

Faith schools

Aims:

These activities aim to stimulate debate and discussion on the issue of faith schools. Faith schools have been a focus of much media attention recently and it is important that young people understand the issues under discussion. This will help to prevent them forming stereotypes about people based on the kind of school that they go to. These resources help to engage young people in complex issues around the appropriate role of religion in education and wider society. The activities aim to teach young people about both sides of the argument and do not offer their own judgement on faith schools.

What are faith schools?

Faith schools are schools where the ethos of the school is based on the values of a particular religion. Many faith schools incorporate religious and spiritual elements into the school day. They are wholly or partly governed by a religious organisation, for example, a church, synagogue or mosque.

Until the nineteenth century, the government did not provide state-funded education. Therefore many schools were started up and ran by churches (particularly for children whose parents couldn't afford private school fees). When the state began to provide education for all children, they incorporated church schools into the state sector, funding the church to continue running their own schools. Many of these schools still exist as state-funded Christian schools today.

In recent years, faith schools have become increasingly controversial. This is partly because Britain is now a multi-faith society.

If Christians have state-funded schools, then it is only fair that the government funds Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and other religious schools too. However, this means that children face being separated along religious and often ethnic lines for their schooling. Opponents worry that this will fuel prejudice and divisions in wider society.

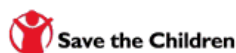
There is a significant lobby against faith schools. These individuals also worry about the intertwining of religion and state and argue that religion shouldn't be promoted in schools.

The present government, however, is committed to the state funding of faith schools and to expanding the number of both Christian and non-Christian schools. There are also plans to allow religious institutions to fund and help govern many of the new City Academies. They argue that faith schools often produce excellent academic results and many very successful schools have a religious ethos.

There are also a number of private faith schools, but the debate largely revolves around whether or not the government should support and fund faith-based schools.

Below are seven different activities that aim to get young people thinking and talking about this controversial issue. We provide a suggested order of activities, but feel free to pick and choose between them. Some are more challenging than others, and may be most suitable for sixth form students. Materials and worksheets can be found at the end of this document.

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Activity one: Religion in School

Time: 20 minutes

Equipment: none

This activity asks participants to think about the role that religion should play in schools. This is a good introductory discussion to debating whether or not there should be faith schools.

Method:

- Ask students to discuss the following questions in pairs or small groups.
 - Where do you come across religion in your school?
 - Where else do you think students might come across religion in other schools?

Examples might include:

School Assembly; Religious Education; religious symbols worn by staff or students (eg the hijab or crucifix); prayer rooms or chapels; other lessons (eg science or history); the values or mission statement of the school.

- Ask participants to think about whether religion **should** be manifested in schools. You could prompt the whole group using the following questions, or alternatively ask them to discuss the questions in small groups. Try to get them to give reasons for their answers.
 - Do you think schools should have religious assemblies?
 - Do you think RE should be taught in schools? If so, how should it be taught?
 - Do you think that students should be allowed to wear religious symbols, such as the hijab, to school?
 - Do you think that there should be places to worship in schools?
 - Do you think that religious beliefs should be taught in other lessons. For example, should creationism be taught in science?
 - Do you think that schools should have religious mission statements?
- Following on from this discussion introduce the concept of faith schools. Ask the group what kind of school(s) they attend, are they faith or non-faith schools? Do they know?
- How would they define a faith school?
- Write up or read out this definition:
 - *Faith schools are schools where the ethos of the school is based on the values of a particular religion, and many faith schools incorporate more religious and spiritual elements into the curriculum. They are wholly or partly governed by a religious organisation, for example, a church, synagogue or mosque.*
- Check that participants understand and explain that there are both state and private faith schools. The main debate is whether the government should fund and support the expansion of faith schools.

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Activity two: Faith school facts and figures

Time: 20 minutes

Equipment: facts and figures quiz

Method:

- Divide students into pairs. Give each pair a copy of the quiz. Ask students to try to match the facts and figures with the gaps in the text.
- Feedback and compare answers as a class. Did they find any answers surprising?

