



Faith in the system

The role of schools with a religious character in English education and society



Introduction



The Government and the providers of publicly funded schools with a religious character have come together to set out in this document our shared understanding of the contribution these schools (popularly known as faith schools) make to school-based education and to the wider school system and society in England¹.

We are taking the opportunity to highlight the very positive contribution which schools with a religious character make as valuable, engaged partners in the school system and in their local communities and beyond. At the same time, we want to dispel some of the common myths and misunderstandings around faith schools and to build a basis for greater understanding and dialogue within society.

The Government and faith school providers believe that **all** schools – whether they have a religious character or not – play a key role in providing a safe and harmonious environment for all in our society, thereby fostering understanding, integration and cohesion. We set out here our shared commitment to this endeavour and the principles that continue to underlie our joint vision and understanding of the contribution faith communities and their schools make to educating young people in England, to nurturing young people in their faith and to promoting community cohesion.

The faith school providers who sponsor schools with a religious character often also have a particular role in helping to meet the needs of those people in their faith communities who would otherwise be hard to reach, thus enabling them to integrate into society. In addition, some faith school providers also have a mission to help provide education for the wider community and especially those who have difficulty in achieving their potential in education. The Government and the faith school providers believe that both missions are equally valid in offering a choice of high quality school provision to parents and their children.

The faith school providers wish to draw attention to their shared interests and overlapping values as a basis for greater mutual understanding and respect between them, while also remaining true to the teaching of their faiths and respecting the dignity of all faiths.



¹ As this document is a joint vision statement, the statements in it should be read as representing the shared views of the Government and the providers of publicly funded schools with a religious character, except where the text indicates that it is setting out one party's position.

The role of faith schools and their communities

Faith organisations have a long and noble tradition in education in this country – from medieval times, through the Reformation, to the present day. This involvement predates that of the state, catering for all children, especially the most disadvantaged. Between 1811 and 1860 the Church of England founded 17,000 schools through its National Society to offer education to the poor at a time when the Government was not prepared to take on the role. The first Jewish school for the poor was set up in 1732 and from 1852 the Catholic Bishops have worked to make available, wherever possible, schools for all Catholic children regardless of their parents' ability to pay. Church of England, Catholic and Jewish schools have existed in the maintained sector since the late nineteenth century, along with Methodist and Quaker schools. Until the end of the nineteenth century many Free Church denominations had denominational schools in both the maintained and independent sectors in England and Wales. Though many independent schools with Free Church foundations remain, all except the Methodist Church surrendered their maintained schools to local education authorities after the 1902 Education Act introduced free, compulsory Christian education for all. The 1944 Education Act introduced the current dual system of schools with a religious character and those without a religious character.

The promotion of community cohesion in St. Bonaventure's Roman Catholic School, London Borough of Newham

More than 80 per cent of pupils at St. Bonaventure's are from ethnic minority backgrounds and in recognition of its work with a wide range of people the school received the Cultural Diversity Award 2006 from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust in November. Ofsted said in 2006: *'As is recognised in the local community, St. Bonaventure's is an outstanding school of which students, parents, staff, governors and the diocese are rightly proud... The harmonious cultural diversity among the boys is a distinctive feature'*.²

Ofsted also noted the *'many creative and imaginative partnerships with outside bodies, locally and nationally, to enrich the quality of the boys' education'*. Many of these links are curriculum-based, for example the music partnership with Tonbridge School in Kent, but also include interfaith activities such as the Newham Building Bridges in Unity project (December 2006). There is a strong link with The East London Communities Organisation (TELCO).

The Headteacher is an inspirational leader, keen to use new developments on the national education agenda to build on the high standards set at St. Bonaventure's.

Since 1997, Muslim, Sikh, Seventh Day Adventist and Greek Orthodox schools have also joined the maintained sector and other Christian denominations have entered into joint denominational partnerships. Proposals for the first maintained Hindu primary school were published in October 2006 and have been approved with the school due to open in September 2008.

² St. Bonaventure's is an all-boys school.



Around one third of the total number of maintained schools in England are schools with a religious character (approximately 6,850 maintained schools with a religious character, out of a total of around 21,000 maintained schools). Of 47 Academies open, 16 had a faith designation. Three were Church of England, one Roman Catholic, one Anglican/Roman Catholic and 11 non denominational Christian. Nearly 2 out of every 5 independent schools in England have a religious character (around 900 independent schools with a religious character out of a total of just over 2,300 independent schools). Over 700 of these independent schools represent various Christian denominations; the next largest numbers are 115 independent Muslim schools and 38 independent Jewish schools.

This dual system of voluntary schools supported by faith organisations and schools without a religious character is therefore at the heart of the school system in England. The Government continues to support the benefits to society that this system brings for parental choice and diversity and we recognise that with the changes in society, it is only fair that pupils of all faiths and none have the opportunity to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents. Our unequivocal purpose in agreeing this document is for other parties to appreciate the contribution of faith schools.

