

Do faith based  
schools create  
division and  
segregation religion  
essay



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Britain is now more diverse in terms of ethnicity and faith than it has ever been. Diversity provides many benefits; however, diversity needs to be balanced with equality and social cohesion in order for our multi-cultural society to be successful. At present Britain has an education system which includes faith schools. Faith schools reflect the diversity of religion and beliefs in Britain, although this paper asks the question whether they promote equality and cohesion within wider society.

The aim of this paper is to address the question of whether or not faith schools should receive state funding and to discuss whether faith schools further segregate communities in a society which is already experiencing racial tension. An overview of faith schools and a history of education focusing on the 1800's onwards will first be given in order to understand how the church became involved with education, and why faith schools came into existence. It will then present some arguments for and against faith schools before coming to a conclusion about the question at hand.

Faith schooling is part of a long tradition of religious involvement in the English educational system. Today there are around six thousand nine hundred faith schools in the United Kingdom, which makes up thirty three percent of all maintained schools in this country (Berkeley R. 2008: 4). Faith schools are based on the values of a particular religion and many incorporate religious and spiritual elements into the school day. They are either partly or fully governed by a religious organisation such as a church or mosque.

Recently faith schools have become progressively more controversial, partly because Britain has become a multi-faith society. As Christian schools are state funded it seems only fair that Muslim and other religious schools are

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also funded although the problem that arises for some is that separating children into ethnic and religious groups for schooling may cause prejudice and divisions in society.

The earliest schools in Britain were set up in the Middle Ages and were called ' Song Schools'. These were places where the sons of the wealthy, were church educated and taught how to sing in the cathedral choirs. The church had begun to set up Elementary Schools by the sixteenth century to cater for other parts of the community. In Britain, free compulsory education has been conducted in formal institutions since 1870. Up until that date, virtually all schooling was provided by the Church of England.

In 1811 the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church (otherwise known as the National Society) was founded and its aim was to provide a school in every parish. The National Society introduced mass education before the state provided schools. Religion alongside reading, writing and arithmetic were taught and took form of the Bible, prayer and book services (Gates 2005: 16). There were other Christians, along with liberal Anglicans and some Jews and Roman Catholics, who preferred a different approach and in 1814 founded the British and Foreign School Society for the Education of the Labouring and Manufacturing Classes of Society of Every Religious Persuasion (the British and Foreign School Society). These schools taught Scripture and general Christian principles but in a non- denominational form, drawing upon the work of Quaker Joseph Lancaster. There was also a third group who wanted to keep religion out of schools altogether and formed another organisation in the 1830's called the Central Society of Education. This third party only  
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represented a very small number of people and made very little impact upon education. In 1833, the government began to give out annual grants to both the British and Foreign School Society and the National Society as it did not want to appear to be promoting one over the other.

England's industrial revolution began to boom in the latter half of the 18th century and new agricultural techniques and machinery meant that it was possible to supply a larger amount of goods using less manual labour. During the Industrial revolution, an economy based on manual labour was replaced by one taken over by industry and the manufacture of machinery. Rapid industrialisation cost many craft workers their jobs and scores of weavers also found themselves unemployed as they could not compete with machinery. Ordinary working people found increased opportunity for employment in the mills and factories and in some cases had no choice but to move to the towns and cities in search of work.

In the 1820's, the population of Britain stood at approximately fourteen million and by 1871 it had reached twenty six million. This fast growth of population meant that a larger number of the population were children. By the early 1900's up to eighty per cent of the population of Britain lived in urban centres (Kumar, 1978, cited in Bilton et al, p. 28). Education was still limited at this time; therefore children were expected to work in the factories.

This dramatic social and economic transformation revealed that England's educational provision was inadequate and several reports pointed out deficiencies in the system and better schooling was called for. The Church of

England believed that education was desirable for all children although this view was not held by everyone, for example those who benefitted from employing children such as the factory owners. Many new types of schools were established including industrial schools, where the poor received manual training. Sunday schools also taught the poor, both children and adults, how to read the bible, but did not teach writing or arithmetic and new day schools were also introduced where teaching was also based around the bible. There were also parish and private schools still surviving alongside these new schools. The annual funding that the state provided to schools in the 1860's was in excess of £800, 000 but there was pressure for the government to provide schools in areas where there were not any. The interests of religious societies caused problems as there was conflict over whether the state should pay for schools run by a particular religious denomination or whether schools should have no association with religious groups.

The Church and the State continued to work closely together in education up until the 1870 Education Act, also known as The Forster Act, which introduced state funded education. This Act established school boards to oversee the network of schools and to bring them under supervision. The 1870 Act can be described as the point at which the government began to take the education of children seriously. The aim of this act was to fill in the gaps concerning schooling that was already provided by the churches. The Act divided Britain into districts and required elected school boards to raise money to provide public elementary schools, which are also known as board schools. Some assumed the 1870 Act would see a gradual decline in church

schools, which would be replaced by board schools, although the churches were adamant this would not be the case. The churches took full advantage of government funds and planned as many buildings as they could. As a result of this, the number of church schools rose considerably in the next fifteen years and the number of children attending church schools doubled.

The Education Act introduced in 1902, established a 'Dual System' of partnership between the churches and the state in providing a national system of education. This system was clarified by the Act of 1944, by distinguishing the different types of maintained schools. County schools had no church governors and were entirely publicly funded. Voluntary schools were originally funded by religious bodies although they later went into voluntary partnership with the state. Voluntary schools were separated into two main types, and they continue to remain this way; Controlled and Aided.