Activity three: Different opinions

Time: 30 minutes

Equipment: quotations worksheet

Method:

- Give participants a worksheet featuring quotations from various sources, giving different viewpoints about faith schools.
- In small groups ask them to identify which they agree/disagree with and why.
- Brainstorm any difficult concepts, eg, 'integration' or 'illiberal'.
- Feedback and compare opinions as a group. Which opinions did the majority of the group agree with?

Extended discussion points

- Split the class into small groups and get them to discuss the following questions. Students compare and contrast their ideas.
 - Why do you think faith schools have become such a big issue in politics and the media recently?
 - Why do you think parents choose to send their children to faith schools?
 - Why do you think many parents choose to send their children to schools that do not have a religious basis?
 - Is it more important to understand your own religion, or to understand other people's religions?

Activity four: Agreement lines

Time: 30 minutes

Equipment: notes for facilitator on key arguments for and against

Method:

- Ask students to debate the following statement as an 'agreement line'. An imaginary line is drawn across the room, with 'agree' at one side and 'disagree' at the other. Students stand in place to illustrate their viewpoint. Ask the students to back up their position with reasons.

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The government should abolish all faith schools.

- Write up their arguments on the board in two columns, for and against.
- Brainstorm any other reasons they can think of for both sides of the argument and add them to the table.
- A summary of the key arguments for and against can be found in the 'materials and worksheets' section below.

Activity five: Faith schools in the papers

Time: 40 minutes

Equipment: a selection of newspaper articles for and against faith schools

Faith schools have been a hot topic in the media recently. This exercise gets students to read and discuss a range of articles that have appeared in newspapers over the past few years.

Method:

- Ask students to work in small groups and give each group an article either for or against faith schools. Try to ensure that you have equal numbers of groups looking at both sides of the argument. A list of links to useful articles can be found at the end of this document.
- Give students 20 minutes to answer the following questions:
 - Is the article for or against faith schools?
 - Who is making the argument?
 - What are the main reasons they give in support of their argument?
 - Write down an interesting quote from the article.
 - Find an example or statistic used to back up their opinion.
- Each group then presents their findings to the class.

Activity six: A role-play

Time: 45 minutes

Equipment: role play cards

Note

The logistics of this role-play depend on the number of students in your class. We give instructions for a group of 20, but the activity can be adapted for a smaller or larger group, you will just have to play with the maths!

- Divide students into four groups of five. Groups 1 and 2 are journalists, group 3 are students who go to a faith school and group 4 are students who go to a secular school.
- Give each group 15 minutes to read their role play card and discuss their answers.
- Then send one group of journalists to group 3 and the other to group 4. They each have 15 minutes to interview their students. Each journalist should interview one student in the group.

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- After the interview, pick a couple of journalists to tell the rest of the group what the people they interviewed think about faith schools and whether the government should fund them.
 - Then open up the debate to any other comments and thoughts on the issue.
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Activity seven: Improving relationships

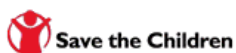
Time: 25 minutes

Equipment: suggestions handout

What could schools do to encourage better understanding between young people from different faiths and backgrounds?

- Give out a sheet of suggestions (see below). Ask participants to discuss the ideas using the following questions:
 - Which of these do you think might work best?
 - Do you know if any of these ideas already exist in your school?
 - Do you have any other ideas?
 - What would you personally be interested to find out more about other faiths if you had the chance?
 - Feedback and compare ideas as a group.
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Materials and worksheets

Activity two: Faith school facts and figures

22,000	49%	6	6,955	80%	36
7,000	3%	1	57%	2	1

There are a) _____ state-maintained schools in England. Almost b) _____ have a religious character.

c) _____ are Church of England, Roman Catholic or Methodist, d) _____ Jewish, e) _____ Muslim, f) _____ Sikh, g) _____ Greek Orthodox and h) _____ Seventh Day Adventist. The first state-funded Hindu school is to open by 2010.

An *Observer* poll in 2001 found that i) _____ of those surveyed did not support the expansion of 'single-faith schools to include religions such as Islam and Judaism'.

