

House of Lords - 11 March 2002

Education Bill

3.13 p.m.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Skills (Baroness Ashton of Upholland): My Lords, I beg to move that this Bill be now read a second time. . .

Before I finish I want to say a little about what is not in the Bill. First, the Bill does not water down our commitment to inclusion. Noble Lords have heard me say before that it is our firm belief that the inclusion of every child in mainstream education who wishes, and is able, to be there is paramount. Secondly, there are no measures in this Bill to promote faith schools. Within the Bill we seek to ensure that those who put forward proposals to a school organisation committee and are not represented on that committee shall have the right of appeal to an independent adjudicator in the event that their proposals are turned down. Thirdly, this is not a Bill that seeks to centralise but to devolve: to devolve to our teachers and governors the kinds of flexibilities that will enable them to improve the education they offer to our children. . .

Baroness Blatch [Conservative dep leader in Lords & spokesperson on education]: . . . [col 547] No doubt an amendment along the lines of that discussed in another place will be tabled in relation to faith schools. We shall never support the imposition of quotas which force schools to accept children who do not share the schools' religious commitments. The Government have caused some confusion about whether or not there is to be a considerable expansion of faith schools. My own view is that the present system works well. Whenever a request to establish a faith school is received, it is considered on its merits. . .

Baroness Sharp of Guildford [Lib Dem spokesperson on education]: . . . [col 548] I have three main reservations about the Bill. My first question is: is it really necessary? What is the Bill for? Let us consider the Government's present agenda on education—the provision of specialist schools; bringing in private sector and not-for-profit providers; and extending the number of faith schools. All those can go ahead without new legislation. But the Bill does nothing to address the biggest problem faced by the education profession at present; that is, the recruitment and retention of teachers. . .

[col 551] In addition to the programme for specialist schools, the way is now open for other groups from both the private and the not-for-profit sectors, including the faith communities, to promote new secondary schools with voluntary-controlled or voluntary-aided status. The agenda is—I understand this—to offer choice through diversity. In many ways it is an exciting agenda. Communities which have seen little or no new investment in school buildings since Victorian times and have been making do with those towering Victorian three-deckers for decades, are seeing new investment, new schools, and new

ideas burgeoning.

However, can we really be confident, amidst all this diversity, that investment is going where it is most needed? With the specialist schools' agenda and its requirements for co-funding, we have already seen a tendency for investment to go into those areas where middle-class parents can find the sponsorship and co-funding required. Can the Minister assure us that such new investment will go where it is needed? Is there not a danger, in the competitive world that is being created, that all the prizes, all the earned autonomy, will go to those schools that are regarded as "good"—predominantly middle-class schools which are already confident and capable of handling experiments—leaving the problem schools in problem areas as persistent poor performers and poor relations? Far from cementing those schools into their communities, is there a danger that such diversity will fragment the whole situation much further, setting school against school, and, dare I say it, faith against faith?

That brings me to the final issue of faith schools. Other noble Lords will have much to say in this debate and in Committee on the subject and I look forward to hearing them. In the other place the Secretary of State has stressed that there is no clause in the Bill that directly relates to faith schools and I hope that this issue will not dominate debates in this House, for there is so much else in the Bill that I regard as objectionable.

However, I share, with my colleague, Phil Willis, who led the debate on the Bill for our party in the other place, an uneasiness about the degree to which this Government have changed the agenda overnight and, bearing in mind the well-established and well-respected compromise between Church and state, which has stood the test of time since 1944, they have made it known that they would welcome substantial numbers of new faith-based secondary schools. It is totally reasonable that Parliament should be given an opportunity to debate such a marked change in policy and, as the Government have provided no such opportunity, my colleague used this Bill as a vehicle by which to initiate such a debate in the other place.

On these Benches, we are concerned that such schools should not only serve their faith communities, but also their local communities and should not, as in Northern Ireland, segregate effectively one faith from another, allowing deep-seated prejudice to be passed on too easily from one generation to another.

Lord Dearing: [col 553] My Lords, I apologise for not being in my place at the beginning of the debate. I had an engagement to speak in Barnsley at a diocesan conference organised by the diocese of Sheffield. I shared the platform with the noble Lord, Lord Ahmed. My doing so may reassure the noble Baroness, Lady Sharp, that neither of us is in the business of setting faith against faith. I had limited faith that my train would arrive on time and warned the noble Baroness, Lady Ashton, that I might be a little late. . .

[col 555] The noble Baroness, Lady Sharp, hoped that the House would not spend too much time on faith schools. To some extent, I am the cause of that subject being an issue. A couple of years ago, I was invited to chair a committee to advise the Church of England

on its schools. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Blackburn will doubtless have something to say on behalf of the Church. I am unable to do that. However, perhaps I may refer to the meeting I attended with the noble Lord, Lord Ahmed, this morning in Barnsley. One of the reasons that my committee suggested more Church schools is because there are seven dioceses without a Church school—I believe that there are 71 LEAs without one—including the diocese of Sheffield. There are 8,000 children attending a Church school but not one is a secondary school. The governors in a former mining village have proposed a secondary Church school. The proposal is being discussed by the diocese and the local authority. The proposal is that the school should serve the existing community but because there is a surplus of places the excess will be offered to Christian families outside. Because there are quite a lot of primary Church schools, some pupils will come from those schools into the secondary school. But there is no question of quotas. The situation is very relaxed. There is no question of doing other than welcome children of all faiths.

In July 2000, long before the riots in Oldham, Bradford and Burnley, my committee issued an interim report. We recommended to the Church of England that it should pursue a policy of welcoming children of other faiths. We said that,

"new Church schools should always have a substantial core of Christian teachers and pupils from Christian families, so that they are in effect a living Christian community, but that they should also serve the whole community of which they are part, welcoming pupils from all backgrounds and faiths".

The final report—if I may respond directly to the noble Baroness, Lady Sharp—explicitly says that the Church in making proposals for the Church of England should not destabilise another faith school. It recommends an ecumenical approach. It recommends special care for social hardship areas, offering service where people have least in life. It is a recommendation of inclusiveness. I shall say no more on that matter. . .

Lord Baker of Dorking: . . . [col 560] I have misgivings about the Bill's proposals on faith schools. When I was Secretary of State, I visited several exclusive Muslim and Jewish schools—I do not believe that there were Sikh schools during my time. They were independent schools. Some were very good, some barely adequate, and others appalling. I was asked sometimes, not very strenuously, whether those schools could be state-maintained. I always turned down those requests, as did my successors in Conservative governments until 1997. I did that because the Butler settlement of the 1944 Act was essentially a religious settlement that, I believe, settled the position not for the foreseeable future but for ever. So, I did not welcome the idea of establishing new faith schools.

The Labour Government coming into power in 1997 decided to change that policy. I am unsure why they decided to change it to provide for new faith schools because, during all my years in the Commons, I do not remember any major debate being initiated by the Labour Party in favour of faith schools. An element in the Labour Party was always strongly opposed to faith schools. The humanist element of that party believed that all education should be secular, and another element opposed selection anyway. Therefore, the matter never came on the agenda. In 1997 the policy was changed, and the Secretary of State decided to accept proposals to convert independent faith schools to state-

maintained faith schools. It was suggested to me last week that that has nothing to do with education, but with the positioning of marginal seats in inner-city areas.

I see that someone on the Benches opposite is nodding. I did not intend to be so ungenerous to the Labour Party, because I am feeling generous today. However, in the debate in the House of Commons, several Labour MPs who spoke, and who came from inner cities with large immigrant communities, were opposed to faith schools. For whatever reason—perhaps they simply gave in too easily to the arguments—they decided to open up the lists for new state schools. I am not against Church schools; I went to one. My primary education was conducted at Holy Trinity School in Southport, which was a wonderful Victorian redbrick school, next to a Victorian redbrick church, "a three-decker", as the noble Baroness, Lady Sharp of Guilford, said. That school gave me an excellent education, as noble Lords can see. Therefore, I am not opposed to the concept of Church schools, but my school was an Anglican Church school, which today would be called a voluntary controlled school. It was a relaxed, inclusive school.

