

Worse than an educated guess: British Humanist Association response to Theos's report on 'faith' schools

Summary

Theos's [recent report](#) *More than an Educated Guess: Assessing the evidence on faith schools* fails to consider a large number of important factors in the 'faith' schools debate, omits a number of important pieces of research, misrepresents others and draws unjustified conclusions. Here we take a detailed look at its flaws.

In summary, the BHA's thoughts on the report are:

- **Introduction:** The report persistently confuses its definitions of maintained schools, Academies and Free Schools, and deliberately ignores the latter, despite their now being about half of secondary 'faith' schools. The report also omits many other important factors essential to a rounded analysis of the debate around faith schools, such as the decline of religious practice, the impact of 'minority faith' schools, human rights, children's rights, employment law, homophobia, the content of the curriculum and special educational needs – meaning it is a very partial overview of the situation.
- **Facts and figures:** The report presents a partial and inaccurate view of the history of 'faith' schools, overplaying the benevolence of the churches and underplaying the contribution of the state. The report also confuses which subjects are on the national curriculum.
- **Are faith schools divisive?** The report completely and repeatedly misrepresents the Runnymede Trust's report *Right to Divide?*, as well as ignoring its conclusions entirely. The report also omits other important factors and pieces of research in this area, and fails to deal with criticism of research based on Ofsted's measure of community cohesion.
- **Are faith schools exclusive and elitist?** The report fails to properly consider the evidence and arguments around Free School Meals, omitting important research (such as the Fair Admissions Campaign's [recent findings](#)) and taking the Catholic Education Service's weak arguments at face value. Its conclusion also largely boils down to 'two wrongs make a right' – although it is welcome that the report encourages schools to reduce selection in their admissions. Finally, the report seems not to have realised the Admissions Code was revised in 2012, instead referring to the 2009 Code.
- **Is there a faith school effect?** The report ignores literature reviews on this question by Ofsted and the House of Commons Research Library, although does ultimately, tentatively, come to the same conclusion.
- **Do faith schools offer a distinctive education experience?** The report relies on extremely subjective research, whilst dismissing the views of the public out of hand. The report also reaches a number of conclusions without any justification for them having been provided.

Introduction

Maintained schools, Academies and Free Schools: The report confuses state-maintained schools and state-funded schools, in a number of places referring to Academies and Free Schools as state-maintained. For the avoidance of doubt, state-maintained schools are those that are maintained by the local authority, i.e. 'community', 'voluntary' and 'foundation' schools; Academies and Free Schools are (legally) independent schools that are state-funded.

The report also makes the ill-founded decision to exclude foundation schools, Academies and Free Schools from its focus. This is justified on the basis that ‘Although academies and free schools have a growing impact on the landscape of state-maintained faith schooling in England, the research on these schools is limited so far so we do not address them here’, and ‘the vast majority, or about ninety five per cent, of faith schools are either voluntary aided or controlled’ – with the latter quote being justified with reference to the British Humanist Association’s [January 2012 figures](#). The point about research is reasonable (although not, in our view, justifying a complete exclusion), but the numbers statement is out of date – as of the report’s publication, 47 percent of religious secondary schools in England, comprising (we estimate) just over 50 percent of places, are foundation schools, Academies and Free Schools, with both these figures [likely to be](#) to over half if we include schools proposed to become Academies/Free Schools. Consequently the report fails to address the sizeable, if not dominant, sector of religious secondary schools – a major omission.

In the next chapter, the report says “‘Faith school’ can refer to schools with a religious character in either the state-maintained (non fee-paying) or independent (fee-paying) sectors.’ This for a fourth time excludes Academies and Free Schools. It also states that ‘When a ‘faith school’ is referred to in public debates, it generally refers to a voluntary aided school’. This may well have been true in the recent past but the fast-changing nature of the education system makes this statement untrue today.

