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Archbishop of Canterbury's remarks on inclusive schools and reactions

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Faith schools

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“Those who are either genuinely religious — or who adopt churchgoing opportunistically — have a wider choice of schools than everyone else”

Sir, According to your leading article (Nov 15), faith-based selection in school admissions improves parental choice. In fact it does the reverse. Those who are either genuinely religious — or who adopt churchgoing opportunistically — have a wider choice of schools than everyone else. They can select both church and non-faith schools. There are plenty of parents who are equally committed to their children's education who are either not religious — and unwilling to pretend — or who have a different faith, whose choice is effectively restricted to non-faith schools in areas where there is competition for places.

What the Archbishop of Canterbury proposes — dropping faith-based discrimination in admissions to state-funded church schools — would give more people a meaningful choice.

Jeremy Rodell

Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign

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In Good Faith

The Archbishop of Canterbury should clarify his views on school selection

Published at 12:01AM, November 15 2013

The best case that can be made for faith schools is a practical one. Regardless of what they do for faith, they tend to make for good schools. This newspaper has long been in favour of the notion that any group with the urge and ability to provide a decent education for children should, where required, be facilitated by the State to do so.

Compared with almost all other forms of state-funded schooling, faith schools are considerably more likely to be rated “outstanding” or “good” by Ofsted and also more likely to dominate the top of league tables. The reasons for this are moot, but are most probably not a direct result of closeness to God. Rather, any parents so motivated as to seek out a particular flavour of education for their child will most likely show beneficial interest in that education thereafter. Motivated pupils facilitate high-performing schools, and the circle becomes virtuous.

Speaking to *The Times* this week, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, suggested that C of E schools (which make up the majority of faith schools in England and account for almost a quarter of state schools altogether) were moving away from selecting pupils on the basis of their religion. Paradoxically, there could be sound religious grounds for doing this. As with many other faiths, the Church is not only a community but also a mission, and Archbishop Welby hails from its evangelical wing. “What you are seeing in the Church schools,” he has said, “is a deeper and deeper commitment to the common good.”

While noble, this would probably be unwise. In practice, Mr Welby may be guilty of overestimating the degree to which faith schools thrive thanks to their teaching, rather than their intake. A faith school which was wholly blind to faith, in other words, might soon start to find that its results began to dip.

Faith schools work precisely because they are an outlet for parental choice. Those attached to faiths other than Christianity are, in fact, far rarer than many might assume (state-funded Jewish schools in England only reach double figures, and Muslim ones barely manage that) and have comparable results. In theory, all allocate a proportion of their intake to those from other communities. In practice, parents who want their children to attend schools of a faith different to their (perhaps nominal) own are rare. In reducing faith-based admissions, the Church of England would, in fact, be reducing parental choice.

Unwise or not, this is something that Church schools would be free to do. It remains unclear, however, whether or not Mr Welby wants them to. He was initially unequivocal that the schools were moving away from faith-based entry tests, and was apparently in favour of this trend. Later Lambeth Palace issued a statement in which he expressed complete support for the schools’ freedom to continue selecting as they wish.

If this were the result of a sudden change of heart, such a U-turn would perhaps be welcome. Instead, it suggests a worrying discrepancy between what the Archbishop believes, and what he wishes his Church to think he believes.

Such tortured twists and turns were an unwelcome characteristic of the archbishopric of his predecessor. Mr Welby should be mindful of the reputation he has so quickly earned for bringing a new sense of clarity to Lambeth Palace. It would be a shame if, as quickly, he was to lose it.

Churches back Welby on faith school inclusion

Ruth Gledhill

Last updated at 12:01AM, November 15 2013

Church leaders last night backed the Archbishop of Canterbury's declaration that Church of England schools are moving away from faith-based entry tests.

The Bishop of Salisbury, the Right Rev Nicholas Holtam, said: "Church of England schools in our local communities provide an excellent education to children of all faiths and none. In only two out of 196 Church of England schools in the diocese are a majority of pupils taken on faith criteria, while in most of our schools the proportion of pupils taken on faith criteria is in the order of 5 to 10 per cent."

Although the Church has made promises of more inclusive selection in its schools, many still select pupils on the basis of faith, according to a campaign to end faith-based selection.

The Fair Admissions Campaign said that over the past few years, there had been promises of 25 per cent, 50 per cent and even 90 per cent inclusivity.

The campaign's research showed that these promises had yet to be met.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev Justin Welby, said this week that the Church was moving away from faith-based selection. "What you are seeing in the Church schools is a deeper and deeper commitment to the common good. There's a steady move away from faith-based entry tests," he said.

"It is not necessary to select to get a really good school. There are unbelievably brilliant schools that are entirely open to all applicants without selection criteria apart from residence, where you live, and which produce staggeringly good results. It's a question of – and you can point to them all over the place – it's a question of outstanding leadership."

Lambeth Palace subsequently put out a statement making clear that in spite of his comments, he supported the policy for schools to set their own admissions criteria, including faith.