Whether or not they have a religious character, all maintained schools are required by law to teach religious education and to hold a daily act of collective worship. This reflects the contribution which all schools – whether they have a religious character or not – make to promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and ensuring ongoing religious dialogue and the fostering of community cohesion.

The Government recognises that faith schools are popular with parents and make a valuable contribution to the way in which this country discharges its duty under Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) to respect the right of parents to ensure education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions. The Government and the providers of schools with a religious character also recognise that many parents who are not of the faith of a particular faith school seek places in those schools because they value the ethos and character of the school.

The Government recognises that in relation to the overall size of their populations there are relatively few faith school places in the maintained sector available to Muslim, Sikh and Hindu children compared to the provision available for Christian and Jewish families. Census figures show that in 2001 there were 5,098,930 Christian children, 376,340 Muslim children, 62,237 Sikh children, 33,292 Jewish children and 82,952 Hindu children aged between four and 15 in England. The School Census from 2005 showed that there were 1,710,400 pupils in

maintained Christian schools, 1,770 pupils in maintained Muslim schools, 14,670 pupils in maintained Jewish schools and 640 pupils in maintained Sikh schools in England, while the first maintained Hindu school is due to open in September 2008. The Government recognises the aspirations of these and other faith communities to secure more schools and school places to offer education in accordance with the tenets of their faith.

The Government also recognises the aspiration of the Church of England, the Catholic Church, the Jewish faith and the Greek Orthodox Church to continue to meet the demand from their communities for faith based education, including provision for new migrants, alongside the mission of the Church of England and the Methodist Church to offer education to the wider community. Catholic schools offer education to the wider community where places are available and there is demand that they can fulfil and sustain. The Government also recognises the position of many in the Free Churches who focus on commitment to the provision of state community schools and do not seek to establish further schools with a Free Church character.



The Government and faith school providers recognise that each faith school is part of more than one family. Faith schools are part of the local family of schools alongside other schools serving the area, including those of the same faith, of other faiths and those without a formal religious character. Each faith school is also part of its faith family, allowing pupils to be drawn from a wider geographical community and links with schools further apart. We believe that this plurality of relationships adds to the richness of provision which each school offers and which they can offer together.



Accordingly, the Government welcomes the contribution that schools with a religious character make to the school system – both as a result of their historical role and now as key players in contributing to the more diverse school system with greater opportunities for parental choice that we seek. The Government remains committed to supporting the establishment of new schools by a range of providers – including faith organisations – where local consultation has shown that this is what parents and the community want, and where this greater diversity will help to raise standards.

St. Cyprian's Greek Orthodox School as part of a cohesive community

St. Cyprian's is a unique school as it is the only state Greek Orthodox voluntary aided primary school in the country, under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain. It opened in 2000 and it is a two-form entry school in Thornton Heath, Croydon, South London.

The school serves the families of six Greek Orthodox parishes in South London and has on roll 331 pupils. However not all pupils are of Greek Orthodox religious background. Other nationalities and faiths include Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Ethiopian Orthodox, Church of England, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Sikh, Muslim and Hindu.

The broad intake of children with different ethnic and religious backgrounds helps to promote social cohesion, through enabling all children to learn tolerance and understanding as well as preparing children for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

The Christian Greek Orthodox ethos pervades all areas of school life and Greek is taught as a Modern Foreign language from nursery to Year 6 daily, by Greek teachers from the Greek embassy and Cypriot Education Mission. The quality of this provision has been recently recognised through a Leading Aspect Award for this area.

The school is proud of its links with the community and this is reflected in visitors to the school, displays and assemblies. Collective worship takes place daily and prayers are said in Greek.

Celebrating festivals, events from other cultures as well as learning about other religions is deeply embedded in the school's curriculum.

Recently the school has had close links with a Jewish school in Southgate as well as connecting with a Secondary Catholic Boys School as part of an Icon Enterprise Day.

St. Cyprian's was inspected by Ofsted in June 2007 and was praised for its outstanding moral, spiritual and social development of pupils. *'Racial harmony and tolerance are apparent in every aspect of the school's life.'* We believe our school is an oasis of a cohesive community.

How do schools with a religious character contribute to the school system?

What are faith schools?

What we call 'faith schools' largely fall into 3 categories: maintained schools with a religious character; Academies with a religious character; and independent schools with a religious character. These first two categories are also known as publicly funded schools. This document is primarily concerned with publicly funded schools but the vision set out in this document and examples of good practice in terms of community cohesion and collaboration between schools of different faiths are equally applicable to independent schools – and in many cases also to schools without a religious character.

