



EMBARGOED UNTIL: 09:00 Thursday 4 December 2008

Faith schools should be open to all

A new report from Runnymedeⁱ concludes that faith schools in England must become schools for all children in order to encourage interaction between people of different faiths and ethnicities.

Today, Runnymede publishes its report '*Right to Divide?*' after a two year investigation into the impact that faith schools have on community cohesion. The research involved over 1000 people across England sharing their views about the role that faith schools play in bringing people together or creating barriers between them.

The reportⁱⁱ, written by Dr Rob Berkeley, examined how faith schools responded to the statutory duty to promote community cohesion. It recommends:

1. End selection on the basis of faith

Faith schools should be for the benefit of all in society rather than just some. If faith schools are convinced of their relevance for society, then that should apply equally for all children. With state funding comes an obligation to be relevant and open to all citizens.

2. Children should have a greater say in how they are educated

Children's rights are as important as parents' rights. While the debate about faith schools is characterized by discussions of parental choice of education, there is little discussion about children's voice.

3. RE should be part of the core national curriculum

Provision for learning about religion is too often poor in schools without a religious character. Provision for learning about religions beyond that of the sponsoring faith in faith schools is also inadequate.

4. Faith schools should also serve the most disadvantaged

Despite histories based on challenging poverty and inequality, and high-level pronouncements that suggest a mission to serve the most disadvantaged in society, faith schools educate a disproportionately small number of young people at the lowest end of the socio-economic scale.

5. Faith schools must value all young people

People cherish facets of their identities beyond their faith, and these also need to be the focus of learning in faith schools – and valued within them. Similarly, religious identities should be more highly valued within schools that don't have a religious character.

6. If these recommendations are acted upon, faith should continue to play an important role in our education system

Faith schools should remain a significant and important part of our education system, offering diversity in the schooling system as a means of improving standards, offering choice to parents and developing effective responses to local, national and global challenges in education.



Rob Berkeley, Deputy Director of Runnymede, said:

“Faith schools make up a third of our education system. Schools should be central to their communities and neighbourhoods for all who live there not just those who share their religious world view. If we are serious about the importance of equality and cohesion, faith schools too need to play their part by welcoming all in society to the benefits of their approaches. ”

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The report will be launched at a press conference at 9am at the Institute of Education, London University, Bedford Way, WC1H 0AL and will last 45 minutes. It will be an opportunity to hear from the author of the report and from a panel including;

- Barry Sheerman, Chair of the Commons Select Committee for Children, Schools and Families
- Jay Lakhani, Hindu Council UK
- Rabbi Jonathan Romain, Accord Coalition

The press conference will be held alongside Runnymede’s annual education conference at which Sarah McCarthy-Fry, Minister for Schools and Families, will make an address.

Those interested in attending are asked to contact Rebecca Waller on 020 7377 9222 or email Rebecca@runnymedetrust.org in advance

2. Rob Berkeley, Deputy Director of Runnymede is available for interviews and comment. To arrange an interview, please contact 020 7377 9222 during office hours. Outside of office hours, contact Rob Berkeley on 07764 935 770.

Rabbi Jonathan Romain of the Accord Coalition is also available for interviews/ comment

3. The report will be published online at 10am 4th Dec. Preview copies are available for press by contacting Runnymede on 020 7377 9222.

ⁱ The Runnymede Trust is an independent policy research organisation focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic society. Founded as a Charitable Education Trust, Runnymede has a long track record in policy research, working in collaboration with eminent thinks and policymakers in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Since 1968, the date of Runnymede’s foundation, we have worked to establish and maintain a positive image of what it means to live affirmatively within a society that is both multi-ethnic and culturally diverse. Runnymede continues to speak with a thoughtful and independent public voice on these issues today. For further information visit www.runnymedetrust.org

ⁱⁱ ‘*Right to Divide? Faith Schools and Community Cohesion*’ will be released on Thursday 4 December by the Runnymede Trust. It will be available for download from www.runnymedetrust.org