

Ethnic diversity in religious Free Schools

15 September 2016

The Government recently published a [green paper](#) in which it proposes, among other things, to lift the 50% cap on religious selection amongst Free Schools (i.e. any new schools that have opened over the last few years), and instead allow them to religiously select 100% of places. They did this in part because they said there is no evidence it has worked to increase mixing amongst minority faith schools. This is largely true, but in making that argument they have ignored the evidence demonstrating that the cap has had a positive impact in Christian schools. We set this out below.

What does the Government Green Paper say?

The relevant sections of the Green Paper are as follows:

9. As can be seen in the table below, whilst free schools are currently limited to admitting a maximum of 50% of their pupils on the basis of faith when oversubscribed, this has not resulted in a mixed ethnic intake. In minority faith schools (Islam, Judaism, Sikhism and Hinduism) the ethnic make-up is formed of pupils from predominantly similar ethnic (and very likely religious) backgrounds.

10. By contrast, Catholic schools have a far better record on diversity, in spite of the fact that no new Catholic school has been established since the 50% rule was imposed because they say it contravenes religious rules. As set out below, "Other Christian" schools have nearly a fifth of pupils of Asian origin and nearly a tenth from black ethnic families, with just 55% of White ethnic origin. While ethnicity data is not a perfect match to religious affiliation, it does demonstrate a high degree of diversity not apparent in other faith settings that apply the 50% rule.

Ethnicity data for faith designated free schools

	Number of schools	Proportion of pupils classified as white ethnic origin	Proportion of pupils classified as mixed ethnic origin	Proportion of pupils classified as Asian ethnic origin	Proportion of pupils classified as black ethnic origin	Proportion of pupils classified as any other (including Chinese) ethnic origin	Proportion of pupils unclassified	Total pupil count (including those with unclassified ethnicity)
Church of England	10	63%	8%	15%	8%	5%	1%	1,538
Other Christian	36	55%	7%	19%	9%	3%	7%	6,818
Hindu	2	2%	5%	91%	0%	1%	1%	887
Jewish	6	84%	5%	2%	2%	3%	4%	456
Muslim	11	1%	4%	80%	9%	5%	1%	2,630
Sikh	11	2%	3%	89%	1%	4%	0%	1,887
Total	76	36%	6%	43%	7%	4%	4%	14,216

What is wrong with this analysis?

The figures above are limited in their usefulness, and certainly in their ability to provide justification for dropping the 50% cap. First, the Government's figures are limited in their usefulness because the table doesn't compare the ethnic make-up of each type of school to the make-up of its local area, which of course is an important detail when assessing how well they are contributing to integration in their particular communities. Different types of religious school tend to be located in different areas so don't have the same local populations.

And second, what is really needed is to compare these figures to the figures for how diverse 100% religiously selective schools are (i.e. the schools that predate the existence of the cap). This is very straightforward to do, so that is what we have done so below.

So, using the same school ethnicity data from the [January 2016 school census](#) that the DfE did in the green paper, here are the figures for 100% religiously selective secondary schools:¹

	Number of schools	Proportion of pupils classified as white ethnic origin	Proportion of pupils classified as mixed ethnic origin	Proportion of pupils classified as Asian ethnic origin	Proportion of pupils classified as black ethnic origin	Proportion of pupils classified as any other (including Chinese) ethnic origin	Proportion of pupils unclassified	Total pupil count (including those with unclassified ethnicity)
Church of England	60	78%	5%	6%	8%	2%	2%	57,429
Other Christian	13	85%	5%	3%	5%	1%	1%	12,740
Hindu	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0
Jewish	10	87%	3%	4%	2%	2%	2%	6,425
Muslim	7	0%	1%	86%	8%	2%	1%	3,879
Sikh	1	0%	10%	67%	0%	14%	0%	1,504
Roman Catholic	312	73%	6%	7%	10%	2%	1%	300,677
Total	403	74%	5%	8%	10%	2%	1%	382654