Maintained faith schools are like all other maintained schools in a number of important ways, while there is also much which gives them their distinct identities and ethos. As with all maintained schools, maintained faith schools follow the National Curriculum, participate in National Curriculum tests and assessments and are inspected by Ofsted accordingly. In addition their denominational religious education (RE) and collective worship are inspected specifically. They have fully qualified teaching staff employed in accordance with the national School Teachers Pay and Conditions document; and they must act in accordance with the statutory School admissions Code. Similarly, all maintained schools and Academies, whether or not they have a religious character, are required to have daily acts of collective worship and to teach religious education as part of their curriculum. Having a religious character gives a maintained school specific flexibilities in the appointment of staff; teaching and inspection of RE; collective worship; admissions policy and the school's ethos. The rest of this document sets out in more detail what this means in practice.

For **Academies**, as with maintained schools, being designated as having a religious character has implications for the appointment of staff, and admissions arrangements. All Academies' admissions arrangements are agreed with the Secretary of State as a condition of their funding agreement, and must be consistent with the statutory School admissions Code. The Education Act 2002 repealed the arrangement in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 that allowed schools with a religious character to reserve places for children of their own faith or denomination. All applicants for school places must be considered, though the School Admissions Code allows faith schools to give priority for admission to children on the basis of religious affiliation. Although Academies are not bound by the National Curriculum, existing Academies must teach a rounded curriculum including the core subjects and carry out Key Stage 3 assessments in English, maths and science. The secondary National Curriculum as a whole has been made more flexible to accommodate a more personalised approach to learning, and all future Academies will be required to follow the National Curriculum programme of study in English, Maths, Science and ICT.

The providers of faith schools, like the providers of all schools, are committed to ensuring that their schools:

- a. promote community cohesion. In this context, the providers of faith schools and their faith communities welcome the duty imposed on the governing bodies of all maintained schools in the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to promote community cohesion and for Ofsted to report on community cohesion in its inspection reports of maintained schools and Academies. The duty on schools to promote community cohesion comes into force in September 2007³;
- b. work in a spirit of partnership with the local authority and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) as commissioners of education. In this context, the providers of maintained faith schools and Academies welcome the involvement of local authority governors as members of their governing bodies;
- c. endeavour to meet the needs of all their pupils whether they are of the faith or not;
- d. offer high standards of education;
- e. work in partnership with other schools and organisations from the voluntary and statutory sectors and play a full role in the local Admissions Forum and Schools Forum;
- f. safeguard and promote the welfare of all their pupils and, like all schools, link with the Local Safeguarding Children Board;
- g. respect the dignity of the human person within each individual – including pupils and staff – of all faiths and none; and additionally
- h. (in the case of faith schools), nurture young people in the faith of their family.



Governors and staff of all schools are expected to meet their legal requirements to promote a positive attitude to diversity of faith, race and ethnicity through every aspect of every pupil's school experience. In particular, staff and governors will encourage pupils to respect their own and other faiths and beliefs in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony with those of other faiths and no faith.

The following sections of this document set out in greater detail the shared vision of the Government and the providers of maintained faith schools and faith Academies for the way in which these schools play their part in the publicly funded school system.

³ A copy of the guidance to schools on community cohesion is available at www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/Communitycohesion/

Addressing ethnic minority achievement in St. Mary's Church of England High School, Cheshunt

St. Mary's CofE High School is a co-educational, voluntary aided school for students aged 11-19 located in Cheshunt. Due to the proximity of London and the boroughs of Enfield, Edmonton, Barnet and Haringey, and in conjunction with migration of increasing numbers of families into Cheshunt, the school receives a larger proportion of students of ethnic minority heritage than would normally be seen in Hertfordshire schools. The majority of these students are of black Afro-Caribbean heritage with other significant representative groups from the Greek, Turkish, Cypriot and Italian communities.

It was found that, in line with national trends, there was significant under-achievement of students of Afro-Caribbean heritage. As a result a decision was made to focus and plan support on this group. In order to understand the students in a more comprehensive manner and to ensure that they were supported as much as possible, it seemed very sensible to involve parents/carers in the work from an early stage.

A parents forum was established. The forum has strengthened relationships and trust between the school and parents/carers. In addition, the forum has provided a vehicle for some difficult issues to be discussed openly and so dealt with rather more quickly with opportunity for debate and clear explanation. A number of activities to support children of ethnic minority families are in place and well attended – for example a mentoring group each for Year 10 students and Year 8 students supported by an external provider.

The forum has achieved many of its aims for ethnic minority children and a decision has been made to alter the focus of the group again to broaden involvement of parents/carers and students. In addition, as a result of this work, it is felt that under-achievement might be linked more to social class than ethnic background although undoubtedly the picture is complex. Therefore, as of September 2007/08, the forum will address student under-achievement and hopefully encourage more parents/carers to join the group and so increase support for students.

