Faith Schools in the UK
• Historically faith and education have been closely linked.

• The Roman Catholic Church was the first provider of schools in England. The earliest were attached to cathedrals and monastic foundations and appeared from the late Sixth Century. After the Reformation, the emerging Church of England began to provide its own network of schools throughout the country.

• The Education Act of 1944 allowed Anglican, Catholic and the small number of Jewish schools to be absorbed into the state system.

• More than half of Church of England schools became “voluntary controlled” and were funded by the state via local authorities, which exercised control over such things as the curriculum, the appointment of governors and teachers, and admissions criteria.

• A third of Anglican schools and most Roman Catholic schools became “voluntary aided” schools. This meant they remained part of the state system while retaining their distinctively Anglican or Catholic ethos and exercising greater control over the everyday running of the school.

• As British society became more religiously diverse, a significant number of adherents of minority faiths sought to emulate the churches’ model and establish schools reflecting their own distinctive creed and ethos.

• The Islamia Primary School in London became the first state-funded Muslim school in 1998. The first Sikh school opened in 1999 and the first Hindu school in 2008.

• Problematically, the term “faith school” these days can encompass a broad range of educational institutions from a C of E primary serving an ethnically and religiously mixed inner-city area, to a single-sex Muslim academy where pupils are expected to wear a hijab; from a venerable, high-achieving Catholic public school to rudimentary premises on a light industrial estate promoting creationism and a narrow, ideologically unchallengeable interpretation of scripture.

THE NEW MILLENNIUM

• In 2007 a third of all state schools in England were run by religious groups, mostly the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church. There were 37 Jewish schools, seven Muslim, two Sikh, one Seventh Day Adventist and one Greek Orthodox school. The figures come from Education in England: A History by Derek Gillard, 2018
In 2017 (according to Department for Education figures collected in the 2017 school census) the number of state funded mainstream primary faith schools in England was 6,177 representing 36.8% of total primaries.

### PRIMARY SCHOOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Total schools</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No religious character</td>
<td>10,609</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of England</td>
<td>4,377</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>1,645</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### SECONDARY SCHOOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Total schools</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No religious character</td>
<td>2,771</td>
<td>81.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of England</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of secondary faith schools was 627 amounting to 18.4% of the total.

- In 2018 there were:
  - Seven Hindu schools, according to the Avanti Schools Trust, which runs them. They educate 3,000 students across five primary schools, one secondary school and one “all through” school. All are state-funded academies.
  - 14 Sikh schools in England solely, says the Sikh Press Association.
120 Jewish schools. Currently 37,000 Jewish children attend 120 Jewish schools throughout the UK, according to the Partnership for Jewish Schools. These schools range from the ultra-orthodox same-sex schools to the more secular mixed schools. There are both primary and secondary schools and state and fee-paying schools. Although predominantly in London, there are Jewish schools in Glasgow, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds and Manchester. Many of the pupils attending the Jewish schools in Glasgow, Birmingham, Liverpool and Leeds are not Jewish. There are none in Wales or Northern Ireland.

184 Muslim Schools: one academy, 16 free schools, 12 voluntary aided, and 155 independent schools. These figures come from the Association of Muslim Schools.

There are no state-funded Muslim schools in Northern Ireland or Scotland. Wales has been included in the English central region.

PERFORMANCE

- Examination results for state-funded faith schools in England are somewhat better, on average, than for non-faith schools. In 2017 the average “Attainment 8” score for mainstream state-funded faith schools was 49.0 compared with 46.9 at non-faith schools, according to Faith Schools in England, a House of Commons Library briefing paper in June, 2018.

- However the report noted that, as pupil intake differs between faith and non-faith schools in both, background characteristics (e.g. free school meal eligibility) and prior attainment, these headline results could be misleading.

INDEPENDENT FAITH SCHOOLS

- Although the Ofsted inspection of 2017 judged a number of faith schools “outstanding” or “good”, its report noted: “There has been a sharp decline in inspection outcomes for other independent schools and in particular schools with a faith. Almost half of faith schools (49%) were judged less than good at their most recent inspection and over a quarter (26%) were inadequate.”

- A third (33%) of the Christian schools, 54% of the Jewish schools, and 58% of the Muslim schools “required improvement” or were judged “inadequate”.

"Faith Schools in the UK"
UNREGISTERED (ILLEGAL) FAITH SCHOOLS

- These continue to give concern to school inspectors. Independent schools are required by law to register with the Department for Education but many use loopholes surrounding home schooling to evade prosecution.

