demonstrable demand from the Catholic community and support from parents. This can be indicated by parental consultation as well as the applications to existing Catholic schools in the local area.

Establish twinning arrangements with other schools not of their faiths

We have a number of successful examples when Catholic schools have twinned with other schools. We have a number of teaching school alliances which work with Catholic schools, Anglican schools and non-faith based schools, similarly many Catholic schools are part of Anglican or other non-Catholic teaching school alliances.

Consider setting up mixed-faith multi-academy trusts

Where additional support is needed we have the legal structures to provide support to non-Catholic schools through our Catholic multi-academy trusts. The Church remains clear that any Catholic school must remain in a Catholic controlled multi-academy trust under designation of the local bishop.

Consider placing an independent member or director who is of a different faith or no faith at all on the governing body of new faith free school

In all Catholic Schools Foundation Governors must make up the majority. This means that just under half of all governor position can be filled with those of any or no faith.

Additional requirements

We also believe that for schools to be truly inclusive, the ethos of the school must be welcoming to all and we have best practice examples of Catholic schools which promote respect and tolerance within their own school community. We would recommend the duty to promote community cohesion is reinstated and that Ofsted is required to inspect all schools in this duty.

Families who are just about managing

We welcome the Government's aim to increase school places in areas of need. We also welcome the new focus on pupils who may not qualify for FSMs but who are from families on modest incomes. We suggest that a range of measures are used to identify pupils who are from families with low disposable income families.

Universities

There are four Catholic universities and one university with Catholic connections. All of them have foundations as teacher training colleges and have strong working partnership with Catholic and non-Catholic schools.

The opening of new schools and establishment of sponsorship arrangement is the role of the diocesan bishop. This enables support and provision to be tailored to the local circumstances.

The Catholic education sector is multi-faceted. Its success is based on partnerships between schools, universities and dioceses. Catholic universities already play a prominent role in supporting Catholic schools through ITT, facilitating leadership programs and sitting on academy trust boards. The diocese role is to determine how and where this support is best focused.

Independent schools

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The role of Catholic Independent schools is to support the local Bishop's strategic vision for Catholic education. There are 126 Catholic independent schools all with a range of capabilities. Almost all of our Catholic independent schools are charities. We welcome the proposals for increased partnership with state funded schools, but recognise that any benchmarks must take into consideration the financial capabilities of the individual school.

Selective schools

There are currently seven Catholic schools with selective admissions in England. Selective schools are not contrary to Canon Law and exist in a number of countries around the world. We support any school system which recognises that parents are the primary educators and which enables parental choice.

However, we also recognise that selective schools can create problems when introduced to an existing school system. In these circumstances the wishes of local parents and the impact on existing schools must be considered. We would also suggest that greater work is required to provide the evidential examples of how a selective system can increase parental choice for all, as opposed to a few.

With the recent cuts to home-to-school transport we have seen parents unable to exercise their choice of school due to the financial burden of additional transport costs. Withdrawal of discretionally provision by local authorities has resulted in parents having to pay thousands of pounds per year to send their children to school and in some case has resulted in the complete removal of the school bus route. These changes have disproportionately impacted of families with small disposable incomes and those on the margins of eligibility.

In the Catholic sector any decision of an individual school to consider becoming selective must have the consent of the Bishop, Trustees and be in full consultation with parents. For this reason, any position on Catholic selective schools must always be a local decision based on the individual circumstances.