My closest friend at that school was a young Jewish boy, and I remember that he took me back to his flat, where his mother explained to me how they prepared meat, the candles and the celebrations of religious observance. I would never have understood that if that boy had attended a separate Jewish school. My attitude to toleration probably began with those thoughts and experiences. Religion was not thrust down. We were taken to church twice a year, during Easter week and Christmas week. We started the day with a hymn and a prayer. Most schools in those days would have started with a hymn and a prayer or some sort of song. That school had what was the attraction of being an Anglican. There was forbearance, acquiescence, tolerance, an absence of fervour, enthusiasm was constrained and there was a commitment but not a crusade. Those are the elements I find attractive in Anglicans. That attitude permeated most Church primary schools and still does.

So I would have kept those things as they are. I feel that, with the creation of new faith schools, there will be a move towards exclusion. I know that the movement which the noble Lord, Lord Dearing—my very dear friend Lord Dearing—supports says that the 100 Christian schools he wishes to establish will be inclusive. I am sure that that will be the intention. However, I cannot help feeling that such will be the enthusiasm in the communities for those 100 schools that they may be overwhelmed by applications from Christian parents to take up the places. I am sure that Muslim parents will want to see their children attend Muslim schools for very good reasons—so that they are not only taught about the Koran and Islam, but also about the habits and behaviour in Muslim life. They will also learn that the Islamic religion is a religion of peace, forbearance and tolerance, which are good lessons to learn.

I am not against all of that. But I cannot help feeling that it will be difficult for children who are non-Muslims to attend schools which have such a strong ethos. Indeed, in the debate in the House of Commons, the two Members of Parliament who spoke—Dr Kumar and Mr Khabra—were both against new faith schools.

I appreciate, as the noble Lord, Lord Dearing, said, that he wants the new faith schools to

be inclusive. There is an easy way to achieve that, though it is a little technical. There are two types of faith school: voluntary aided and voluntary controlled—the school that I attended must have been a voluntary-controlled school—the difference being that in a voluntary-aided school the governing body is controlled by the relevant religion. The governors are the employers of the teachers and the diocese can dictate 100 per cent preference in terms of selection. For that they contribute only 10 per cent of the cost—it was 15 per cent in my time.

The admissions policy of voluntary-controlled schools which are also faith schools does not require the intake to be 100 per cent based on their religion. Instead it reflects the normal local education procedure. That means that such schools reflect the community which they serve. Around 40 per cent of Church of England secondary schools are like that.

The test for those people who want new faith schools would be for them to be prepared to be voluntary controlled. That is the test. I hope that the noble Lord, Lord Dearing, will measure up to that test and agree.

Finally, perhaps I may say something about why I believe that that is the way we should go. Our society in the inner cities today is under enormous pressure for all the reasons that have been well documented and of which Members in this House are well aware. There is a real danger of community fragmentation. I do not say that inclusive schools will solve that overnight. The problems of housing, employment, racism and attitudes of parents are complicated and come together. But the existence of new faith schools, which will tend to be more exclusive, will tend to reinforce the tendency to parallel communities. I do not believe that that is the best way for our society to go forward over the next 20 or 30 years.

Your Lordships should appreciate that the children of those who attend the new schools will also attend them and their children's children will attend them. Is not that how the troubles in Northern Ireland started?

When I was returned as an evacuee after the war, I went eventually to St Paul's School. Dean Colet founded the school in 1509—an inspired aim when one considers that it was a time of one universal Catholic faith—for the children of all nations and all countries indifferently. Over the years that school extended admission to boys without any distinction of race, nationality or creed. That should be the ideal to which we aspire.

The Lord Bishop of Blackburn: My Lords, following the noble Lord, Lord Baker of Dorking, I should perhaps declare that the whole of my education was in non-Church schools and the whole of my teaching career was in non-Church schools, and I think I had a very good education none the less. I hate to do battle with a former Secretary of State and correct him, but it is not right that a diocese has control over the admissions to voluntary-aided schools; that is a matter for the governing body of those schools. . . It has been a great joy for me in the past year to share in the opening of new facilities in a whole range of primary schools in my diocese, and in east Lancashire often to share that privilege with the noble Lord, Lord Patel of Blackburn, which in itself is a symbol of the

ability of faith communities to work and co-operate together. . . The Church of England has a long-established and continuing concern for the education and well-being of all the nation's children, and not least for their spiritual and moral education. That is enshrined in legislation by the separate committee and vote given to the established Church in the arrangements for the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education, which seeks to regulate the teaching of that subject in the community rather than in Church schools.

I wonder whether the Government were surprised by the way in which, in another place, their desire to improve standards in secondary education in this Bill seemed almost to be high-jacked by the debate on what are now to be called "faith schools", once termed "schools of a religious character". The powers to create such schools already exist. This Bill has little to say on the subject. Yet the debate on the issue has dominated the press. As chairman of the Church of England Board of Education I have been happy to

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engage in it, although listening to some it would appear that Church schools are responsible for most of the evils which beset urban life today.

The Secretary of State was surely right when she said in another place that Church schools were being used as scapegoats for wider and more profound concerns. Of course, the reality is that, while negative points have been made in this debate, parents are continuing to choose Church schools in this year's admissions round, and parents are not fools; they know a good thing when they see it, even if they cannot always put their intuitive feelings into words. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that the very debate has increased the pressure for places by drawing attention to the quality of many such schools.

I believe that I should make it clear that the official policy of the Church of England has been stated recently over and again on the subject. It was reaffirmed by His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury in the Times Educational Supplement on 11th January this year, by the General Synod of the Church of England in November 2001, and last January by the House of Bishops, that Church of England Schools should be distinctive of their Christian foundation, but inclusive in their pupil intake.

It has to be said that most of our 4,700 schools achieve that aim in rural, urban and suburban settings. Their link with the local community through the Church is often second to none. However, with only 150 secondary schools randomly located across the country we simply do not have enough places to meet parental preferences. This leads so easily to the accusation that Church secondary schools are exclusive and admit only the children of church-going parents. Surely the answer to that charge from the opponents is to call the bluff of the Church of England, and to enable it to create more secondary schools to meet local parental need, as was suggested by The Way Ahead working party, chaired by the noble Lord, Lord Dearing. We owe the noble Lord an enormous debt for this, and many other recommendations in the field of education. That would be my answer to the Member of Parliament for Harrogate and Knaresborough, who represents part of the country where, until last year, there was only one Church of England secondly

school between York and Harrogate and the Scottish Border—one in whose foundation I played a part in 1972.

In their White Paper, the Government rightly saw and supported that argument. Given the number of faith community secondary schools, it really will not do to lay at the door of the Churches and of the Jewish community this charge of segregation. Church schools, like the Church itself, are multi-racial and multi-cultural. If people do not believe me, I suggest that they go and visit the Archbishop Michael Ramsey school in Camberwell, or Archbishop Tenison's School in Kennington.

In my own diocese in east Lancashire the Church primary school is often the only place in the normal course of events where Muslim and Christian

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communities, Asian heritage, and indigenous communities meet. Burnley, which is in my diocese, experienced riots last summer, but it is the one town in the diocese of Blackburn with no Anglican high school at all. Similarly, Bradford had no Anglican high schools until recently. Most of the racially-segregated schools in this country happen to be community schools, which serve particular communities or local neighbourhoods. That is just how it is.

Before we went to Lancashire, my wife was head teacher of a large, what we would today call "community", first school in Dewsbury that had nearly 400 pupils—all Asian heritage, all Muslim in faith. That was not a Church school. The history of England and Wales is not the history of Northern Ireland. It could be said that the presence of faith schools, in which the name of God is honoured and religion respected, has enabled a tolerant society to flourish in this country. Religion may, sadly, get caught up in war, but the most oppressive regimes suppressing the freedom of people in the 20th century in fact denounced faith and embraced atheism. I have in mind Stalinism, Nazism, Pol Pot, and Communist China, among others.