In 2001, 80% of respondents to a MORI poll believed that all schools should be open to those of any religion or belief.

Until Labour was elected in 1997, all state faith schools were Christian or Jewish.

All state-funded faith schools have to teach the national curriculum. Around j) _____ of faith schools (voluntary-aided) only teach their own faith in Religious Education.

k) _____ of Muslims in Britain are educated in faith schools, in comparison to l) _____ of Jews.

Answers:

a) 22,000	b) 7,000	c) 6,955	d) 36	e) 6	f) 2
g) 1	h) 1	i) 80%	j) 57%	k) 3%	l) 49%

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Activity three: Different Opinions

<p>"Throughout their history, faith schools have helped raise educational standards including in some of our most deprived communities... By promoting core values, they have also strengthened communities and our society."</p> <p>Ruth Kelly, former Education Secretary</p>	<p>"Schools I have come across in West Yorkshire set up by faith communities outside of the state system are illiberal and poorly resourced. It's better to have them within the system, and part of the system than outside of the system."</p> <p>David Blunkett, former Home Secretary</p>
<p>"We need to have all our children educated in schools which believe that concern for others is not a Christian virtue, or a Jewish or Islamic virtue, but a human virtue; and where all faiths are equally respected. Faith schools do not, and cannot, do this."</p> <p>Francis Beckett, Guardian columnist</p>	<p>"If Christians and Jews have state funding for their schools, Muslims and Hindus follow and other religions will not be far behind. Do we want such a proliferation of state-funded religious schools? Will it hinder integration, foster religious divisions and provide fertile ground for religious and ethnic conflict? I believe it would."</p> <p>Hank Roberts, National Union of Teachers Executive</p>
<p>"Schools like Feversham college actually aid integration by improving Muslim exam performance... Better exam results mean better jobs, and a more harmonious society than we have at the moment."</p> <p>Osama Saaed, Muslim Association of Britain</p>	<p>"We respect the rights to freedom of belief and to education, and understand the desire of parents to bring up their children with the family's beliefs. However, it is not the job of publicly funded schools to instil a religious faith in children, and states are not obliged to provide schools catering for every shade of belief or philosophy."</p> <p>British Humanist Association</p>
<p>"[Parents] are scared that their children will forget the ways of their ancestors and that's why they'll send their children to a religious school." 15-year-old female, Muslim</p>	<p>"I believe that attending a single-faith school has enhanced my understanding dramatically of my faith and without learning and studying it at GCSE I don't believe that I would fully understand my religion and the importance of it in my life." 16-year-old female, Roman Catholic</p>
<p>"[At a single-faith school] you'll become more religious and then you might become racist against other people's religions." 14-year-old male, not religious</p>	<p>"[At a single-faith school] you're not used to communicating with other people so well." 15-year-old female, Muslim</p>

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Activity five: Faith schools in the News

Here are a selection of newspaper articles for an against faith schools. This is not intended to be an exhaustive or extensive list.

Articles in favour of faith schools

The government's perspective

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/4737172.stm>

The Church of England's perspective

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr3206abc.html>

An argument for more Muslim faith schools

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/faithschools/story/0,,1393576,00.html>

An argument from a Catholic faith school

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/bestschools/story/0,,1566617,00.html>

An argument from a Jewish perspective

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/comment/story/0,,1769081,00.html>

A multi-faith Catholic school

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/faithschools/story/0,,1670823,00.html>

Arguments against faith schools

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers' perspective

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/faithschools/story/0,,1752244,00.html>

The National Secular Society's perspective

<http://www.secularism.org.uk/archbishopsdefenceoffaithschools.html>

Faith schools cannot teach tolerance and understanding

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4297122-110908,00.html>

Faith schools segregate communities

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4295388-110908,00.html>

Religious schools are indoctrinating and divisive

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/comment/story/0,,1753745,00.html>

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Activity six: A role play

Groups 1 and 2 - Journalists

You are a team of journalists from Channel 4 News. You are researching a feature on state-funded faith schools and want to find out what some young people in the UK think about this issue. You want to talk to some young people who go to faith schools, and some young people who go to secular state schools.

