

# GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

**Mr Tony Arbour AM**

Chairman of the London Assembly  
City Hall  
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**Date: 03 MAR 2017**

Dear Mr Arbour

Thank you for your letter of 4 November with regard to the Motion passed at the London Assembly Plenary meeting of 2 November, on the issue of the Government's proposals to remove the 50 per cent cap on religiously selective admissions for all religious free schools. Please accept my apologies for the delay in getting this response to you.

As you will be aware, City Hall has no statutory role regarding education provision in London. That notwithstanding, the Mayor and I share the view that it is imperative that every effort is made to encourage people of different backgrounds to mix as much as possible, and this is as true in our schools as it is in workplaces and communities. We are therefore concerned that the Government's proposals to remove the 50 per cent cap for religious free schools could represent a threat to the drive to pursue greater integration in our schools.

There is no doubt that faith schools play a valuable role in offering many children an excellent education, and the desire of many parents to send their children to these schools is understandable.

However, faith schools in London have lower proportions of pupils on Free School Meals than other schools, and Professor Ted Cattle of the Institute of Community Cohesion Foundation has voiced his concerns that religiously-selective schools are less accessible to children from poorer backgrounds. This must therefore be of concern to those of us who believe we should be striving to create more avenues for social integration, not fewer.

It is also worth noting that in her recent review into opportunity and integration, Dame Louise Casey recommends among measures to reduce inequality and segregation in our most isolated communities, work should be undertaken with schools providers 'to promote more integrated schools and opportunities for pupils to mix with others from different backgrounds.' The government's proposals to remove the 50 per cent cap will

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run the risk of making it less likely that religious free schools will achieve greater integration and diversity amongst their intake.

It has been argued by some, as the Casey Review notes, that the existing criteria have not achieved their stated aim of achieving greater integration and diversity. The report states:

*'More restrictive admissions criteria have been applied to new faith-based Free Schools than are applied to non-religious Free Schools. Under these rules, where a new faith-based Free School was over-subscribed, only 50% of pupils could be selected directly on the grounds of their faith.'*

*The Department for Education does not record data on the faith of pupils. Nevertheless, ethnicity data for Free Schools suggests that the criteria have not been having the effect on diversity they were intended to, with the use of other admissions policies based on siblings or catchment areas, combined with parental choice, allowing more-or-less the same selection as 100% faith admissions would have, particularly in minority.'*<sup>1</sup>

However, the right response to this, should it be the case, is not to remove the cap - in lieu of an unspecified consultation process on new integration measures for religious free schools - as the government is now proposing. The outcome from that approach, with no alternative system in place, would be at best maintain the status quo and in all likelihood make things worse.

Maintaining the 50 per cent cap would at least underline the message that it is desirable for faith schools to be grounded in their religious beliefs and communities, whilst retaining an open approach to others. This is the message that we should be sending to our schools and I am happy to consider with colleagues ways in which we might be able to achieve this.

Thank you again for writing to me.

Yours sincerely



**Matthew Ryder QC**

Deputy Mayor for Social Integration, Social Mobility and Community Engagement

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<sup>1</sup> The Casey Review into opportunity and integration (December 2015, pp48)