Surely the Government are right to say that what is permitted for Christians and Jews should also be available where need is proved for Muslims and other world faith communities. It is simply part of the ongoing development of education in our land. If they are not very careful, those opposed to the establishment of new faith schools come close to saying that the members of some world faiths cannot be trusted to run good, sound schools. Surely, in a society where independent Muslim schools are mushrooming, it would be better to invite them to come into the maintained sector and be subject to the national curriculum and Ofsted inspection. Like many others, I believe that the Government's policy on this matter is enlightened in meeting the needs of a pluralist society.

Those opposed to faith schools, and those who seek to undermine them, must address the question as to how community schools can be enabled to provide that spiritual and religious awareness that so many parents, whether or not they have faith themselves, require for their young. This question is touched upon in the helpful National Union of

Teachers' briefing for this debate. My diocese has been under great pressure from other faith communities to provide places in our few secondary schools from parents who feel that, in some community schools, the very fact that their family practise a faith would be questioned, or even derided. I know that some would like to see a percentage of places for those of other faiths, or of no faith. In principle, that is not a problem for the Church of England, but it may be very difficult for schools to work out in practice—a point well made by the Catholic Education Service. It would create a new category of so-called "exclusion"; namely, have faith and, therefore, cannot be admitted to a faith school. That would be arrant nonsense.

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In welcoming the broad scope of the Bill, with its emphasis on raising standards and the professionalism of teachers, perhaps I may turn, briefly, to some of the more technical aspects of the legislation. Among our principal concerns is the need to safeguard the foundation and distinctive qualities of schools with a religious character. While understanding the need for flexibility, we have a real concern, shared with others, that too much is being left to regulations. We shall want to pursue some of those concerns in Committee.

Given our desire that Church schools should be distinctively Christian, yet committed to inclusiveness, we regard it as absolutely fundamental that the Christian foundation of our schools in the maintained sector should continue to be securely recognised in law. Therefore, with regard to the provisions under Clause 18 relating to governing bodies, we wish to provide for a foundation majority of at least two in voluntary aided schools, and for three foundation governors, or a quarter of the governing body to be foundation governors, whichever is the less, in voluntary controlled or foundation schools.

On staffing, which is dealt with in Clauses 34 and 38, we believe that the role of the governing bodies in aided schools in appointing and dismissing staff must be preserved, particularly where that relates to the safeguarding of the religious character of the school.

We welcome the proposals for federation, but we wish to ensure that the religious foundation of an individual school is not so weakened. We should seek to provide for the consent of the relevant religious authority before federation takes place. Regulations in respect of school forums should specify representation of voluntary aided schools. Again, where an "interim executive board" is established, we should like an assurance that the religious promoter is appropriately involved in its establishment. In welcoming the proposals for the inspection of independent schools, we ask that the inspection rubric includes reporting on their religious character, if they have such a foundation.

Finally, like other Christian Churches, the Church of England's whole approach in developing provision is one predicated on partnership with the local community. Therefore, we request—and would welcome—an amendment to the Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 1991 that would give diocesan boards the power to give advice to governing bodies of Church of England schools on admission policies, to which advice they must have regard. This would be in line with our historic responsibilities within the

maintained sector, and our renewed commitment to promoting Christian education in an inclusive context. We welcome much of the Bill, and very much look forward to the debate that will ensue in your Lordships' House.

Lord Thomas of Gresford: [col 576] . . . I have only one further comment on the Bill. An increase of faith schools in Wales would be unthinkable. I recall a colleague of mine who was educated in Belfast in a well-known Protestant school. He told me that he met his first Catholic at the age of six and his second Catholic at the age of 15. If we are to have a multiracial society, are we seeking the development of different cultures as separate streams, or are we seeking some kind of integration? We can accept faith schools as they are at the moment but, if we are seeking integration into a truly multiracial society, the development of faith schools must be entirely contrary to what we wish to achieve. . .

Lord Moser: [col 577] . . . The second point on which I wish to comment is the structural change foreshadowed in the Bill. The underlying principle is diversity and, as the noble Baroness, Lady Sharp, said, diversity is one thing but hierarchy is another. What are we facing? We have specialist schools; a new layer of advanced specialist schools is promised; there are academies replacing earlier city technology colleges and city colleges for the technology of the arts; and we have faith schools. I will not speak at length on those—other noble Lords have mentioned them and no doubt there will be further opportunities to do so—but I share the view of those who stress the overriding importance of strengthening social cohesion in every possible way within our increasingly multi-cultural society and who see, certainly in single faith schools, a move in the other direction. . .

Lord Sheppard of Liverpool: My Lords, the first serious political opinion I ever held emerged from living and working in the East End of London in the 1950s and 1960s. It was that the segregation that divides cities into vast one-class quarters is very damaging and needs to be tackled. When I moved to south London as Bishop of Woolwich, I saw the beginning of another segregation—by race. When I came to Liverpool, I saw both class and race segregating people—but, thank God, I saw determined efforts beginning to remove the bitter divisions between Protestant and Catholic that had marred the city.

Segregation is a serious issue. In my years in Liverpool, it was a high priority to me to seek to break down divisions of whatever kind—Protestant-Catholic, black-white, Christian, Jewish, Muslim. So I understand the anxiety expressed by some noble Lords about an increase in the number of faith-based schools. But I welcome that increase, and the variety that it can bring to our schools.

The accusation is being made that an increase in the number of faith-based schools will add to segregation. But are those critics suggesting that segregation has not already happened? The segregation that I met in east London had nothing to do with faith-based schools, and in so many cities the origins lie in completely different places. Housing, jobs and fear have created segregation. In some areas, 90 per cent of the children in county schools are Muslim. That is reality. So is the fact that Muslim communities have founded, and would continue to found, their own independent schools.

To say that segregation would be removed by a thoroughgoing secularism would be nonsense. Perhaps I may quote from the Runnymede Trust report on The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, chaired by my noble friend Lord Parekh. The report states:

"There is a tendency in western democracies to believe that secular society provides the best public space for equality and tolerance ... but secular society tends to push religion to the margins of public space and into the private sphere. Islamophobia and antisemitism merge with a more widespread rejection of religion, which runs through a significant part of 'tolerant' society, including the educated middle class and the progressive media".

The report says that anti-racist organisations frequently appear insensitive to forms of racism that target religious identity.

Tolerance and respect for other faiths grows from confidence and security in one's own identity and faith. Bringing schools in from the private sector means that some requirements can be made. One of the words of the moment in education is "clusters"—the idea of schools making links with other schools. The noble Baroness, Lady Sharp of Guildford, said that setting up faith-based schools would set school against school. She made no mention of what the Secretary of State has been saying about a "family of schools".

Baroness Sharp of Guildford: My Lords, I did not say that the idea would set school against school; I said that there were some who feared that.

Lord Sheppard of Liverpool: My Lords, I want to take that fear very seriously and I understand it.

My noble friend the Minister spoke about a culture of collaboration. A cluster of schools sponsored by different faiths and the local authority can be highly creative. Moving out from the secure base of belonging to a school in which their own faith is taught, children can meet others and work out what tolerance and respect mean. Pretending that religious faith is not there will not do that. Clusters can be a significant way of beginning to build some bridges. The Church leaders in Liverpool used to meet—and still do—with our opposite numbers in Belfast and Glasgow twice a year for 24 hours. Perhaps 10 years ago, our Belfast colleagues gave us a presentation on the EMU programme—education for mutual understanding—which is required of all schools in Northern Ireland. The Protestant child who was mentioned earlier who did not meet a Roman Catholic from when he was six until the age of 15 would not be able to do that today.

As I dare to mention Northern Ireland, no doubt if we could start all over again we would not start precisely where we are now. The same is true of Bradford. However, programmes such as EMU begin from where we are. Last week I rang Bishop Walsh, the Roman Catholic diocesan bishop in Belfast, to ask whether the programme continues. He said that it does, with enthusiastic support from schools. As we might expect, the links are easier and more successful in the areas where sectarian passions are not the strongest, but even in those areas where it is most difficult, the programme makes a beginning. There are a number of areas in other cities where we need to make a beginning. EMU is part of the required curriculum. It is cross-curricular, appearing especially in history,

English, drama and RE. The EMU co-ordinator in each school has to make a report to the governing body every year. The programme insists on links between schools.