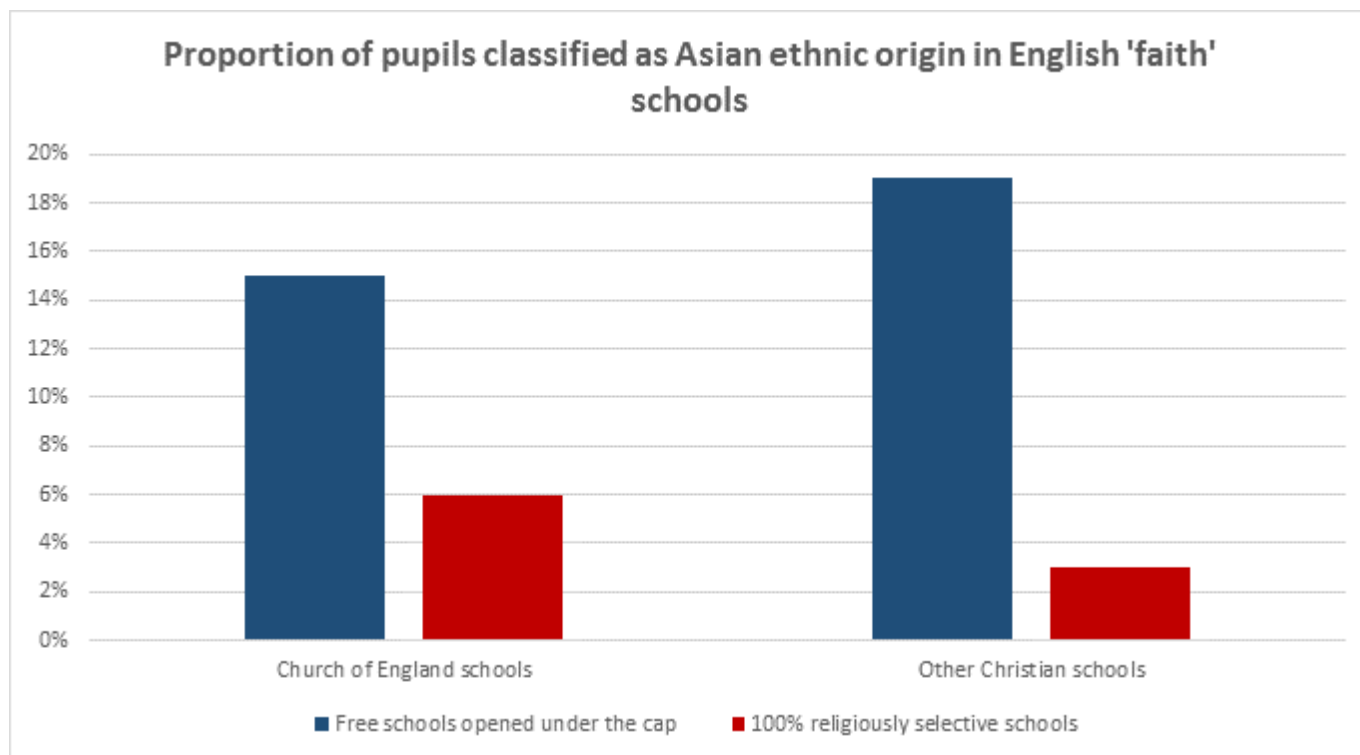
Christian school figures

The key figures to look at here, taken from the two tables above, are these:

¹ In 2013 the Fair Admissions Campaign surveyed all secondaries' admissions policies and identified those that are 100% selective. This is the only data of this nature we are aware of, and so we use that data here. The slight difference in the age of this data from the school census and the focus on just secondaries shouldn't make much if any difference to the analysis that follows.

- **63% of pupils at the CofE free schools are white, compared to 78% at the 100% selective CofE schools**
- **55% of pupils at the other Christian schools are white, compared to 85% at the 100% selective other Christian schools**
- **15% of pupils are Asian at CofE free schools, compared to just 6% at 100% selective CofE schools**
- **19% of pupils are Asian in other Christian free schools operating under the cap, compared to just 3% of pupils at the 100% selective other Christian schools**

The significant contribution that the 50% cap has made to the integration of Asian pupils in Christian schools is made clear by the following graph:



Minority religious school figures

For the Jewish schools we can see that this sector is very slightly more white (87%) without the cap than with (84%), so here we see a slight positive impact.²

There are no 100% selective Hindu schools, and only one Sikh school so comparisons are difficult. The figures for the 11 Muslim Free Schools vs the 7 100% selective secondaries also show a little improvement, with 86% Asian amongst the latter dropping to 80% amongst the former. Lack of change amongst these and the Jewish schools is what the Government is relying on – perhaps that might largely be true, but of course the cap hasn't made the situation any worse either.

Conclusion

The bottom line is therefore that any focus on just the minority faith Free Schools is missing the point. The number of pupils at these minority faith Free Schools is much smaller than at the Christian free schools – there are about twice as many Christian free schools/pupils than Hindu/Muslim/Sikh. And amongst the Christian schools, the difference in the number of white British pupils is quite large.

So, if the 50% cap was rolled out across all state-funded secondary schools then these figures indicate that whilst there would be little difference for the minority faith schools, tens or even hundreds of thousands of non-white pupils would gain access to Christian schools when they haven't had access before.

**Humanists UK
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² Note we had to exclude one uncapped school (JFS) because unlike any other school, for some reason it didn't the ethnicity classify any of its pupils, so that meant 25% were unclassified.