Excluded factors: The report fails to consider many important factors in its discussion of faith-based admissions, such as:

- the decline of religious practice: the Fair Admissions Campaign has calculated that over 13 percent of secondary places in England are restricted on the basis of faith, and estimates that over 17 percent of primary places are similarly restricted. And yet weekly Church attendance [stood at](#) just 6.3 percent of the population in 2005. This is plainly relevant to the question of whether practice-based admissions criteria are fair.
- the impact of Academies and Free Schools, as discussed already.
- the impact of ‘faith’ schools other than those that belong to the Church of England or Catholic Church – a growing sector already consisting of over 250 schools.
- ‘the relationship between faith schools and human rights and equality legislation’ – even though the Joint Committee on Human Rights has [suggested](#) that the power of state schools to religiously select might, within the context of the European Convention, be ‘overdrawn’, a recent Equality and Human Rights Commission research report [cited](#) further, similar concerns, and Dan Rosenberg and Raj Desai have [recently raised questions](#) about faith-based admissions indirectly religiously discriminating or causing problems with respect to the public sector equality duty.
- young people’s rights to freedom of religion or belief, versus having their parents’ beliefs imposed on them by a state school.
- the fact that ‘faith’ schools are usually legally able to discriminate against all teachers on the basis of faith, which is not only a problem in itself but [may well](#) also be a breach of the European Employment Directive.
- ‘allegations of homophobia in faith schools’, ostensibly because ‘the most recent Stonewall School Report found pupils in faith schools are now no more likely than pupils in non-faith schools to report homophobic bullying’ – when in fact the report [continued to find](#) ‘faith’ schools doing worse than other schools on a range of measures.
- ‘the content of religious education and school curricula’ – which is surely absolutely central to any debate about state-maintained or funded ‘faith’ schools.
- the well-established fact that ‘faith’ schools take fewer pupils eligible for special educational needs than schools without a religious character.

While of course it is difficult to look at everything, it is worth considering what is omitted not least due to how many things there are.

Other points: The report is wrong to state that the Fair Admissions Campaign (of which the BHA is a supporter) ‘advance[s] a particular model of “inclusive education”, “without regard to religion or belief”.’ It is a single-issue campaign focused narrowly on the issue of faith-based admissions. It does not advocate any particular model of education outside of the admissions debate.

It is also disingenuous that David Conway of Civitas, on the basis of its being *religiously unaffiliated*, is presented as advocating in support of faith-based admissions from a *non-religious* point of view – when Conway is, in fact, religious, and approaches these issues from this angle.

The report asks of schools, ‘Are they ‘neutral’ spaces that require us to disregard our religious, philosophical and cultural identities? Or can they be spaces where we come together in difference *and* equality?’ This is a completely false dichotomy, with no organisation in the UK (certainly no member of the Accord Coalition or the Fair Admissions Campaign) seriously advocating a French or US-style model where there is no consideration of or education about religion or belief within schools.

The report states that ‘For the British Humanist Association, education rests on the celebration of humanism: a trust in “the scientific method, evidence, and reason to discover truths about the universe” and the placing of “human welfare and happiness at the centre of...ethical decision making”.’ This is a misrepresentation of the BHA’s position, which is thoroughly documented on our website and in many publications. It merely quotes from the BHA’s definition of Humanism and then invents the claim that a ‘celebration of humanism [sic]’ is its aim for education. On the contrary, the BHA [advocates](#) ‘A broad education that prepares young people for adult life in a pluralist society... [including] an objective fair and balanced education about religious and non-religious beliefs and values.’ It is totally unbalanced to dismiss the BHA’s decades of contribution to these debates on this basis.

1 Facts and figures

History: The report re-writes history to give a very partial view of the nature of church initiatives in education.