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I could see such a programme being appropriate in other parts of the UK. I hope that Muslim leaders, for example, might echo the comments of the Roman Catholic bishops in Northern Ireland last November, that EMU sets out,

"to address issues of conflict and overcome the all-pervasive culture of silence on the causes and consequences of division".

Opening up the possibility of Muslim schools in the maintained sector sends a strong message of inclusion to that community. Many of their young people feel disenfranchised and excluded from places of influence and power. Our message to those young people is, "We want you as full citizens".

Let me say a little about Church of England schools. When I first became a bishop, as Bishop of Woolwich, I was made aware of criticism of Church schools in London of the kind that Frank Dobson has been making in another place. It was claimed that they created sink schools by creaming off the nice children. During those years, I learnt that any successful schools were in danger of doing that—faith-based or secular. I saw two Church schools that took more than their share of children with special needs. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Blackburn mentioned Archbishop Michael Ramsay school in Camberwell, which did just that, and no doubt still does.

Our ideal is that Church of England schools should not be simply for the children of Church families. Pressure on admissions has sometimes made them more like that, but the traditional C of E school has always wanted to serve the neighbourhood more widely. The noble Lord, Lord Dearing, has encouraged the Church of England to increase its number of secondary schools. If that happens, I have no doubt that it will make that traditional dream more possible.

When I moved to the North, I saw Church schools—in Wigan, for instance—that were clearly for the whole community. Lancashire taught me to be much more enthusiastic about Church schools than I had been in London. Archbishop Warlock and I in particular worked for a joint school with the Roman Catholics. It was very difficult for years because the population of Liverpool was declining and falling rolls meant that no new schools were being opened. However, I have been invited this May to celebrate five years of the joint Anglican and Roman Catholic Emmaus School—a large, two-form entry primary school, which is the first new school that Liverpool City Council had built for 25 years. I am also delighted to learn that a new city academy high school is proposed in the inner city in Liverpool, to be sponsored jointly by the Anglican diocese and the Roman Catholic archdiocese.

When these discussions take place, we seem to speak only about the Bradfords and Oldhams—places with large Muslim communities. There are also cities and towns with smaller Muslim communities that would find it very hard to run their own school. That is

also true of Sikh and Hindu communities, in which parents are often glad to send their children to a school based on another faith. We have been glad to offer places to those who are not part of our Church. I well remember the leaders of the Muslim community coming to ask

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for our help when Liverpool education committee went co-educational. I am glad to say that our Archbishop Blanch girls high school has for some years been happy to include a number of Muslim girls. Another school in Liverpool with a most honourable tradition in that respect is a Jewish high school—King David school—which has included perhaps 30 or 40 per cent of gentile children, with its particular appeal of specialising in music.

When my noble friend replies to the debate, I hope that she may be able to tell us that there will be a realistic programme along the lines of the Secretary of State's hopes for a family of schools and her own phrase of a culture of collaboration—perhaps through a programme building on the experiences of EMU from Northern Ireland. That would help pupils to feel secure in their own identity and worth and to experience steps in building mutually enriching relationships with others.

Lord Lucas: . . . [col 584] I turn to religious schools. I find myself aligned with my noble friend Lord Baker on that matter. I have severe doubts about the effect that religious schools have. One can see too many examples—Oldham is one of them—where religion has been used to exclude children of another faith and deny them a part in the community. The schools ask, "How can we turn away Christians"? However, if a school is to represent the community and to be the kind of school which the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Sheppard of Liverpool, wished, it has to turn away children of its own faith community. I have no difficulty with schools which hold to a faith and all the things of the spirit that faith can bring. However, I refer to the issue of having only children of that particular faith in that school. If a private school wishes to do that, it should be permitted to do so. Most private religious schools, except perhaps some that represent minority religions, admit children of all faiths because they need the money. By and large it is only in the state system that religious schools are exclusive. If you want a decent school in some parts of London, you have to convert to Catholicism about three years before you conceive, go to mass every day and produce a certificate from a priest to get access to state money to pay for the education of your child. That seems to me entirely wrong and not the way in which the state should disburse its money. It is fine to permit a religious-based school to control its intake, but it is not fine to make little exclusive sects at the expense of the taxpayer and all of us. . .

Lord Alton of Liverpool: [col 585] My Lords, I say to the noble Lord, Lord Lucas, that only a week ago I spoke at a Catholic sixth form college in London, at which 50 per cent of its 850 students were from other faiths—25 per cent were Hindu and 10 per cent were Muslim. I hope that he realises on reflection that the caricature that he painted of Catholic schools is extraordinarily unfair.

Lord Lucas: My Lords, I did not give a caricature and my point did not apply to all such

schools but to very many of them. I see many schools and know that some schools are as the noble Lord described. However, to give a counter-example, there was an excellent sixth form college in Bristol that the Catholic Church closed because it could not find enough Catholics for it. As he will remember, that caused a great furore at the time.

Lord Alton of Liverpool: My Lords, the noble Lord makes the case for the integrated nature of Church schools and Church education. As he said, if there are not enough people from a particular denomination, those schools simply do not survive. The figures show that across the country, more than 20 per cent of those in Catholic schools come from outside the Catholic Church. That does not bear out the proposition that he placed before your Lordships' House. I declare an interest by virtue of the chair that I hold at Liverpool John Moores University and as a foundation governor of the Liverpool Bluecoat School. Perhaps more relevantly, before going to another place, I spent seven years as a teacher. For five years I worked in the state sector with children with special needs, and the two years before that I worked in the voluntary aided sector in a Church school in Kirby, on the outskirts of Liverpool. I strongly welcome the comments of the noble Lord, Lord Sheppard of Liverpool, on the nature of those schools in that area. I am a product of Church education myself and my four children are currently being educated in a Church school. I therefore recognise what he and other noble Lords, including the noble Lord, Lord Dearing, said about the way in which those schools have risen to the challenge—I stress that it is a challenge—of ensuring that we do not slide into sectarianism or division. We need to draw out the best—the generosity of spirit—that is deep inside every person and which is waiting to manifest itself if only it can be drawn out.

At the end of World War II, many aspirations were properly met in what Estelle Morris, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, described in another place as the historic concordat between the state and the Church. That became the foundation of the Education Act 1944. That legislation was the fruit of a remarkable partnership between a Conservative and Anglican, R. A. Butler, and the Labour Member, Chuter Ede, a Free Church man. Butler was President of the Board of Education and Chuter Ede was his Private Parliamentary Secretary.

It is extraordinary that that legislation—it is perhaps the most important legislation of the 20th century—has stood us in such good stead for so long. It stands in sharp contrast to the overly partisan, ill-considered, meretricious and often contradictory changes that central government and local authorities have imposed on education during the 50 years that followed. Among many other things, the 1944 Act provided a small grant towards the cost of building Church schools.

Following that Act—the noble Lord, Lord Dearing, mentioned this—the Church of England decided to scale down significantly its commitment to education. Of the 9,000 Church of England schools in existence in 1944, nearly half have closed. However, in total in the UK today, there are 6,384 religious primary schools and 589 secondary schools of different denominations. All but 40 of them are Christian. What signal does that send—I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Sheppard, in this regard—in multicultural,

multiracial Britain? The suggestion is that some Church schools may exist—no noble Lord has argued that we should close down those schools—but that people from other faiths will not be permitted to have similar schools. I notice that a noble Lord on the Back Benches opposite is shaking his head and suggesting that that is what he supports.

Following the publication of the report of my noble friend Lord Dearing, the decision of the Church of England to create new faith schools is, I believe, a welcome recognition of the need to change. Many people, some of only nominal belief, want an education which offers more than places in the academic league tables. The Church of England has some 775,000 places in its primary schools but only 150,000 places in its secondary schools. Clearly there is an unmet demand.