During the school day

The Curriculum: Both Government and faith school providers are committed to ensuring a broad and balanced education and personalised learning and equal opportunities for all pupils, irrespective of whether or not a particular pupil is from the faith of the school concerned. The school curriculum comprises all learning and other experiences that each school provides for its pupils. This includes the contribution that the National Curriculum⁴ makes to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, religious education, collective worship, sex and relationship education and careers education. Within the school curriculum, the National Curriculum secures for all pupils, irrespective of social background, culture, race, gender, differences in ability and disabilities, an entitlement to a number of areas of learning. It also makes expectations for learning and attainment explicit to pupils, parents, teachers, governors, employers and the public, and establishes national standards for the performance of all pupils in the subjects it includes.

The aim of the school curriculum is to develop knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes necessary for each pupil's self-fulfilment and development as a well-rounded individual and an active and responsible citizen and to provide the foundation of the Government's commitment to the development of each pupil's religious literacy. Existing Academies are also bound by their funding agreements to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum and to carry out National Curriculum assessments in English, maths and science, while future Academies will be required to follow the National Curriculum Programmes of Study in English, maths, science and ICT.

Independent schools must be registered with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and as a condition of registration must meet standards set out in regulations. These regulations do not require independent schools to follow the National Curriculum: they set out areas of learning which all pupils should experience so that learning opportunities are suitable for the child's age, aptitude and needs, but schools have considerable flexibility about how they are delivered. All independent schools must also reach and maintain a satisfactory standard in respect of the quality of education provided, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural developments of pupils, the welfare, health and safety of pupils, the premises and accommodation at the school, and the suitability of the proprietor and staff within the school.

Religious Education: All maintained schools, whether they have a religious character or not, are required to teach religious education to age 19. While RE is part of the basic curriculum, it is not part of the National Curriculum, and is not subject to statutorily prescribed attainment targets, programmes of study or assessment arrangements. Voluntary aided faith schools have the right to teach RE in accordance with the tenets of their faith; while voluntary controlled and foundation faith schools, along with schools without a religious character, use the locally agreed RE syllabus, taking advice from Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education to help ensure that each RE syllabus reflects the religious make-up of an area.



⁴ Further information on the National Curriculum can be found on: http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/Schools/ExamsTestsAndTheCurriculum/DG_4016665

The Government and providers of schools with a religious character believe that all faith schools should teach pupils about their own faith and foster awareness of the tenets of other faiths.

In October 2004, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) published the first non-statutory National Framework for RE, which identified important principles for religious education. In their Joint Statement in February 2006 on the importance of RE, the Government and faith leaders recognised the important contribution of RE to developing respect for and sensitivity to others. In particular those whose faith and beliefs are different from their own. It should promote discernment and enable pupils to combat prejudice and contribute to community cohesion. In this spirit, the Government and the faith school providers now reaffirm the commitment they made, in the February 2006 Joint Statement on the importance of RE, to using the principles of good religious education enunciated in the non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education when developing and reviewing the RE curriculum for their schools and colleges.

The Government and faith school providers also respect the long-held right of parents to withdraw their children from religious education if they so wish.

Collective Worship: All maintained schools are required to have a daily act of collective worship. In schools without a religious character, this must be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian nature; while in schools with a religious character, collective worship may be in accordance with the tenets and practices of the religious designation of the school. The Government recognises the value of collective worship in schools in contributing to young people's spiritual, social, moral and cultural development and to exploring social and moral issues and their own beliefs. It also recognises that collective worship has an important role in promoting the ethos of a school.

The Government and faith school providers also respect the long-held right of parents to withdraw their children from collective worship if they so wish and acknowledge the change in the law that allows sixth-form pupils, if they wish, to be able to withdraw from collective worship. Alternative activities which pursue similar objectives and nurture students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are to be encouraged.

Citizenship: All maintained secondary schools are required to teach Citizenship education. The Government and the faith school providers believe Citizenship education has an important role to play in helping young people to develop a full understanding of their roles and responsibilities as citizens in a modern, diverse society. We recognise that Citizenship education can help young people to develop social and moral responsibility and to engage actively in their communities.

The Government and the faith school providers believe it is important that schools should teach 'identity and diversity: living together in the UK' as part of the secondary curriculum for citizenship education. We welcome the fact that this was one of the recommendations of Sir Keith Ajegbo's 'Diversity and Citizenship Curriculum Review' published in January 2007⁵, to which we contributed. This is a vital agenda for all schools, whether they have a religious character or not. We will continue to work together and with other stakeholders to take forward this important agenda.

⁵ A copy of this report can be found at the following link:
http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/DfES_Diversity_&_Citizenship.pdf

Rounded British Education at The Swaminarayan School⁶

The Swaminarayan School was founded in 1991 by His Divine Holiness Shree Pramukh Swami Maharaj to provide education along the lines of independent British schools, whilst reinforcing Hindu culture and tradition. It is a non-profit making co-educational school for children aged 2½ to 18 years.

On the curriculum front, we follow most of the National Curriculum while reinforcing the cultural identity of our pupils. The cultural subjects unique to the school give it a special dimension – students have lessons in the Indian Performing Arts (tabla, dance and singing) up to Year 8 and all students study Gujarati and Religious Education in Hinduism up to GCSE level.