- In 2016 Sir Michael Wilshaw, who was then the chief inspector of schools, recognised “more than 100 unregistered schools” (mainly in London, Birmingham, Luton, Wolverhampton and Staffordshire) but added that the figure was “likely to represent only a small proportion of the illegal schools operating across the country”. Not all unregistered schools have a religious impetus. Some estimates put the figure in 2018 at more than 280, of which illegal faith schools account for an estimated 20%.

- Often working from unsatisfactory premises and staffed by unqualified teachers with scant regard to safeguarding procedures, the worst of these schools have been found to be promoting a highly conservative reading of the Jewish, Christian or Muslim faith and failing to promote values in keeping with those of mainstream British society.

FAITH SCHOOLS AND THE LAW

- Faith schools have to teach the national curriculum but they can choose what they teach in religious studies.

- Faith schools may have different admissions criteria and staffing policies from those in non-faith schools although anyone of any faith or none can apply.

- All academies, including faith academies, have their own admissions processes and do not have to teach the national curriculum.

- New faith academies and free schools must ensure that, if oversubscribed, they offer a minimum of 50% of their places irrespective of faith affiliation. The Catholic Education Service (CES) strongly opposes this and, in 2018, had hoped that the Education Secretary, Damian Hinds, a Catholic, would remove the 50% cap. The CES, disappointed that he did not, argues that this inhibits the Roman Catholic Church from opening new schools as canon law prevents them from turning away a Catholic child.
• If places are available, faith schools are required to offer them to every child who applies “whether of the faith, another faith or no faith”.

• Faith schools are permitted to take into account religious considerations in employment matters such as the appointment (and dismissal) of teachers and heads.

• Ofsted inspectors must not comment on the content of religious worship or on denominational religious education but they may comment on the contribution they are making to a child’s wider moral, social and cultural development.

• Faith schools may not teach creationism as an evidence-based scientific theory. In RE lessons it may be presented as part of a particular belief system, if this does not undermine established scientific theory. It should not be presented as having a similar evidence base as or superior evidence base to scientific theories.

• Faith schools are free to express their belief that marriage is a union between a man and a woman, but teaching should be based on facts and should enable pupils to develop an understanding of how the law applies to different relationships. Teachers must follow statutory guidance on sex and relationship education, and must satisfy the demands of equality and human rights law.

PROS AND CONS OF FAITH SCHOOLS

• Faith schools excite opposing opinions. Supporters argue that state-funded faith schools are among the best-performing schools in the country, inculcating a sense of respect, discipline and care for others. Detractors say they are divisive and often sectarian propounding a misguided world view at odds with the UK’s inclusive society made up of people many different faiths and none.

• Criticism has come not only from the National Secular Society and Humanists UK but also from some religious representatives who themselves have argued that faith schools run the danger of fostering a sense of religious segregation, hindering rather than promoting community cohesion.
Secularists fear that faith schools may be practising a covert form of religious indoctrination, potentially isolating pupils from mainstream British society and promoting an understanding of issues—such as abortion, homosexuality, the family, evolution, and women’s rights—at odds with mainstream British values. To do this, they argue, is dangerous and unhealthy and to do it with secular taxpayers’ money is unfair.

Supporters of faith schools defend a school’s right to teach within an environment that embodies and reflects a particular religious ethos. They deny charges of sectarianism and point out that it is often the academic achievements of such schools rather than their faith base that make them popular with parents in the first place.

They argue further that the requirement for them to adhere to the national curriculum and to present a comprehensive compendium of views surrounding contentious moral and social issues militates against either extremism or indoctrination.

HOW MANY?

England

In England, faith schools educate 1.9 million pupils in state-funded, mainstream primary and secondary schools—about a quarter of the total number of pupils taught in all state schools.

Northern Ireland

The province has a complex school structure. Government figures show that 93% of children in primary and secondary schools attend either Catholic schools or “controlled” schools.

There are 560 “controlled” schools teaching pupils of all religions and none—though pupils of a Protestant denomination account for 66% of the total school roll (140,600) according to the Controlled Schools’ Support Council of Northern Ireland.

There are 547 Catholic schools teaching about 45% of all pupils according to the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education.

There are 62 “integrated” schools committed to teaching equal numbers of Protestant and Catholic pupils alongside children of other faiths and none.
Wales

- In Wales, 30,549 pupils attend the principality’s 91 Catholic schools according to the Catholic Education Service. The Church in Wales has 152 primary and secondary schools across the principality.

Scotland

- There are 378 denominational schools in Scotland, of which 367 are local authority schools (fully funded by government) and the remaining 11 are independent (funded by private means) according to a freedom of information request to the Scottish Government.

November 2018