In another place it was suggested, and implied again in an earlier speech today, that the allocation of places in the present system is based upon hypocrisy. One honourable Member in another place said:

"Many people suddenly find a faith and start going to church"—

a point mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Lucas—in order to get their children into Church schools. It is true that some Church schools are over-subscribed, and parish priests and vicars provide affirmation of Church commitment. But who is to say how deep is another person's faith, and who is to question a person's desire to return to it or to prevent him from transmitting his belief to his children?

According to Dr Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi—I agree with him—

"Denominational schools have a great strength. Often they have a clear ethos that gives consistency and power to the lessons they teach".

He adds that a survey of 34,000 teenagers in England and Wales, carried out by the Jewish Association for Business Ethics, found that children educated in such an ethos,

"are less likely to lie, steal or to drink alcohol illicitly . . . the evidence is that teaching about the morality of everyday life does make a difference".

The imposition of arbitrary quotas will undermine ethos but it will also undermine the self-governance which allows Church schools to determine their own composition. And such questions must be determined locally according to local needs and circumstances.

As I heard personally from teachers working in Church schools in Oldham—a part of the country referred to during the debate—they place a great premium on preparing their children for active citizenship and for the responsibilities that that entails. To imply otherwise illustrates a profound ignorance of what goes on in those schools.

Lorna Fitzsimons, the Member of Parliament for Rochdale, said in a very good speech in another place that when she looked into the disruptions and rioting that had taken place in Oldham, she found that those involved had not been educated in Church schools; they were children from non-integrated state schools where it may certainly be the case that the whole basis of teaching citizenship should be reconsidered.

I end with a quotation from the Archbishop of Birmingham, Vincent Nichols. In a trenchant and hard-hitting statement he expressed his anger at the caricature of Catholic education, saying that Catholic schools are the fruit of "a struggle" to which Catholic parents,

"have contributed financially for many generations".

He said:

"Admission quotas could effectively undermine the cohesiveness of the school".

In welcoming the general thrust of the Bill, I hope that, when we come to consider it further, we shall resist the temptation to break the concordat and the trust that exists between faith schools and the state; that we shall recognise the extraordinary contribution that these schools make; that we shall strongly affirm them as a valued and integral part of the provision of education in this country; and that we shall not add to the pressures that already affect the teaching profession.

Baroness David: . . . [col 592] The Government do not need to legislate to bring about more faith schools or to extend the range of faiths that have voluntary-aided status. A century ago the future of Church schools was the main educational debate in England. This year is the centenary of one of the major pieces of education legislation which brought religious schools under the management of the local authorities. The Education Act 1902 affected the politics of the rest of the decade, with various Liberal Government attempts to undo it, mainly stopped by the House of Lords. I suspect that in the next century this House will still be debating faith schools.

I want to quote from an article on exclusion and inclusion, by Amartya Sen, a Nobel prize winner. He finds that faith-based schools are divisive and damaging, as I do, despite the excellent speech of my noble friend Lord Sheppard. I believe that the noble Lord, Lord Baker, towards the end of his speech, was moving in that direction as well. The article states:

"the public policy of placing children in faith-based schools . . . may sometimes come with a severe reduction of educational opportunities that could help informed choice on how to live. The purpose of education is not only to inform a child about different cultures in the world (including the one to which his or her family may, in one way or another, belong), but also to help the cultivation of reasoning and the exercise of freedom in later life. Something very important is lost if the doors of choice are firmly shut on the face of young children, on the misguided belief that tradition makes choice unnecessary . . . You may think I am talking about Madrassas in Pakistan, or religious schools here, but I am actually talking about also Britain. Such has been the state of confusion about identities, and the force of the implicit belief that a person has no choice over priorities regarding his identity, that nothing particularly wrong is seen in the lack of choice for children in the new dispensation regarding 'faith-based schools' (Muslim or Hindu or Christian) in the new multi-ethnic Britain. The human right that is lost in this is, of course, the children's right to a broad education that prepares them to choose, rather than just to follow".

As a postscript to that—Amartya Sen mentions children's rights—I raise a point that I have often raised in this House, the right of children to express their views and to have them taken seriously within education. When in opposition during the passage of the

Education Act 1994 Labour advocated strongly in both Houses for the right of pupils to be consulted about matters that affect them. We lost the argument then but society and politics have moved on. These days there can be few politicians who reject the logic and principle of listening to children and including them appropriately in decisions about their education and about the running of their schools.

Increasingly, children and young people are encouraged to take active roles in their local communities and in improving the design and delivery of public services. The Government have issued guidance to all government departments requiring them to produce action plans for involving children and young people in developing policies and services. The time is now absolutely right for children and young people to be given a statutory entitlement to consultation about decisions in education that affect them. Scottish children already have such a right, introduced through the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000.

I am aware that the Government have offered guidance on that, but that is not enough. Such guidance will simply encourage good schools and others will leave it to gather dust. It has to be on the face of the Bill, as in Scotland. I hope that the Minister can comment on that in her reply.

Lord Griffiths of Fforestfach: . . .[col 595] Thirdly, on the issue of faith schools, rarely do I find myself in disagreement with my noble friend Lord Baker. However, on this issue there is a nuance of difference. The White Paper was more fulsome on faith schools than the Minister today. The White Paper states that we wish to welcome faith schools with a distinctive ethos and character into the maintained sector where there is clear local agreement. I believe that the present debate over faith schools was introduced by the wonderful report of the noble Lord, Lord Dearing. What comes out of that report is that faith schools are very popular with parents. That is something we have to accept. Why are they popular with parents? As the right reverend Prelate said, they are popular partly because they have a distinctive ethos: a moral and spiritual basis for education. It is partly because of discipline and partly an expectation of good academic results.

As the noble Lord, Lord Sheppard, mentioned, most faith schools are genuine community schools. Church of England schools are there to serve the community as well as to teach Christian faith. They are not there to proselytise. We must remember that the Church of England became serious about education in 1811. It did so specifically to help poor communities which were suffering because of industrialisation. That was their rationale. Catholic schools were built up in the 19th century in order to help poor immigrant families and to bring them into an inclusive community. As the right reverend Prelate said, the Archbishop of Canterbury has made it clear that Church of England schools should not exclude people of other faiths and of no faith. The House of Bishops has said the same. I worship at All Souls Church, Langham Place, which is just at the top of Regent Street. We have a Church of England school. Forty-seven per cent of its pupils are Muslim. More than 50 per cent are from non-Christian faiths; 14 per cent are of no declared faith; only 35 per cent are Christian; and 12 per cent are Anglican. The reason that Church schools work is that they manage to bring together the home, the parish and

the school. That is a tremendous advantage. Why interfere with it by having something like a 25 per cent quota?

I recognise that there are objections to Church schools. Some come from people who are declared to be secular. Amartya Sen may well be in that category. They feel that a secular foundation would be a better one. This is a great subject. We cannot go into it in any detail now. It seems to me that, as the Secretary of State for Education and Skills said, we are in danger of making Church schools a scapegoat for other problems.

Can anyone really believe that the lack of integrated schools in Northern Ireland is the reason for the issues which it faces when it has had, frankly, hundreds of years of discrimination against the Catholic community? Likewise, can people feel that in some of our inner cities—in towns of northern England where one has second generation immigrants who find it very difficult to find jobs—that faith schools can somehow explain the problem rather than the issue of poverty?

I would encourage anyone who has not done so to read the report of the noble Lord, Lord Dearing. There is an enormous amount of good will in faith schools. My experience of them has been that they are not narrow, proselytising bodies but that they are there to serve the community. Far from being divisive in our society I believe that they can be integrative. Therefore, I commend them to your Lordships.

Lord Plant of Highfield: . . . [col 597] I want to use my speech to express some anxieties about the provisions in the Bill which would allow for the potential expansion of faith-based schools. I fully accept that there are important arguments in favour of the establishment of such schools, but I still have misgivings. I want to make it clear from the start that my misgivings are not based on some kind of aggressive secularism. I have been a faithful member of the Church of England throughout my life. Indeed, I was accepted for ordination in that church in the 1960s. That was going to be my second career after mastic asphalt spreading. But, as time went on, I felt that I was not capable of the priesthood either.