The report states that ‘The Church of England provided 17,000 public schools between 1811 and 1860 through the National Society, with the intention of providing education to the poor at the time the government was unwilling, and perhaps unable to do so.’ In fact, the state *was* willing to do so, but was repeatedly frustrated by rivalry between the Church of England and the free churches over control of schools and religious instruction – for example, Government moves in 1839 and 1843 fell in the face of opposition from the Church of England and the free churches. Christian commentators agree: ‘Attempts to secure State intervention were baulked... by religious antagonisms.’¹ ‘Arguably, it was the tussling between [the National Society and British and Foreign School Society, representing the free churches] that delayed the introduction of a fully comprehensive school system funded by public taxation.’²

¹ Marjorie Cruickshank, *Church and State in English Education – 1870 to the Present Day* (London: Macmillan, 1964)

² Brian Gates, *Faith Schools - Consensus or Conflict?* ed Gardner, Cairns, Lawton (London, RoutledgeFalmer, 2005)

It is also worth noting that Church schools started receiving state aid in 1833, with Marjorie Cruickshank estimating that between 1839 and 1869, £24 million was spent on education, of which £15 million was in voluntary contributions – meaning that almost 40% of the total was contributed by the state.

The report later states that ‘faith schools (at the time, solely Church schools) began with a mission of ameliorating poverty and inequality by providing education for all.’ However, the National Society’s aim [was that](#) ‘the National Religion should be made the foundation of National Education, and should be the first and chief thing taught to the poor, according to the excellent Liturgy and Catechism provided by our Church.’ The secondary object was ‘to communicate such knowledge and habits as are sufficient to guide them through life in their proper station’. In other words, the aims were religious education of the poor, and there was nothing about equality (albeit the schools did have equalising effects).

The report states that ‘In 1902, the Education Act merged Church and State-based school systems to establish free, compulsory *Christian* education.’ However this is not the case. There was no requirement for any religious instruction, Christian or not – just a requirement that any that was given should be non-denominational. It was not until the 1944 Act that Christian religious instruction became compulsory.

Other points: Contrary to what is stated, Citizenship is in fact on the national curriculum, including for ‘faith’ schools. Religious Education is not, as stated, part of the national curriculum. Personal, Social, Health and Economic education is also not.

The report incorrectly states that Academies cannot religiously select in admissions.

Admissions to voluntary controlled schools are always, not ‘usually’, determined by the Local Authority. VC schools may religiously select 20% of teachers, not 20% of staff, and the head teacher can be discriminated against *in addition to* this figure, not merely as part of it.

2 Are faith schools divisive?

Misrepresenting *Right to Divide?*: This chapter overlooks some significant contributions to the evidence base, while misrepresenting others – particularly the Runnymede Trust’s [Right to Divide?](#), which is repeatedly quoted in misleading ways throughout the report. For example, Theos’s report says that ‘Runnymede, a race equality think tank and member of the Accord coalition, found that despite common perceptions, the intake of faith schools is ethnically diverse.’ But the cited part of Runnymede’s report says that ‘The intake of faith schools is ethnically diverse – perhaps more so than the common perception of faith schools would suggest. Statistics from faith school providers show that Anglican schools as a whole recruit less than a proportionate number from minority groups except in KS3 and except for Black Caribbean and Black African pupils in KS4. Similarly, RC schools have more Black pupils and fewer Asian pupils, relatively than other schools nationally. These figures mask geographical patterns since people from minority ethnic communities are clustered in the major conurbations.’ So in fact the report finds they are more ethnically diverse *than people might expect* and more so than general in a few areas, but (at least in the case of Anglican schools) are *less diverse in general*. This conclusion is ignored when Theos subsequently cherry-pick further examples of ‘faith’ schools being ethnically diverse. In addition, the fact that Catholic schools have more black pupils but fewer Asian pupils correlates strongly with the Church’s religious makeup – a point unacknowledged and unexplored.

Theos's report says that 'The report suggested that despite faith schools being more "effective at educating for a single vision than at opening a dialogue about a shared vision", they had some success in providing opportunities "for young people of different backgrounds to mix in faith-based and secular spaces".' But the full quotation from Runnymede is that 'Faith schools are much more effective at educating for a single vision than they are at opening dialogue about a shared vision. Where they do have some success it is often due to the opportunities afforded for young people of different backgrounds to mix – these spaces can be faith-based or secular. Faith schools should aim for a broader intake of pupils in order to enable interfaith and intercultural dialogue.' In other words, Theos's implication that 'faith' schools provide opportunities for young people of different backgrounds to mix is wrong in the general manner in which they have presented it, as it is premised by Runnymede on when the schools have a broader intake of pupils – which is further encouraged.