Pupils in Year 7 & 8 do extremely well in the LAMDA (reciting prose and poetry) examinations. We take part in inter-school sports competitions against both state and independent schools, and do exceptionally well in cricket (but not so well at football!). We have day outings, clubs afternoons, ski trips and residential trips to Europe. Our senior school students take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme, producing one of the largest groups for the bronze award each year in Brent.

The school has held a black history week and arranged exchange visits with a number of schools including a special school. Each year our pupils visit homes for the elderly and arrange a party for senior citizens. All students in the sixth form are expected to do at least two lessons of community service because seva (putting something back into society) is a large element of our Hindu ethos. Each half term, we also adopt a charity. While raising awareness about the work of that charity we raised money for it through activities such as a non-uniform day.

We go out of our way to recruit a team of committed teachers from all backgrounds. We also ensure that our children experience the full range of activities that children in other schools would be exposed to. For example, we celebrate the festivals of all the major faiths – our Christmas assembly includes a nativity play that parents really appreciate. A pantomime group visits the school each year so that our children become familiar with this particular aspect of British life! We recognise that we are preparing our children for a university education that will lead to them becoming fully participating citizens of this country whilst also retaining their cultural identity. Our children are British and therefore need to have exposure to all things British!

Considering there is very little selection at the point of entry, our GCSE and A level examination results are exceptional. Some of the credit for this success must go to the families who recognise the value of education. Most of the students go on to university and we have already sent students to Oxford, Warwick, LSE, King's, UCL, Imperial and other London colleges.

⁶ As there are currently no Hindu schools in the publicly funded sector, this case study is from an independent Hindu school. The first maintained Hindu school has been approved to open in September 2008.

School Uniform: The Government and the faith school providers strongly encourage schools to have a uniform, dress code or appearance policy. It is the role of the governing body to determine such policies. This flows from its responsibility in overseeing the running of the school and its duty to ensure that school policies promote good behaviour and discipline on the part of its pupils. The Government strongly recommends that in setting policies or amending existing ones, governing bodies of schools consult widely with:

- pupils and parents (including prospective pupils and parents); and
- representatives of different groups within the wider community, taking care to identify community leaders who represent minority ethnic and religious groups as well as groups representing pupils with special educational needs or disabilities.

The Government recognises that some faith schools will have school uniforms that reflect the religious requirements of the faith. The providers of faith schools are working with the governing bodies of their schools to ensure that uniforms reflect the ethos of the school and are sensitive to the needs of all pupils, including those not of the faith of the school. Schools must have regard to their responsibilities under the Human Rights Act 1998 and anti-discrimination legislation and should be sensitive to pupils' cultural and religious needs and differences when drawing up or amending existing policies.

Home to School Transport: Many faith schools draw in pupils from a wider area than schools without a religious character, and the lack of affordable transport can act as a barrier to parental choice, particularly for those from low income backgrounds. The Government recognises that affordable – or free – transport is essential to support low income families who adhere to a specific religion and who would like their children to attend a school of their faith which is some distance from home. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 places new requirements on local authorities to provide free transport for low income families so that they are able to attend schools with a religious character up to 15 miles from their home. The Government hopes that local authorities will work closely with faith schools and their providers in developing their travel planning strategies and that arrangements can be made which are cost effective, and in a way that benefits children attending other schools, and the wider community.

Staffing: In all maintained schools – including those that do not have a religious character – the governing body is responsible for deciding the staffing structure and arrangements that will meet the school's needs and for deciding which candidate to appoint to posts when vacancies arise. Specific statutory provisions exist to enable the governing bodies of schools with a religious character to secure the faith character of the school. Voluntary aided schools are able to have regard to a person's faith when making a teaching appointment and considering a teacher's remuneration or promotion; and in the future will also be able to have regard to a person's faith when making a support staff appointment. Support staff perform a wide variety of roles in schools, with very different levels of pupil contact and influence, and faith will only be a relevant factor where there is a genuine occupational requirement in accordance with anti-discrimination legislation.

Foundation and voluntary controlled schools with a religious character are able to appoint up to one fifth of their teaching staff as reserved teachers – that is, teachers appointed specifically to teach denominational religious education and selected for their fitness and competence to do so. In the future, the post of headteacher at a foundation or voluntary



controlled school may be included in the one-fifth of reserved posts. These are specific freedoms and do not otherwise affect a governing body's general obligations under other relevant employment and anti discrimination legislation.

The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 will introduce a new vetting and barring scheme for all those working with children and young people from 2008. The faith school providers welcome the new guidance 'Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education', which came into force on 1 January 2007⁷, backed by new school staffing regulations. These regulations include new requirements about keeping records on the checks schools have made on staff, including List 99 and Criminal Records Bureau checks as necessary.