My wife's first teaching post was in a Church of England school. My three sons attended Church infant to primary schools because they were our local schools. My youngest son is currently doing his teaching practice in a Roman Catholic school in Woking. A daughter-in-law teaches in a Church school. So I am not coming at this issue in an aggressively secular way. Nevertheless, I have qualms about the proposals in the Bill.

So, what are the arguments in favour of the expansion of state-funded faith schools? I think that we can distinguish five separate arguments. First, there is parental choice. Parents who profess strong moral and religious beliefs are entitled to have their children educated in a school where the ethos and the teaching represents their deeply held convictions.

Secondly, there is an argument about fairness and justice. The state has supported the establishment and maintenance of schools for Roman Catholics and members of the Church of England. Therefore, in fairness, other denominations within Christianity, and

other religions, should be able to use public funds to support education, consistent with the values, ethos and teaching of those religions.

Thirdly, there are the results of such schools. It is argued that the schools produce good academic results; they have high standards of educational attainment, high levels of discipline and low levels of truancy and exclusion. Supporters argue—I think that the noble Lord, Lord Alton, was saying this—that there is a close correlation between the religious and moral ethos of these schools and those types of attainment.

Fourthly, in many areas of British society we are witnessing a decline in a sense of discipline, moral responsibility and moral authority. If society is to sustain high moral standards, that cannot be done primarily by the state. It has to be the job of parents, churches and schools in some kind of relationship. It is then claimed that Church schools bring together parents and schools in a common moral enterprise, and that that will have an impact on strengthening the moral fabric of society.

The fifth argument is the one that is I suppose reflected in the Runnymede report, which my noble friend Lord Sheppard mentioned. It is that a sense of cultural and religious identity is essential for those who come from groups within society with a strong sense of those things. It is important that that is capable of being maintained rather than eroded through the educational system.

It is no part of my case to underestimate or belittle the importance of these arguments. What I want to do, however, is to look at the other side of the coin. It is surely vital for our society, as the noble Lord, Lord Moser, said, to have a sense of its own identity, of the common values that unite it—a sense of social cohesion. Collective action in both peace and war ultimately has to draw upon common beliefs and values—a sense of common citizenship.

At one time in British society these values and beliefs may have been a matter of tradition and habit. We shared, by and large, the same kind of moral heritage. Society was more homogeneous in cultural, religious and ethnic terms than it is now. In our day we cannot just assume a sense of common civic culture and a sense of civic virtue. It has to be worked on and created out of the many diverse groups that make up British society.

Given the importance of a sense of social cohesion, it is very important that we do not go too far down the road of emphasising what is sometimes called "the politics of difference"—what separates us rather than what unites us in the exercise of a sense of common citizenship. One of the central values of citizenship in a pluralist society of the kind in which we live has to be mutual respect and toleration. These concerns with common identity, common values, mutual respect and toleration are not just theoretical issues, as we saw from the riots in northern cities last year. No doubt those with a strong belief in the expansion of faith-based education will hold up what they sincerely regard as an ideal and practical picture of how faith-based education, far from undermining a sense of common identity, will in fact enhance it. I think that that was precisely the point that my noble friend Lord Sheppard and the noble Lord, Lord Alton, were making. Those coming through to adult citizenship from faith-based schools will have a strong sense of

their moral responsibility and identity through their membership of the faith community which has also been sustained by faith-based education. From this they will engage actively in common and civic tasks in society. On this view, there is no conflict between the recognition and, indeed, the funding of difference and the emergence and upholding of a sense of common identity. So, parental choice, religious identity and common values can all be held together.

If this ideal picture were to turn out to be the most likely one, I would have no practical qualms. However, I am worried that this may not be quite how things turn out. My worry is that faith-based education may not continue in the rather benign way that the noble Lord, Lord Baker of Dorking, experienced in Southport, because the fastest-growing areas of religion are of a fundamentalist and dogmatic kind. That is not just true of Islam, although we talk rather glibly so often of Islamic fundamentalism, but it is also true in the context of Christianity and, for all I know, of Judaism as well.

I have absolutely no objection to people holding their religious beliefs in a fundamentalist way. That is fine, but if faith schools that cater, or come to cater, for forms of fundamentalist forms of religion were to be established, there would be genuine concerns in respect of public policy and for a sense of common citizenship and common identity. The reason for that is simple: a fundamentalist regards it as unreasonable to disagree with his or her beliefs, "If I know the truth, why should I tolerate or respect dissent?". However, respect for others, toleration and a recognition that it is reasonable to disagree on such matters as religion are among the common values that are essential to a liberal democratic society marked by pluralism. They are essential features of the social cohesion about which the noble Lord, Lord Moser, talked. Yet fundamentalism does not recognise the reasonableness of disagreement between people over precisely those deep values of religious belief. So, although we must take into account parents' beliefs and choices, we cannot be indifferent to the potential consequences of such choices on the common values without which society cannot be sustained.

Indeed, it could be argued that faith communities, including those who hold their beliefs in a fundamentalist way—in the sense that I use the term—will receive state support if the Bill goes through, precisely in terms of the recognition of mutual tolerance and reasonable disagreement. After all, as the noble Lord, Lord Alton of Liverpool, said, perhaps the most persuasive argument for the extension of faith schools to religious minorities would be on the basis of fairness and justice—the very ideas that are founded on a sense of mutual toleration and a recognition of reasonable disagreement. It would be odd, to say the least, to use such arguments in favour of the extension of religion-based schools if the ethos and teaching of some of those schools did not embody the very principles that have justified their own funding.

Critics of the position that I outline would say that fundamentalism in schools can be constrained through Ofsted inspections and other measures. I doubt that. Although I am sure that Ofsted does an exceptionally good job in monitoring teaching standards and delivery, it is difficult to gauge a school's ethos on the basis of limited and infrequent inspection, partly because an ethos is not codified.

How might we respond to concerns about the possible use of faith schools by fundamentalists and those who wish to exclude people from other faiths? Constraints on the further development of faith schools are needed. That might be done through the proposals that my honourable friend Frank Dobson made in another place; I can see the difficulties of that approach. It might also be done by means of voluntary controlled schools, as referred to by the noble Lord, Lord Baker of Dorking, or through more informal procedures such as those that operate in Northern Ireland, which were mentioned by the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Sheppard. If we are to go down that track, I should like to see the emergence of multi-faith schools rather than single-faith schools only.

It is important that schools play a full part in their community, that they should not be exclusionary bodies, and that we learn respect and mutual toleration through, as the noble Lord, Lord Lucas, said, living with people of different beliefs, not just learning theoretically about those beliefs. If we are to facilitate and endorse faith-based schools, we must at the same time examine ways to ensure that they are neither exclusionary nor fundamentalist in terms of excluding a sense of reasonable disagreement.

Lord Peston: [col 606] . . . I feel obliged to say a few words about what are called "faith schools". I regard the expression as neither grammatically nor epistemologically satisfactory. When we debate the subject in more detail we shall look for a more appropriate expression. I have said nothing about them substantively; and, indeed, I have said nothing about the other phenomena that are beginning to litter the education field.

I should like to make a few remarks on the subject tonight while saving my heavy artillery for later. First, I simply see no serious argument—I have heard none today—in favour of expanding the number and range of such schools. We have been told that there are Christian schools and a few Jewish schools, from which we are told we must infer the need to use public money to provide Sikh, Muslim, Greek Orthodox and goodness knows what other schools. We may have to do it. However, it does not follow logically from the fact that we have some schools of that sort that we must have more of them, as well as different ones. That case needs to be made in some other way.

We have also been told that parents want such schools. I do not wish to be cynical, but what I find astonishing is the number of parents who suddenly discover that they are truly religious in order to get their children into schools that do not let in rough boys, blacks or those sorts of people. Again we shall look into the matter at a later stage. There is a good deal of evidence to consider, both on the social nature of these schools and on why parents choose them—

Lord Alton of Liverpool: My Lords, I realise that the noble Lord is making his case in a very measured way, but I believe that he should reflect further upon the remark that he just made about how admission into Church schools would be sought because they would not, for example, permit the admittance of blacks. If the noble Lord thinks about it, he will realise that many Church schools were built in order to accommodate immigrants. He will find that large numbers children in Church schools come from many racially diverse

backgrounds.