Theos says that 'the report highlighted for most ethnic minority groups, "Catholic schools, parishes and organisations provide a meeting place and important support in becoming fully integrated into society"'. However, it is totally misleading to attribute the quoted view to Runnymede –the quote is actually from the Catholic Bishops' Conference, presented within Runnymede's report.

Finally, Theos's report says that 'they concluded that the experience of effective intervention by faith schools to promote race equality is as mixed as it is within the broader education system.' Ignored are Runnymede's key recommendations, which were: '1. End selection on the basis of faith; 2. Children ought to have a greater say in how they are educated; 3. RE should be part of the core national curriculum; 4. Faith schools should also serve the most disadvantaged; 5. Faith schools must value all young people; 6. Faith should continue to play an important role in our education system, provided points 1–5 are taken into account.'

Other omissions: As already stated, the report fails to consider the fact that religion and ethnicity often correlate, and the impact this has on explorations of ethnic diversity in 'faith' schools. The report also only passingly references the work of Professor Ted Cantle, considering his 2001 report but not subsequent reports and work with the Institute of Community Cohesion. At the launch of The 2009 Cantle Report, Professor Cantle stated that 'faith' schools with religious admission requirements were '[automatically a source of division](#)' in the town.

When Rupert Brown, Adam Rutland and Charles Watters' paper *Identities in Transition: A Longitudinal Study of Immigrant Children* (2008) is cited as showing that 'Diverse ethnic composition at a school level promotes positive inter-group attitudes and more cross-group friendships', their conclusion is relegated by Theos to the footnotes: 'Note this report advised against single faith schools based on the assumption that such schools are likely to be less ethnically diverse.'

Ultimately this section of the report concludes that even if religiously selective schools harm integration (i.e. bridging social capital), they have a positive effect on social mobility of minority groups by instead building bonding social capital. No evidence is cited to suggest that integrated schools are worse at fostering social mobility for minority groups: indeed, it seems obvious that if a minority group is fully integrated in an educational system then it should be afforded the same opportunities as the majority. The wider literature on the advantages of bridging over bonding social capital is ignored.

Other points: The report suggests that 'faith schools came under attack' because of 'the tragic events of 9/11 and 7/7'. However, it seems to the BHA that the recent debate around 'faith' schools started in earnest when the Church of England's *Dearing Report*, published in 2001, proposed that Church schools started expanding in number again, and the Government readily backed the

expansion in the proportion of 'faith' schools thereafter. The history of a largely static sector starting to grow in number and proportion is ignored.

The report states that faith 'schools were simultaneously represented as recruiting grounds for terrorists and religious extremists' – but cites a publication that argues that 'faith' schools were increasingly vulnerable to extremist influence, not that they had been hijacked by them.

The report cites research from the Church of England and the Centre for Christian Education (looking at Catholic schools) as having 'separately conducted research examining Ofsted inspection findings on schools and social cohesion.' Both the pieces of research rely on Ofsted's measure of community cohesion, and how schools scored against this. But as the Fair Admissions Campaign [points out](#), 'Ofsted's [inspection criteria](#) gave no consideration to how representative schools were of their local communities in terms of religion or belief, ethnicity or socio-economic factors. As a result, schools could have highly unrepresentative intakes in terms of religion, ethnicity and socio-economic factors, and yet still be classed by Ofsted as performing well on this measure by being cohesive *within* the school and having good links within the community – despite these having less of an impact than if the school was itself diverse.

'Ofsted therefore did not find that religiously selective schools' net contribution to community cohesion was better than other schools, as it never asked this question. It merely found that this sector undertook more pro-active measures than other schools to try and promote better community cohesion. This might be seen as taking small steps to repair the damage to community cohesion they had caused in the first place by purposely segregating children on the basis of faith.'

This line of criticism is acknowledged by Theos, who claims that it 'is explored further in the next chapter', but it is not in fact considered.

