

The Rt Hon Justine Greening MP
Secretary of State for Education
The Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith St
London SW1P 3BT

27th July 2016

Dear Justine,

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the cross-communal, democratic representative body of the UK Jewish community, to set out our position on the current legislation surrounding the admissions procedure for faith-based free schools, whereby a maximum of 50% of pupils can be selected on faith grounds. There is a diversity of opinion on this issue within our community, with the majority of Jewish schools in favour of the abolition of the 50% rule, but we believe that the following position would allow all sections of our community to realise their aspirations.

Whilst we absolutely support the drive to promote community cohesion, our view is that, in many cases, the cap has been an ineffective means of promoting this. Many of the faith-based free schools have only appealed to people of the faith background of the school, meaning that often the quota does not actually deliver a diverse school community in practice. Meanwhile, the cap has prevented the creation of more faith-based free schools, including Orthodox and strictly Orthodox Jewish schools. This is a pity because some of the schools, which could most benefit from joining the state sector through the free school offer, are choosing instead to remain independent.

We believe that a better outcome could be delivered by continuing to place an emphasis on requiring community cohesion to be promoted as an essential duty of schools, but allowing a range of options by which schools could demonstrate this. The 50% cap could be one option for those schools who feel it is consistent with their ethos, but other options could include school-linking programmes, teaching about different faiths and beliefs, multi-faith coordination between governors and/or teachers of different faith schools, or co-location. An example of the latter is Calderwood Lodge Jewish School and St Cadoc's Roman Catholic Primary School in Glasgow, which will share a site from the 2017/18 academic year.

This more flexible approach would allow a wider menu of achieving cohesion than the 50% cap, which could lead to more effective cohesion outcomes, appropriate to the ethos of each school. Meanwhile, it would allow more schools to take advantage of the free schools programme within the state sector, leading to a more positive outcome for all.

We would be happy to find an early opportunity to discuss this with you further.

Yours sincerely,



Gillian Merron
Chief Executive

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