Already, though, some dioceses are seeing many schools that do not select most pupils on the basis of faith.

Professor Ted Cante, founder of the influential [Institute of Community Cohesion](#), said: "Justin Welby's comments in *The Times* make his views clear – and he is right to support a move away from faith-based selection.

"I think his comments show the contradiction between the faith's ideals and the practice of the Church."

Jeremy Rodell, the spokesman for Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign, said the Church was still discriminating against non-Anglicans in places. "To take the example of the London Borough of Richmond: all eight of the voluntary-aided Anglican primaries with reception classes have admissions policies involving faith-based selection. In four of them the result is a high level of discrimination against children whose parents are not practising Anglicans."

Jonathan Bartley, a director of [Ekklesia](#), a think-tank, said: "When you do the maths, there are simply not enough children from church-going families to fill all the places in church schools. There are many many Church of England schools that do not discriminate in employment or admissions. The argument that you have to have a discriminatory admissions policy in order to maintain your ethos is demonstrable nonsense. The position the Church has held in the past is simply not tenable any more."

Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain, of the [Accord Coalition](#), which campaigns for inclusion, said that the Church had "made commitments towards greater inclusivity at its schools in recent years, but not delivered".

"So that the Church cannot be accused of chasing headlines, it now needs to offer clear leadership to bring about a lasting cultural change. First steps could include ensuring that all Church of England schools admit at least 25 per cent of pupils without recourse to religious belief or practice, as it committed to the Government it would do back in 2006, and for its guidance on admissions to Church of England schools to be revised, so that serving the whole community is set out clearly as a key expression of the mission of its schools.

"Justin Welby's position should be noted by other religious groups with regard to their schools too, which should also be open and inclusive, and not serve to ghettoise children of different backgrounds from each other."

Church in ‘move away’ from school selection

Ruth Gledhill Religion Correspondent
Last updated at 12:01AM, November 14 2013

Church of England faith schools are moving away from selecting pupils on the basis of their religion, the Archbishop of Canterbury has revealed.

The Most Rev Justin Welby said that selection was not necessarily the key to good results and believes that throwing open the doors to all-comers can help the Church achieve its mission to alleviate poverty.

Tens of thousands of parents each year attempt to meet the strict criteria to get their children into the bestperforming faith schools.

“What you are seeing in the Church schools is a deeper and deeper commitment to the common good,” Dr Welby said in an interview with *The Times*. “There’s a steady move away from faith-based entry tests,” he added.

Three quarters of Church schools are judged good or outstanding by Ofsted compared with 57 per cent of all state schools, leading to high demand for places.

Many faith schools are oversubscribed and allocate places first to parents who are regular churchgoers. Attendance registers are taken at Sunday services in parishes attached to the most popular schools. Critics say that the system allows pushy middle-class parents to cheat the system by getting their children into top state schools.

Archbishop Welby, who was educated at Eton but whose five children were educated in state schools, some in deprived parts of the country, said: “It is not necessary to select to get a really good school.

“There are unbelievably brilliant schools that are entirely open to all applicants without selection criteria apart from residence, where you live, and which produce staggeringly good results. It’s a question of — and you can point to them all over the place — it’s a question of outstanding leadership.”

Archbishop Welby later attempted to tone down his comments. In a statement, released by Lambeth Palace, he said: “I fully support the current policy for schools to set their own admissions criteria, including the criterion of faith. Nothing in my wider comments on this subject should be seen as dissenting from this policy.”

Approximately one million children attend Church of England schools, which include 4,484 primary and middle schools, 193 secondary schools and 50 sponsored and 217 converter academies; making the Church the biggest education provider in England.

A small number of primary schools and about 100 secondary schools use a faith-based admissions process which can often be a cause of local contention. Any move away from faith-based selection is likely to be resisted both by traditionalists within the Church, and by parents who adopt the mantra “get on your knees, avoid the fees” to obtain an education which can be comparable to that received in private schools.

A step back from religious selection would be welcomed by secularists. Andrew Copson, of the British Humanist Association, said: “One of the worst aspects of state faith schools is religious selection in admissions. It segregates pupils on the basis of their parents’ beliefs and on socio-economic and ethnic grounds. Any move to end it must be welcome.”

Last week, a leading Roman Catholic school where Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister, sends his son challenged a ruling that it must change its “unfair” admissions policy.

The London Oratory School, a state boys’ secondary in Fulham, West London, which was also attended by two of Tony Blair’s sons when he was Prime Minister, was told by the Government’s Schools Adjudicator in August that it was unjust to favour children whose parents carried out church duties, such as flower arranging.

Archbishop Welby was speaking to *The Times* before addressing a Church Urban Fund conference on tackling poverty.

He said in his speech: “It shouldn’t come as a surprise to anyone that the Church is part of the solution for building community blessing at local level, although I suspect that it might be questioned by some. But the Church has been an integral part of delivering education in this country since before the state ever agreed to get involved.”