In your group you have 15 minutes to decide on five or six questions you will ask. You might want to ask about the following topics:

- advantages of going to a faith school
- disadvantages of going to a faith school
- the views of the young people's parents
- how faith schools can build understanding between young people of different faiths.

You will each go and interview a different group of students, so you will all need to make a note of the questions you decide on. Also make sure you make a written note of your interviewees' opinions, as you will have to report their views to the rest of the class.

Group 3- Students at a faith school

You are a group of friends who go to a state-funded faith school. Your teacher tells you that a team of journalists from Channel 4 News are coming to interview you for a feature on faith schools. The journalists want to find out what young people going to a faith school think about faith schools in general.

You have 15 minutes to discuss your opinions together and decide on your points of view. You might want to think about the following topics:

- advantages of going to a faith school
- disadvantages of going to a faith school
- why your parents chose to send you to a faith school
- whether you find out about other religions and cultures at your school.

Try to ensure that you don't all have the same opinion to offer the journalists. Some of you are more positive than others. You might want to consider what you think about the opinions below.

"[In this single-faith school] it is easier for me to practise my faith and to be able to celebrate it with people."

14-year-old female, Christian

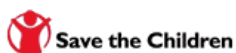
"[Parents] are scared that their children will forget the ways of their ancestors and that's why they'll send their children to a religious school."

15-year-old female, Muslim

"I think a multi-faith school would be better. Religion is an accident of birth, if my parents were Muslim then I would probably be a Muslim. If you go to a multi-faith school then you can have a look at all the religions and choose your own one."

15-year-old female, Christian

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Group 4- Students at a non-faith state school

You are a group of students who go to a secular state school. There are students from many different religious and cultural backgrounds at your school. Your teacher tells you that journalists from Channel 4 News are coming to interview you for a feature on faith schools. The journalists want to find out what you think about faith schools in general.

You have 15 minutes to discuss your opinions together and decide on your points of view. You might want to think about the following topics:

- advantages of going to a non-faith state school
- disadvantages of going to a non-faith state school
- why your parents chose to send you to a non-faith state school
- whether you find out about other religions and cultures at your school.

You don't all have the same opinion about faith schools. Some of you are more positive than others. You might want to consider what you think about the opinions below.

"I think if you went to a school where it was just one religion you'd get stuck in your views and when you go out in the real world you won't understand other people."

14-year-old female, Sikh

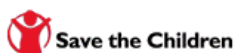
"[Being in a multi-faith school is good because]...you get to know better what you can and can't say to other people."

14-year-old male, non-religious

"I think I would [like to go to a Muslim school], actually. I'd still want to have friends from other faiths, but I'd like to know more about being a Muslim and you don't get much of a chance here."

15-year-old female, Muslim

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Activity seven: Improving Relationships

What could schools do to encourage better understanding between young people from different faiths and backgrounds?

Here are some suggestions:

"I would set up a multi faith youth club with all different faiths, and it would have a disco once a month and other things that young people want to do. And it would teach about different religions, but not sitting round in a classroom, but in a fun way."

Group 2, Male, Jewish

"I think we should talk to young people from other religions more and be friendly. I think we should go and talk to them. They should come over and have some visits and talk about Iraq and what's going on."

14-year-old female, Muslim

Other possible methods might include:

- setting up a website dedicated to encouraging this kind of inter-faith discussion
- finding a pen-friend of another faith
- organising events in community centres and youth clubs for groups of different faiths (outside of school time)
- organising regular sixth form conferences in which students can debate issues together and build good relationships (to be run by a mixed panel of students)
- showing good documentary or educational films about these issues
- organising regular visits to schools by leaders of different faith groups

- 1) Which of these do you think might work best?
- 2) Do you know if any of these ideas already exist in your school?
- 3) Do you have any other ideas?
- 4) What would you personally be interested to find out more about other faiths if you had the chance?

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