3 Are faith schools exclusive and elitist?

Admissions Code: The report seems not to have realised that there is now a 2012 Admissions Code, instead quoting extensively from the 2009 Code. It also says that supplementary information forms are of 'primary importance' – ignoring the more important oversubscription criteria. It also states that 'There is legislation in force which prevents admission decisions that discriminate on the basis of socio-economic criteria', and 'schools are effectively prevented, by law, from discriminating against particular socio-economic groups' – which is strictly true, but the evidence shows has not (yet?) stopped such selection from widely occurring in practice.

Free School Meals: Theos asserts that 'The use of free school meals eligibility as a proxy for whether the school's intake reflects the socio-economic make-up of its community is something of a blunt instrument.' To justify this, it says 'The Catholic Education Service, for example, suggests that fewer eligible children might claim free school meals because of the associated stigma. They also assert that their catchment areas are wider than the postcode or local authority where their schools are situated. Similarly, the Catholic Education Service contests the claim that Catholic schools are unrepresentative: "separate figures from the DfE showed 18.6% of pupils at Catholic primary schools live in the 10% most deprived areas of England, compared with only 14.3% of primary school pupils nationally. Some 17% of pupils at Catholic schools lived in the 10% most deprived areas compared to 12% of pupils nationally". The Right Reverend Malcolm McMahon OP, Chairman of the Catholic Education Service, makes the exact same points in his subsequent response. Claiming that the local authorities controlled the admissions for more than half its schools, the Church of England challenged the assertion that their schools were unrepresentative of the local communities and that admissions were failing to mirror local diversity.'

Taking these points in turn: with regard to free school meal eligibility being a blunt instrument, it is worth noting that it is the Government's instrument of choice when it comes to allocating key resources such as the pupil premium. It justifies this [in the following terms](#):

But isn't FSM an inaccurate measure of disadvantage?

FSM is the only pupil level measure of deprivation available. The link between FSM eligibility and underachievement is very strong and data on FSM is easily collected and updated annually. The FSM indicator best fits the rationale for the premium.

Turning to the Catholic Education Service's point about stigma, we see it is entirely unfounded. Due to concerns over stigma, it is in fact estimates of free school meal *eligibility* that *are* used by the Government, Fair Admissions Campaign, *The Guardian* and other researchers, and not the number of pupils actually *in receipt* of free school meals. This aims to correct for the problem; but even if it doesn't, there is no evidence to suggest, and no reason to suppose, that Catholic schools will experience a disproportionate stigma when it comes to free school meal registration.

Turning to the CES's assertion that its schools have bigger catchment areas than postcode or local authority, it is true that religiously selective schools have larger catchment areas than other schools (although not larger than local authorities at the primary level or for secondaries outside of London – both areas where the statistics continue to show that Catholic schools are unrepresentative of their areas). However, while particular location and catchment size might negatively affect an individual school, it seems that it should be equally likely to positively affect it – especially given the fact that house prices go up (and hence free school meal eligibility goes down) around successful schools – and so this explanation cannot justify Catholic schools' increased socio-economic selectivity on aggregate.

Considering the CES's 'separate figures', this simply reflects the fact that Catholic schools are more likely to be in inner cities than other schools. It does not attempt to consider whether the pupils are actually more likely to be the most deprived people within those areas. To work this out, you would need to look at a measure of deprivation for individual families – not simply for their areas. This is what the free school meals measure does. And while Catholic schools admit more pupils on free school meals than Church of England schools, they admit relatively few when compared to their own local areas.

Finally, a major omission from this report is its failure to consider [research published in August](#) by the Fair Admissions Campaign, comparing schools to their middle super output areas (MSOAs). As the Campaign has recently mapped secondary schools by their religious admissions policies, for the first time this research is able to disambiguate religiously selective and non-selective schools. The results of this for Church of England schools show clearly the effects of religious selection: nationally about 15% of secondary pupils are considered eligible for free school meals. Looking at Church of England secondary schools that do not select at all, they typically have 0.2 percentage points more FSM pupils than their area. But looking at CofE secondaries that select 100% of their pupils, they typically have 3.9 percentage points fewer. This is a huge difference. The Campaign will be publishing further research on this point shortly.