Voluntary aided Schools are usually called religious schools or faith schools and have governors who are appointed by a religious body from the place of worship connected to the school. In a voluntary aided school, the land and buildings are normally owned by a religious organization such as a church and the governing body is responsible for the religious instruction and the running of the school. Many of these schools teach their own syllabus of Religious Education rather than that which is taught in community schools. This does not have to include the teaching of other religions. Voluntary aided schools are partly aided by the state, partly the governing body and partly by a religious organisation. At the time that the 1944 Act was passed, the state paid half of the building and maintenance costs, the rest had to be found by the religious body, this was because they had greater influence

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over running and teaching of the school, although in the 1960's, the proportion of the cost that the state paid went up to eighty five per cent. Although the church appoints some members of the governing body of voluntary controlled schools, they have fewer Church governors than voluntary aided schools and are controlled by the local education authority. Religious education is taught in accordance to the local agreed syllabus and the pupils must follow the national curriculum.

The majority of state schools in Britain today are community schools which are funded and run by the Local Education Authority although a growing number are voluntary controlled or aided with up to one hundred percent of running costs covered by general taxation. Out of these there are four thousand six hundred and fifty seven Church of England schools; the Catholic Church claims two thousand and fifty three schools in England, there are around thirty six Jewish schools, eight Muslim schools as well as other faith schools including Sikh and Hindu schools (Berkeley R. 2008: 4). The admittance of a pupil into a faith school is determined by the governors of the school but the local education authority is also usually involved. Faith schools can insist that their pupils come from particular faiths but this is bound by the Race Relations Act. It is suggested that school places should be reserved for children of no or other faith although ultimately this is the governor's decision and a Church of England school may ask for proof of baptism and regular church attendance. An argument against this is that if a school is being funded by taxpayer's money then it should be open to all not only those of a particular faith.

Faith schools are seen as important for sustaining religion, culture, identity and language to religious groups. These schools are seen as having appropriate moral beliefs and are free of discrimination around their religion and culture which may reassure parents. Parents may feel faith schools will allow their children to grow up sharing their own beliefs and help them to live moral and responsible lives. Where a group feels under threat by the majority culture, hanging on to their culture will be seen as important, and it is clear that these schools are popular with some parents, however a survey published by the Guardian on the 23rd August 2005, showed that two thirds of those who were interviewed believed that the government should not fund any type of faith school. However, these results may have been encouraged by the perceived threat of Islam, as the results were collected just one month after the London bombings of July 2005. Faith schools are a particularly British way of accommodating religious diversity and they are not found in countries such as France where there is a definite separation between the Church and the state. There are many arguments against faith schools, although ethnic and religious tension currently being experienced in France is an indication that eliminating faith schools will not guarantee community harmony.

At present there are many people lobbying against faith schools, and apart from other reasons, there is an ongoing argument that no one religion should be promoted in schools. The current New Labour government is however continuing to fund faith schools as they argue that faith schools produce excellent academic results and have found that many schools with a religious ethos are very successful. Although the government often claims



that faith schools are more successful than non faith schools, it is argued that these schools are likely to have fewer pupils with special educational needs and it is argued that faith schools attract middle class children, who are generally more motivated and do better academically. In turn this raises the question of whether the higher success rate is down to the religious ethos of the school. The argument could be made that faith schools gain better results due to the selection of pupils within the school rather than the quality of the teaching or the religious aspects. It is however important to take into account that Catholic schools reflect the national school population in terms of those pupils with special needs and according to Ofsted, they perform better than county schools (Quality and Performance: a survey of education in Catholic schools: 5).

One of the main arguments against state funded faith schools is that they may expect children to accept particular religious teachings and practices. It is argued by Humanist philosophers that young children lack the necessary experience to make judgements on religious claims and that information taught on religion in religious schools is likely to be biased (Jackson R. 2005 p51). It is thought by some that faith schools separate groups in society and that future citizens of this country should learn to live together despite any religious or cultural differences. The most convincing argument against the topic of faith schools is their ability to create barriers between different groups and in return causing damage to social harmony. There is also the danger that separation by religion will also lead to separation by ethnicity.

“ A report on race riots in Bradford five years ago found that the existence of religious schools had increased segregation and contributed to racial  
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tension. Critics [of faith schools] argue that as faith-based schools increase in numbers, racial and ethnic mixing will dwindle” (The Economist 2006).

The conflict between youths of different ethnic backgrounds, which took place in Oldham, Bradford and Leeds in 2001, has led to increased calls to end the expansion of faith schools. In September 2002 it became compulsory for secondary schools to include Citizenship education in their lessons. This teaches students about diversity and the need to respect all people from different social, cultural and religious backgrounds.

It is more than necessary that space is made in all schools for the teaching and learning of all the major faiths and cultures in Britain today, with particular focus to the local area of the school. This would play a vital role in supporting the understanding and awareness of people in our communities and help to build bridges between faiths and not create barriers. There appears to be a lack of teaching in all schools, but in particular faith schools, about different cultures and religions and beliefs in Britain today, which in some instances may lead to misunderstandings, ignorance and fear of difference. If children were taught from a young age about different beliefs and cultures this may ease a parent’s fears of sending their child to a community school.

Education is an important aspect of socialization, involving the acquisition of knowledge and the learning of skills. Intentionally or not, education often helps towards shaping a person’s moral values, understandings and beliefs. The purpose of British taxpayer’s money should not be to push one particular religion but should be used to enable all children to gain education, insight

and awareness which are all necessary to engage with others. Places of worship are specifically intended to nurture faith through worship and learning and schools should serve a separate function.