Developing Collaboration

Collaborative working can enrich education and cultural development and help build up lasting relationships between members of school communities from different ethnic backgrounds and the wider community, in addition to those already formed amongst the socially and ethnically diverse communities that make up the majority of faith schools. The Government and the faith school providers believe that all schools need to work collaboratively with other schools and with the wider community in order to deliver the education their pupils deserve. We support the recommendation in Sir Keith Ajegbo's 'Diversity and Citizenship Curriculum Review' that schools should build active links between and across communities, and signal our willingness to look at how we can develop better **links between all schools**, whether they have a religious character or not.

The providers of all schools, including faith schools should encourage collaboration both within and outside their faith communities as a way of promoting community cohesion and integration. The Government and the providers of faith schools see collaboration between different schools and communities as having the ability to contribute towards building partnerships and to break down negative stereotypes. The faith school providers therefore welcome the prospect of working with schools to forge these links, particularly when this is firmly rooted in education, such as shared curriculum projects.

Alongside school linking, the Government and faith school providers recognise the importance of opportunities for all school pupils to take part in **joint activities** with pupils from other schools. Such activities support the wider development of individual young people, promote greater understanding of the views and beliefs of others and support community cohesion. For pupils in faith schools – especially where the school's pupils are drawn exclusively or predominantly from members of that faith – these activities provide opportunities for pupils to meet young people from other faith backgrounds and of no faith. Activities might include opportunities for shared assemblies that respect the faith of those present; shared playtimes; joint production of a drama performance open to all parents; or collaborative volunteering for community projects.

⁷ A copy of this guidance can be downloaded from the following address: <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=downloadoptions&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFES-04217-2006&>

School linking and joint activities at the Independent Jewish Day School

The Independent Jewish Day School is a voluntary aided Jewish primary school, which serves the modern orthodox population of Hendon and surrounding areas. We are a one-form entry school, with 27-30 children in each year from nursery to Year 6. We are a modern orthodox school and as our name suggests we are not attached to any organisation or synagogue group.

Over the years we have developed good links with Bell Lane Primary School, which is only a few hundred yards away. It is a non-denominational two-form state primary which has children from a very large number of different nationalities and religions. It is situated on the edge of an area of council/social housing and caters, generally, to children from more needy socio-economic background than most of our children. Although we have been visiting each other's school for a few years, this year we trialled a more formal programme of multi-cultural visits, as part of a multi-cultural strand to our curriculum. We also share resources and expertise with Bell Lane – for example one of our classes had a session in their IT suite this year.

Each Key Stage 2 class in our school looked at a different major religion. The study was centred around specific questions which allowed the children both to have an insight into the different religion/culture and also see differences/similarities to their own religion's approach to that subject. We did not concentrate on the religious credo as such, although it did come up, but mainly looked at the more cultural aspect of the religious event – customs, foods, family events etc.

Each class visits Bell Lane to attend the assembly which relates to the topic being studied. Before this they are given a background lesson in school. They then visit the school to see an assembly, for example on Ramadan, Diwali etc. After the assembly they are then addressed by a member of staff who can represent the religious event to the children and they have the opportunity to ask questions, some of which they have prepared before and some of which arise out of the presentation at the assembly. On returning they write thank you letters to the school which is a way of consolidating in their minds the new things they have learned.

Bell Lane visit us a few times a year. They come before Succot to the nursery to help build a Succah there. They participate in our Key Stage 1 mock-Seder and they come to the Chanuka presentation. This presentation is always preceded by an arts/craft activity run for them by our top class. The children take part in these activities together and this is a highlight – to see the different children all working together and helping each other is fantastic.

Joint activities will also be valuable for the number of schools without a religious character which nevertheless have a high proportion of pupils of a single faith. We note that in its report, 'Our Shared Future'⁸, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion recognised that there are faith schools which have pupils from many different backgrounds and faiths and that there are largely single background schools which are not faith schools. Accordingly, we welcome the fact that the report's recommendations for schools focus intentionally on '*...the range of opportunities which are available to students in mainly monocultural or monofaith schools, regardless of their type, which can help pupils of different ethnic and religious backgrounds learn to respect and interact well with people of other backgrounds*'.⁹

The new **duty on all maintained schools to promote community cohesion** introduced by the Education and Inspections Act 2006 builds on existing good practice in schools, including many faith schools which are already working to promote community cohesion, for example through their work with parents and the wider community and partnerships with other schools and groups.

Madani High School (VA) & Community Centre, Leicester

The need to promote racial equality and good relations between people of different races, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds and religions is a high priority in this Muslim school's Community Cohesion Programme.

The school, situated in a strategic location, is ideally placed to promote community cohesion through a well structured and broad based programme of activities. Through its extensive contacts with places of worship, community groups and leaders the school plays a significant part in bringing together young people from a diverse range of races, cultures and socio-economic backgrounds and provides a range of sports, recreational and educational activities that enhance social cohesion.