Theos quotes one researcher as saying 'Unless the argument is made that all fee-paying independent schools should be abolished and access to high-demand housing made more equitable, then a focus on faith schools as creating 'education apartheid' limits the state's role to preventing social separation on the basis of religion but not doing so on the basis of parents' economic (and indeed

social and cultural) capital.’ Later it points to research showing that ‘VA faith schools were ten times more likely to be highly unrepresentative of their surrounding area than faith schools where the local authority acted as the admission authority. However, it also concluded that non-religious state schools which acted as their own admission authorities [which, it is worth bearing in mind, were at the time almost all grammar schools] were six times more likely to be highly unrepresentative of their surrounding area than schools for whom the local authority is the admission authority. This research suggests that faith-based selection is not the sole cause of socio-economic sorting.’ Ultimately, this chapter concludes that ‘While there may be good reasons to challenge faith-based selection, it would not solve the wider problem of socio-economic filtering which occurs at all oversubscribed schools.’ It is not for the BHA to comment on debates around grammar and independent schools, but this argument effectively amounts to ‘two wrongs make a right’. It also seems slightly odd of Theos to present this argument when it has previously declared that ‘independent or fee paying schools are not within the scope of this report’.

Theos states that ‘In practice, complaints about a lack of clarity around admissions criteria seem to be fairly rare’, quoting Damian Hinds as saying in 2009-10 that just ‘12 or 23 out of 6753 religious schools in this country’ were found by the Schools Adjudicator to be in breach of the Code. Although it appears that Mr Hinds got it wrong and that the figure is actually 45, and at the time 37% of ‘faith’ schools were not their own admissions authorities, it is surely strange to conclude that because only a few schools were complained about in a particular year, only a few ‘faith’ schools break the School Admissions Code. Indeed, part of the reason why there may have been so few complaints is that just a couple of years earlier the adjudicator did a [mass investigation](#) of admissions criteria, and found 3,000 schools (overwhelmingly ‘faith’ schools) to be in breach of the Code. Finally, it is worth pointing out that this paragraph does not consider any socio-economic selection that occurs while being permitted by the Code.

Theos states that ‘Some suggest that parents from more privileged backgrounds seek to enrol their children in high performing, oversubscribed faith schools by feigning religiosity. It has been suggested that because they have greater resources at their disposal that they are better able to manipulate existing faith-based selection criteria. We have not found any concrete evidence to support this idea.’ In general, Theos is right that there is not a huge amount of academic literature to support this occurring. But it is not hard to see why this is something that people would be reluctant to admit to. Nonetheless, there are [a number of individual cases](#) that attest to the fact that such selection does occur. And the facts that wealthier religious families are more likely to send their children to ‘faith’ schools than poorer ones, and that 13 percent of secondary places over 17 percent of primary places in England are restricted on the basis of faith (if schools are sufficiently oversubscribed), versus weekly Church attendance [standing at](#) just 6.3 percent of the population in 2005, seem to corroborate the widespread notion that such instances are common.

4 Is there a faith school effect?

Ofsted recently conducted a literature review on whether ‘faith’ schools improve academic achievement. Their findings, in full, [were that](#) ‘[No conclusions can be drawn with confidence]. Faith schools tend to perform relatively well in terms of raw attainment. However, studies that examine whether this is due to the composition of faith school intakes or to something that faith schools are doing do not come to a consensus (Benton et al., 2003; Schagen et al., 2002; Schagen and Schagen, 2005, Morris 2009, Gibbons and Silva, 2011). Morris, using Contextual Value Added (CVA) scores, showed that Catholic schools were more likely than other schools to have a combination of high attainment and high CVA, and less likely to have low attainment and low CVA. However, Schagen and Schagen (2005) using a multi-level approach, found that, controlling for other prior attainment and pupil and school characteristics, faith schools had slightly higher total points scores at GCSE and

slightly high examination entries, but not higher average scores, suggesting perhaps that the higher total points were accounted for by entry into an extra GCSE in religious education. Gibbons and Silva's (2011) study attempts to provide stronger controls for pupil background and characteristics by additionally considering family residential choice and positive selection into faith schools throughout the school career. Taking these factors into account they find no faith school effect at primary school: differences in rates of progress at Key Stage 2 in faith and non-faith schools were entirely explained by pre-existing differences in pupils' characteristics.'

