

**Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP**  
**Chair, Education Select Committee**  
**House of Commons**  
**SW1A 0AA**

20 February 2018

Dear Mr Halfon,

I am writing in reference to recent reports that the Department for Education will proceed with proposals to drop the 50% cap on religious selection at free schools. We are concerned that the consequences of this move will not only serve to increase religious segregation in our state schools, but also send a damaging message about the value that the Government ascribes to integration in society more broadly. We would therefore welcome an inquiry, and the opportunity to discuss this with you.

The former Education Secretary, Justine Greening, presided over the three-month consultation on the proposal, sought further representations and evidence for more than a year subsequent to that, and commissioned independent research into mixing within schools, before concluding that the cap should remain in place. Despite this, barely a month later, it has been reported that a different decision is to be taken. It is difficult to imagine that a similarly rigorous assessment of the evidence could have been carried out in that time, which makes the sudden change in policy a curious one. The evidence, of course, has not changed:

- The DfE's own official statistics show that ethnic diversity has been boosted significantly by the 50% cap, even in the short time it has been in place.<sup>1</sup>
- Research published by the DfE in 2017 revealed that young people in ethnically mixed schools are more trusting and have more positive views of children from different backgrounds than do pupils in segregated schools.<sup>2</sup>
- The Sutton Trust, the Education Policy Institute, The Challenge, the Institute for Community Cohesion Foundation, and the Children's Rights Alliance for England have all published research demonstrating the negative consequences of removing the cap.
- A 2017 poll conducted by Populus found that 80% of the public are in favour of keeping the cap, including 67% of Catholics and 71% of Christians overall.<sup>3</sup>

In sum, it seems clear that in reaching a fresh decision on the 50% cap the DfE has disregarded the evidence. In doing so, it has put the demands of a handful of religious groups over the interests of children, parents, and the education system more broadly.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ethnic diversity in religious schools*, Humanists UK, October 2016:

<https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016-09-15-FINAL-Ethnic-diversity-in-religious-Free-Schools.pdf>

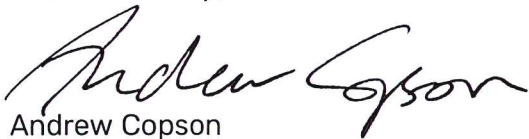
<sup>2</sup> *Diversity and Social Cohesion in Mixed and Segregated Secondary Schools in Oldham*, DfE, August 2017 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/634118/Diversity\\_and\\_Social\\_Cohesion\\_in\\_Oldham\\_schools.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/634118/Diversity_and_Social_Cohesion_in_Oldham_schools.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> *Religious schools survey*, Populus, May 2017 <http://accordcoalition.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Religious-Schools-Survey.pdf>

Should your schedule allow, we would be happy to discuss the prospect of an inquiry with you more fully. Any inquiry need not cover the role or place of faith schools *per se*, only the impact that faith-based admissions have on integration in and fair access to our state schools.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Copson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Andrew Copson  
Chief Executive