Lord Peston: Yes, my Lords; they certainly do. However, I am questioning the attitude of parents. I should add that the Church has nothing to apologise for in terms of the history of education in this country. I have forgotten which speaker made the point, but if we are worried about who was involved in education some 100 or 150 years ago, there is little doubt that the Church of England has to apologise to no one for the contribution that it has made. I am not attacking the Church on the matter. However, I will be attacking religion on a completely different basis when we meet again in Committee. I am not attacking the Church: I am talking about what it is that parents are selecting.

It just happens that the best argument that I have heard for the extension of faith schools came from my right honourable friend the Secretary of State and was repeated by my noble friend Lord Sheppard. It appears that we are to have these restrictively constructive schools. My right honourable friend said—and I believe that my noble friend repeated the argument—that if we are to have them, we would be better off having them within the maintained system rather than in the private sector. That at least seems to be an argument worth reflecting upon, though I have not got much further with it. If my noble friend the Minister takes that view, she ought to generalise it completely to the whole of the private sector and ask why we do not bring in the latter in all its different forms in the same way.

As I said, I shall reserve most of my remarks on this hotchpotch of,

"city technology colleges, city colleges for the technology of the arts . . . city academies",

and so on. I am not in the least surprised that noble Lords opposite are in favour of such innovations; indeed, they are all Tory phenomena. I cannot see any connection between them and the Labour Party.

I shall conclude my remarks. I am sorry that I have spoken for 14 minutes, but I have two urgent questions for my noble friend the Minister. One is whether she has seen the case of the Cooper's Company School, which appears to use interviewing techniques to achieve academic and social selection in practice. I read her department's statement on the matter and I was not convinced by it. However, the Minister could easily convince me.

More serious is the story that appeared in the Guardian on Saturday about the school in Gateshead that has been taken over by a group of creationists. I stand second to none in my support for freedom of thought and expression, however idiotic it is. The people in this case can believe anything that they like, but I say in terms that such people are not fit to be allowed within a million miles of our schools or the education of our children. What will the department do about that? Does it have the power to do anything about it? If not, should it not reflect on such matters? Does not the Minister see that, if she and my right honourable friend go down the proposed path, those chickens—to return to today's cliché—will definitely come home to roost?

Lord Rix: [col 609] My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Lucas, bemoaned the fact that he had hit the tea-break. I can only bemoan the fact that I seem to have hit the dinner hour.

Having listened to four and a half hours of debate, I have heard a great deal of discussion of faith schools. I realise what a terribly mixed-up childhood I must have had. My prep school in Hornsea in Yorkshire was a Church of England school and my best friend was a Primitive Methodist. I was then sent to Bootham School in York, which is a Quaker school, where my best friend was of the Jewish faith. At the outset of the war, we were evacuated to Ampleforth, which, as noble Lords will know, is a Roman Catholic school. There I made no friends at all. The Roman Catholics made me extremely jealous: after they had been to Mass they could go out and play cricket on Sundays, whereas those of us who were members at that time of the Society of Friends could only stay inside and write letters. Such are my thoughts on faith schools from my experiences of many years ago. . .

Baroness Howe of Idlicote: [col 617] . . .The important decision to introduce citizenship from September is long overdue. We have to do much more to educate people in tolerance and respect for other people, other races, other faiths, other ages and even other interests. That ties in with what many noble Lords have mentioned already about faith schools, to which I shall certainly come back on another day. . **Lord Hattersley:**

Lord Hattersley: [col 625] I wish to say a few words about faith schools. That is another example of "new speak". We used to call them religious schools and I propose to call them religious schools tonight. I do not share some of the concerns of my noble friends as regards faith schools. Certainly, in a free society faith schools should exist. However, faith schools existing is rather different from faith schools being promoted by the Government, as the noble Lord, Lord Baker, said. If the Secretary of State for Education is right and if she means what she says and they will be created only if there is a real demand for them in an area, although I am not an enthusiast for faith schools, it is difficult to deny that right if there is a real demand. However, I should like to know how the demand is to be assessed. I do not think that the

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demand can be represented by the views of the Episcopate or the views of the mosques in the area; it has to be the views of the people. I notice that my noble friend Lord Dearing nods his head. He mentioned the absence of a faith school in South Yorkshire. In fact there is a faith school called Notre Dame, but he was thinking of faith schools in rather more limited terms. I believe that I know South Yorkshire at least as well as he does. I see no upsurge of demand from the people of South Yorkshire for a faith school.

Lord Dearing: My Lords, I am no expert on the wishes of parents in that part of Yorkshire. However, the papers I was given at this morning's meeting show that of the 8,000 children in Church of England primary schools, the parents of 3,200 of them had explicitly asked for the opportunity to send their children to a Church of England secondary school. I agree very much—I believe that the Government have said this—that it is a matter of whether the parents want that and, I would further say, provided there has been full consultation and agreement with the LEA and it has been through a schools organisation committee and there has been full discussion and, hopefully, a unanimous recommendation.

Lord Hattersley: My Lords, I do not want to detain the House too long by giving a reply to that intervention which in a sense it deserves. However, I am sceptical about the genuine demand of parents for that education. I understand the genuine demand of parents to send their children to Church primary schools, but I also know, as my noble friend Lord Peston said, that part of the demand for a place in a faith secondary school is because that is regarded as a bit special. Therefore, the demand has to be genuine and have a religious rather than a social base. I do not understand how the Government can assess that and that worries me. How can the Government assess which Church should be allowed to develop faith schools? The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Blackburn referred to world faiths of every kind. Would the Government approve a Jehovah's Witness school or a Seventh Day Adventist school? I cannot see constitutional propriety of any kind in the Government having a list of acceptable religions and other religions with which they will not do business.

That situation has enormous dangers, some of which my noble friend Lord Plant mentioned. I spent 33 years of my life representing a constituency which, by the time I retired from the House of Commons, comprised almost entirely Muslims, Sikhs or Hindus. What my noble friend said was certainly borne out by my experience; that is, the people who push hardest for faith schools have the most fundamental view of their religion and the most, dare I say, extreme interpretation of what their religion demands. I say only that there are immense dangers in going down that path. However, I doubt whether the Government will go down it.

The noble Baroness who speaks for the Liberals said that on reading the Bill she sometimes wonders what it is really about. If she will forgive me for saying so, her naivety astounds me. The Bill's principal purpose is declaratory. Governance has changed during the past four years. There are not just two arms of government, the executive and legislative; there is the executive arm, the legislative arm and the declaratory arm. The most important of the three is the declaratory arm. The Bill demonstrates that the Government are not somehow held back by the old principles of equality, equal shares and democratic socialism, which brought many of the Government's supporters into politics in the first place.

I do not believe that the proposal about faith schools will be put into practical operation because of the associated difficulties. The proposal is in the Bill to create an impression. More importantly, the impression that is being created in the secondary field is bound to increase covert, informal selection. That is a fundamentally bad thing for the future of this country. I shall try to develop that theme in Committee.

Baroness Walmsley: [col 627] My Lords, this really is a terrible Bill. It is riddled with the fear of losing control and lack of trust in communities, local government and the biggest body of professionals in the country. It has potential for selection and discrimination and suggests a lack of belief that a public service can deliver high-quality education with creativity and efficiency without much meddling from people who are committed primarily to profit. I shall never accept that state-run public services cannot deliver innovation and efficiency, given a level playing field with the private sector. . .

The Bill will create a de facto national education system. It condemns the comprehensive ideal to the history books, it undermines the principles of local democracy, it introduces more selection by faith, specialism and postcode, it creates a two-tier system in which schools serving the most challenging and deprived communities are penalised for their poverty and it attacks the very foundations of one of our most important public services.

