
How to get into a Faith School: a case of malpractice and cheating

PAUL PETTINGER

ABSTRACT This article looks at the extent of parental cheating to get their child of primary-school age into a local faith school.

The results of a new poll, published on 14 May 2015, revealed a shockingly high percentage of parents prepared to lie about their faith, or lack of a faith, in order to gain places for their children at local faith schools with a good reputation. The poll was commissioned for the ITV *Tonight* programme called: 'How to Get into a Good School', and broadcast on 14 May 2015. The survey, conducted by OnePoll, interviewed 1000 parents with primary-school-aged children between 23 March and 8 April 2015.

Among the findings were the following:

- 12.6% of parents admitted that they had pretended to practise a faith in which they did not believe;
- a further 23.7% said they would do so if they had to;
- 13.7% also said they had baptised their child purely to gain a school place;
- 11.1% said they had 'pretended' their child had been baptised;
- 40.5% said they knew that the practice of parental cheating (putting something they knew to be untrue on the application form) was very widespread.

But

- 54.1% admitted they would feel guilty about their child taking the school place of another child because they had given false information about their religion.

These findings revealed a significant increase in religious deception since a November 2012 YouGov poll, commissioned by the education charity the Sutton Trust, revealed that only 6% of parents with children at a state-funded

faith primary school admitted to attending church services when they did not ordinarily do so.

Commenting on the new figures, Chair of Accord, Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain [1], said:

This poll is a game-changer, replacing the many anecdotal stories with hard evidence of widespread cheating. Rather than blame parents, we should blame the system that allows tax-payer funded schools to have admissions procedures that discriminate on religious grounds. No other publicly-funded institution is permitted to make faith a condition of entry. It forces parents to either lie or bus their children further away from home.

Why should local children be barred from local schools unless their parents play the religious game? The survey will appal all those who value faith and now find that it is being used to cheat one's way into a school place. We [Accord] call on the Secretary of State for Education ... to remove faith requirements from schools that are publicly-funded.

Notes

- [1] The Accord Coalition was launched in 2008 and brings together religious and non-religious organisations that want state-funded schools to be made open to and suitable for all, regardless of a family's religious or non-religious beliefs. It campaigns to end religious discrimination in school staffing and admissions, and for all state-funded schools to provide personal, social and health education, as well as assemblies and a form of religious education that boost mutual understanding and teach about the broad range of beliefs in our increasingly diverse society. Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain can be contacted via the Accord website: accordcoalition.org.uk

PAUL PETTINGER is the National Coordinator of Accord. He also works in support of the Fair Admissions Campaign – a single-issue campaign seeking to end selection-by-faith to all state-funded schools. *Correspondence:* paul@accordcoalition.org.uk