The school welcomes and indeed encourages community-based programmes which focus on providing distinct opportunities for members of the wider community to develop an understanding of different cultures, fairness, social justice, the nature of prejudice, anti-social behaviour, racism and bullying.

Working in partnership with Connexions, Education Business Partnerships and other agencies the school acts as a focal point for young people in providing early information about career opportunities, thus helping to generate more interest in pursuing further and higher education and as a result improve their job and career prospects.

8 A copy of this report can be accessed via the following link:
http://www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk/Our_final_report.aspx

9 The quote above is taken from paragraph 8.20 of the report (page 117).

The **14-19 syllabus** provides a particular driver for increased collaboration between schools. Schools and colleges will collaborate within partnerships and consortia to deliver the new 14 Diploma lines, to which all young people have an entitlement from 2013, with roll out commencing in 2008. Faith schools and colleges will play a full part in the delivery of this entitlement. Where parents and young people have opted for a faith provider, local arrangements for delivery will need to take account of this choice and ensure the learner can continue to participate in religious observance and access pastoral support.



Work-related learning and enterprise education are increasingly important to modern education at all phases, and are a statutory requirement at Key Stage 4. The Government and the providers of faith schools understand that effective delivery of work-related learning, including work experience opportunities for all Key Stage 4 pupils, requires close collaboration with other schools and colleges in the locality, and with education-business links organisations. This will ensure that: learning aims and outcomes are identified and shared across phases; issues of pupil well-being are handled effectively; a collective approach is made to local employers to secure their essential partnership and students understand the part work plays in human fulfilment. The providers of faith schools are committed to providing all their pupils with equal opportunities to gain employability and enterprise skills through participation in work-related learning activities in and outside school.

The Government also expects all local secondary schools to be working together in **partnerships to improve behaviour** and tackle persistent absence, with funding devolved by the local authority to enable schools to commission a range of support and provision for pupils at risk of exclusion or persistent absence. The Government expects these partnerships to cover all maintained secondary schools in the area, including faith schools, and to involve special schools and Pupil Referral Units as the local schools should also be bound together by a 'fair access' protocol. Partnerships can also be extended to include primary and middle schools¹⁰.

Admission to schools with a religious character

We are all committed to fair and open admission arrangements which are easy for parents to understand and that contribute to fair access for all families. The Government recognises and supports the right of faith schools that are their own admission authority to give priority for some or all of their places to children from the faith concerned when they are oversubscribed. The Government also recognises that where there are relatively few maintained schools of a particular faith to meet the demand for education in accordance with the tenets of that faith, those schools are more likely to be oversubscribed by children of the faith and have less



¹⁰ For more information on expected outcomes and design principles for school partnerships see: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/collaboration/>

scope to admit children not of the faith. However, the Government welcomes the willingness of the faith school providers who have relatively few maintained schools in relation to demand for education in accordance with the tenets of that faith to admit pupils not of the faith where circumstances allow.

The Government believes that where priority for some or all places is given to those of the faith, parents must be able to clearly understand the criteria used for determining how priority will be given. To this end, the providers of faith schools are committed to ensuring that admission arrangements for their schools will objectively establish whether a child or family is a member of, or practises the faith, and what that means, in order to meet oversubscription criteria.

The Government welcomes the wide support given by the faith school providers for the new admissions policies introduced in the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the new School Admissions Code, such as the prohibition of interviewing and other unfair criteria, and the encouragement of practices that will ensure that all schools contribute to fair access.

All providers of faith schools will make clear how affiliation to the faith should be determined, and will provide guidance for their schools. This will include guidance on how children in care (looked after children) can demonstrate affiliation without being disadvantaged. The providers of faith schools welcome the requirement in section 89(2)(e) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (inserted by section 45 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006) that the governing body for faith schools that are their own admission authority must consult the body that appoints their foundation governors about proposed admission arrangements.

Admissions

The Government has reached historic agreements with the Church of England and the Catholic Church on arrangements for new Church of England and Catholic schools.

The Church of England has determined that all new Church of England schools will give priority to 25 per cent of their places with no requirement that the children be from practising Anglican families.

The Catholic Church has said that it will first and foremost continue to plan new Catholic schools in order to meet the needs and demands of Catholic parents. In addition and subject to local discussion, it will consider the scope for new Catholic schools to offer additional places to other families who would like a Catholic education for their children as it typically does at present when restructuring its existing educational provision in response to changing demography.

Since the establishment of its first schools in the nineteenth century, **Methodist Church** policy has always promoted a totally inclusive admissions policy. Currently the Methodist Church promotes schools only in partnership with other denominations or faiths and in those circumstances will approve an admissions policy that reserves no more than 50 per cent of places on faith grounds.