The very schools which need to innovate and which need to offer radical change, especially to the curriculum, are those excluded in the Bill. On that and many other aspects of the Bill, the Government speak with forked tongue. That is why we on these Benches shall challenge the Government's policies on specialist and faith schools. While they are not referred to directly in the Bill, Parts 1 and 5 provide the over-arching legislation for those schools.

I hope that noble Lords will not misunderstand me. Liberal Democrats are not opposed to schools having a special ethos so long as they do not select. But we want all schools to develop their own personality and areas of special excellence. However, that should be for the schools to choose; it should not be for the Secretary of State to offer a limited menu of specialisms to a maximum of half the schools. Why should a school not be able to offer a community ethos as a specialism or a special needs specialism or a citizenship specialism? What about another category—a school which specialises in teaching children how to think, learn and make life decisions? Some of us believe naively that that is, in any case, the prime purpose of any school.

How can a Labour Secretary of State justify a system that puts a £50,000 price tag on entry to the specialist club and then limits entry to only half our schools by 2005? We on these Benches believe that all schools, excluding those with special needs, should have access to that money. Only nine out of the 244 schools in our survey had achieved specialist status, although many had tried. Naturally, they were attracted by an extra £0.5 million; but in the brave new world of the two-tier education system, they were denied.

I remain concerned about the expansion of faith schools. Historically in this country, the only way in which to obtain an education was in a faith school. That was yesterday. We are legislating today for a multi-cultural community of schools tomorrow. To promote an expansion of schools that select on the basis of faith is to deny the reality of the composition of our country today. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Baker, that the noble Lord, Lord Dearing, has a very naive impression of how admission to Church schools works and would work in future. I believe that there is more than one way to skin the equality cat than to open more faith schools. I consider that to be the wrong way.

The structure of our education system should be based on two key principles. From what he said, I am sure that the noble Lord, Lord Peston, will agree with them. The first is equality of access to the best possible education for all our children of whatever faith or none. The second is a system which promotes racial harmony and understanding, not awareness of difference, ignorance and division. Expansion of the ability to select on the grounds of faith may achieve the first of those but, crucially, it will not achieve the

second.

As many speakers have said, parents want not faith schools but good schools for their children. The fact that many are prepared to put themselves through a faith test in order to get their children into good schools and then abandon that faith vividly demonstrates the point. Perhaps I may now challenge two myths. Not all faith schools are excellent schools, and many state schools do promote a set of moral values. The Churches do not have a monopoly on morals.

I was delighted that the Church of England recently conceded that schools operating admissions policies which discriminate against non-Christian children or children with no faith are wrong. But, sadly, the Secretary of State seems prepared to allow that situation to continue. The Liberal Democrats will propose an amendment to the Bill that makes it unlawful for any school in receipt of state funding to deny access to a child from its local community on the grounds of faith or lack of faith.

Lord Roberts of Conwy: [col 633] . . . Other themes from the past have been developed in England, if not in Wales: school businesses, specialist schools and so on. The theme that attracted most attention, although there is no direct reference to it in the Bill, is the extension of the Church schools concept to faith schools. Over the centuries, both Christian religions—Catholic and Protestant—and the Jewish religion have been active educators. We owe to them the transmission of the Judaeo-Christian fundamentals of our Western civilisation. Religious schools have been in the state system since 1944. Their record of achievement has been good and they have been valued by the parents who send their children to them.

Other faiths, outside the Christian tradition, that also set great store by education, now permeate our multicultural society and, in fairness—I almost said "logically"—they should be supported by the state where there is a clear local desire for such support, provided that they are not fundamentally opposed to the state itself and the democratic foundations that sustain it. Arguably, it is better to have them within the state system than outside it. I understand that there are four Muslim schools, two Sikh schools, one Greek Orthodox and a Seventh Day Adventist foundation within the maintained sector. I see the Minister nodding.

The social implications for the future of a significant extension of faith-based schools may be immense and must be carefully thought through, but we are a tolerant society. Without tolerance and freedom under the law, we should be very impoverished. We have to rely on the intrinsic benevolence of the faiths themselves to ensure a good social outcome. I hasten to say that that is a personal contribution and not a statement of the party line.

Baroness Ashton of Upholland [replying for Government]: . . . [col 645] Briefly, because I am conscious of the time, I turn to the question of pupils' rights to consultation. We are looking at this and we are aware of the need to consult with young people. Whether that should be put on a statutory basis is a matter that we shall need to discuss.

I turn now to the issue of faith schools. There has been an important debate in your Lordships' House in which many noble Lords have spoken with great passion. The noble Lord, Lord Baker, said that he believed that the Butler Act had settled the position. With respect, I would say to him that the world has changed. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Blackburn mentioned the attractive attributes of faith schools, as well as the tolerance that can apply. I believe that that is an attractive trait in all schools, not only in faith schools.

I am pleased that no move was made by noble Lords to lay society's ills at the door of our schools. I know that noble Lords are far too experienced to do that. I recognise, when it is said in your Lordships' House that parents know a good thing when they see it, that I want all schools to be "a good thing" so that all parents have the opportunity to recognise that good thing.

I was much taken by the view of my noble and right reverend friend Lord Sheppard of the tolerance that comes out of security and identity. I was very much reminded of the work of Steve Biko, whose writings helped me to understand the need to develop a separate ethos from which one meets others; that is, from a position of strength and security. I am sure that we shall deliberate on that again. I recognise the work of my noble and right reverend friend Lord Sheppard from when I was 17 years old and living in Liverpool. I attended a conference at which he addressed us on precisely the issue of tolerance.

The noble Lord, Lord Alton, spoke of the generosity of spirit in many of our faith schools. I would agree with him, as I would agree that there is a generosity of spirit in many of our schools more generally. I was taken by the speeches of a number of noble Lords, including that of the noble Baroness, Lady David, who discussed the need to be pragmatic. Parents have chosen to educate their children by sending them to Church schools or schools with a faith ethos for a long time. I believe that they will continue to do so, whether or not such schools are in the maintained system.

My noble friend Lord Peston raised the issue of the Cooper's Company School. I understand that the school was found to be interviewing inappropriately; namely, that it was not interviewing purely to establish the religious grounds for attending the school. I believe that the school has accepted the position and has changed its criteria accordingly.

I was most taken by the speech of the noble Lord, Lord Plant of Highfield, and how mastic asphalt spreading led him to becoming a priest, but that later he was drawn to philosophy. There is an issue surrounding the need to ensure that faith schools are wanted by the community. Indeed, the only basis on which the matter has been raised in the Bill is to ensure that, where a school does have the support of the community but perhaps does not achieve the support of the school organisation committee, there will be an opportunity to go before an adjudicator and ask for the position to be looked at. However, as I have said, it is only in that context that the Bill touches on the issue of faith schools.

We think that it is important to be pragmatic. I would prefer to see faith schools in the maintained system. I make no bones about that. I want to ensure that schools teach the national curriculum, that they teach girls and boys equally, that they teach citizenship and

that we are able to influence the work they undertake on inclusion. To respond to the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, that is what I think is important in a multicultural society.

My noble friend Lord Peston mentioned creationism in a school in Gateshead. Rather than take up the time of the House at this point, I shall write to him. My noble friends Lord Hattersley and Lord Peston raised issues of ideology and philosophy. There is no time to debate them at this stage and I am only sorry that we have not had the chance to do so. I should welcome the opportunity to do that. I hope that either or both of my noble friends will consider initiating an appropriate debate in which we can discuss what we mean by the comprehensive system.

For my part, I shall state my philosophy in 30 seconds. The comprehensive system does not mean that all schools are the same. I believe in a comprehensive system, but one where every child has the opportunity to achieve. We have not yet finished the task before us. Our comprehensive system has done a great deal, but still too many of our children do not achieve in the way in which they should. Therefore diversity rather than hierarchy—which of course the House would expect me to say, but I shall be happy to debate that at greater length—is the way in which we can help to improve the standards of all our children. . .

[col 648]

On Question, Bill read a second time, and committed to a Committee of the Whole House.