A literature review by the [House of Commons Research Library](#) in 2009 reached a slightly firmer conclusion, stating that 'Recent research on primary schools suggests that performance difference can largely be explained by prior attainment and background. The remaining differences are due to parental self-selection and selection methods used by some faith schools. Further analysis of GCSE results shows a different pattern of results for faith and non-faith schools with similar governance arrangements and control over admissions. Non-faith schools perform better in certain categories, faith schools do best in others and there is no clear difference in some.'

Theos does not quote either of these conclusions. Nonetheless, it ultimately, tentatively, reaches the same conclusion, but takes a meandering route to it, at several times suggesting the findings will be positive. Along the way it relies on the findings of Andrew Morris, whose research is cited in the report in nine separate places (particularly in this chapter and the next) – only five of which are acknowledged in the main body of the text to be to him. It is worth noting that Morris is the Director of the National Centre for Christian Education at Liverpool Hope University, which is specifically cited as having made its research available to Theos for the purposes of the report.

5 Do faith schools offer a distinctive education experience?

In this chapter Theos immediately presents strong evidence (in the form of a YouGov survey) that 'faith' schools are not popular due to their religiosity, with other factors being more important; this has now been corroborated by [another survey](#) that has come out since. However, Theos immediately dismisses the first survey as 'fail[ing] to grapple in a meaningful and nuanced way with the enduring appeal of faith schools' – without providing any justification for this statement.

A lot of the research subsequently presented is extremely subjective in nature.

Theos states that 'As previously outlined, Andrew Morris' research suggests that higher academic performance is linked to a schools' ethos rather than other socio-economic determinants.' But no such evidence is presented in the report.

Theos quote Templeton Foundation-funded research as finding that 'the most important pedagogical strategy for character formation in schools is teachers modelling values. Students see schools as places that help to shape their values, but not through assemblies, tutor time or in non-examinable subjects' (the Foundation, of course, having its own strong agenda on religion and education). From this they conclude that 'That faith schools have the potential to meet these needs in a unique way ought not to be understated.' But it is not clear where such a conclusion has come from.

Theos concludes this chapter by stating that 'It is clear that the actual impact of ethos in 'faith' schools is under-explored. As a result, it is impossible to offer even a tentative answer to the question posed by this chapter. It is hoped that these gaps will be remedied in part by the findings of Professor Trevor Cooling's 2 year project investigating "the impact of a distinctively Christian education". The project due to be delivered in August 2014, will investigate the impact of secondary

schools' implementation of a distinctively Christian ethos in their approaches to teaching and learning.'

In the fundraising pitch for this project, which was sent to the BHA by an individual who had obtained it by FOI, Professor Cooling wrote that the priority of the research is 'to generate the evidence that demonstrates the impact of a Christian approach to teaching and learning... The project is designed to build on the current opportunities offered by government support for schools with Christian sponsors.' Professor Cooling also writes that 'a very effective, political lobby group exists [i.e. the Accord Coalition], which campaigns against schools with a Christian ethos and other "faith" schools. This has published a 40-page dossier of research which, it is claimed, provides the evidence to show that faith-based approaches are harmful to community cohesion and do not benefit the wider population. At the annual conference of the Association of Anglican Directors of Education in June this year the question asked was "what is the evidence for the positive impact that a distinctively Christian approach to teaching and learning has?" In these days of evidence-based policy, this key group highlighted the urgent need for robust evidence that demonstrates the impact of a Christian approach to teaching and learning. Without this evidence of impact, it becomes increasingly difficult to argue for the value of a distinctively Christian contribution.' This makes clear that the project is not intended to impartially build an evidence base, but starts with a presupposition that such positive evidence will be generated. Theos are therefore wrong to hope that Professor Cooling's research will be able to fill this gap.