The Government would normally expect any new faith Academy (other than one replacing an existing faith school) to give priority for at least 50 per cent of their places to pupils of other faiths or none, in order to promote parental choice and to ensure that parents with a wide range of beliefs have the opportunity to send their children to the Academy.

The providers of faith schools that give priority to members of their faith recognise and accept that where they are undersubscribed with members of their faith, they cannot keep places unfilled.



Establishment of new publicly funded faith schools and support for independent faith schools wishing to come into the maintained sector

In line with the proposals in the White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All*, and the provisions of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, the Government is committed to a diverse system of schools driven by, and responsive to, parental needs and aspirations. Faith groups – along with other providers – have a major role to play in developing and delivering such a system. The Government will accordingly continue to support the establishment of new schools including faith schools in the maintained sector where the local decision making process shows that is what parents and the local community want and where the school is willing and able to comply with the requirements on all maintained schools. These include teaching the National Curriculum, employing teachers with qualified teacher status, an admissions policy in accordance with the Admissions Code and the promotion of community cohesion. Such schools might be newly established or replace existing independent schools.

The Government will work with local authorities as the commissioners of schools and school places in each area and with faith organisations to remove unnecessary barriers to the creation of new faith schools. In particular, the Government will encourage independent schools to enter the maintained sector in their existing premises so that the need for capital funding is not a barrier to entry. Where existing premises are not available and the local authority is generally supportive of the proposal, it may offer premises, or arrange to acquire them, and also offer any capital investment that may be needed. Where it does not itself have the necessary resources, it may approach the Department for Children, Schools and Families for additional funding to support low cost options.

We recognise that there are nearly 15,000 Muslim children and around 11,000 Jewish children, including those from low-income families, whose parents chose to send them to independent schools with a particular religious character and that the availability of places in the maintained sector could therefore provide an important contribution to integration and empowerment of these communities.

Inter-faith initiatives at Akiva Primary School

Akiva Primary School is a co-educational Jewish Primary school for 4 - 11 year olds in Finchley, North West London. Until this year, it has been a one-form entry independent school of 155 pupils housed in a former convent school. From September 2007, it will be a voluntary aided London Borough of Barnet two-form entry school, eventually rising to 420 pupils, in a brand new building on the same campus as the present school. All the students are Jewish and the school comes under the auspices of the Jewish Community Day Schools Advisory Board (JCDSAB). JCDSAB schools are pluralist, supported primarily by the Reform, Liberal and Masorti synagogue movements in the UK. They are egalitarian in religious practice and welcome pupils from any or none of the UK synagogue movements.

The school has always placed its responsibility for involvement with the wider community at the heart of its ethos. A religious education syllabus is taught alongside the Jewish education that the pupils receive and all pupils learn about the major world religions. They are encouraged to learn from, as well as about other religions. In a Year 5 project, all pupils visit a local mosque, Hindu temple and church. Parents are encouraged to accompany these visits, which are followed up by classroom work.

The school environment reflects both the world religions work, evidenced by classroom displays and the children's work books, and also the links that Akiva school has made with the local and wider community. Photographs and letters in the school corridors show an impressive range of the ways in which Akiva school involves itself. In the last year, just two examples include: a) a joint Jewish/Muslim sports initiative with Arsenal Football Club and b) visits to their local Catholic school at Christmas and their new friends from the Catholic school visiting Akiva at Passover. On both occasions, the pupils both watched and joined in with each other's ceremonies and celebrations, as well as having opportunities to ask and answer many questions.

The school is looking forward to becoming part of Barnet's family of primary schools and in preparation for this, the Akiva Jewish Studies and RE co-ordinators have attended meetings in the local authority to enable them to fully engage with the 'Big Picture' project. This is an RE syllabus that has been designed to enable schools to provide an exciting progressive curriculum to empower pupils to learn about and from religions and human experience.

Conclusion

In this document, the Government and the faith school providers have set out our shared vision and understanding of the integral part which schools with a religious character play in the publicly funded school system and in society. We confirm our commitment to continue to work together and with schools with and without a religious character to improve the life chances of children, to build bridges to greater mutual trust and understanding and to contribute to a just and cohesive society, while nurturing children in their faith and as engaged citizens. We see this as a shared challenge and wish to emphasise our unity of purpose while also celebrating the different perspectives and contributions which each can bring and how we can continue to learn from one another. We offer this document as a positive contribution to an informed debate about how we can all continue to work together to create a just society founded on integrated and cohesive communities.



Organisations endorsing this document

Department for Children, Schools and Families

Association of Muslim Schools UK

Board of Deputies of British Jews

Catholic Education Service

Church of England Board of Education

Free Church Federal Council

Greek Orthodox Church

Hindu Council UK

Hindu Forum of Britain

I-Foundation

Leo Baeck College Department for Education and Professional Development

Methodist Church

Muslim Council of Britain

Network of Sikh Organisations

Seventh Day Adventist Church

UK Islamic Education Waqf / Muslim Education Forum

department for
children, schools and families



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