

[News story: Education Secretary urges more faith schools to consider academy conversion](#)

Faith leaders are being encouraged to convert more of their schools to academies – joining hundreds of schools across the country already benefiting from higher standards after academy conversion and building on the leading role faith groups have played in delivering the Government’s education reforms.

At a round-table of representatives from all major faiths held on 29 January, the Education Secretary Damian Hinds set out the benefits of becoming an academy school – placing freedom into the hands of school leaders and helping schools to work together to achieve more than they can alone.

The Education Secretary also praised the role faith organisations have had in the Government’s education reforms since 2010, with more than a quarter of state-funded faith schools already having academy status and more than 100 faith free schools open or due to open soon. The figures reflect an upturn in the pace of academy conversion within faith groups, with more groups now also establishing their own multi academy trusts.

The department would also like to see more people from faith groups choosing to join the thousands of volunteers already offering their time, energy, skills and expertise as school governors and trustees.

Mr Hinds said:

The diversity of schools in this country is one of our education system’s most valuable assets, and faith schools play a pivotal role in that. They have led the way in embracing our reforms, with innovative free schools and high performing academies, taking advantage of the freedom and autonomy those choices provide.

Faith schools make up one-third of the schools in England. I want to see even more faith schools enjoying the benefits of academy conversion, with even more faith groups using the exciting opportunity the free schools route provides. In doing so, the leaders of these schools will ensure they are the ones making the right decisions for their pupils and for their communities, as I firmly believe they should be.

The meeting followed the news that more than 50% of children in state-funded schools in England are now taught in an academy or free school, with standards rising faster in many sponsored academies than in similar council-run schools.

Standards in faith schools are also impressive, with last year's GCSE data showing faith schools perform better than their non-faith counterparts, while over half of the top performing 5% of schools at Key Stage 2, are faith schools.

Representatives from all major faiths attended the meeting, including individuals from the Church of England, Muslim, Catholic, Sikh, Jewish and Hindu faiths, and from the Methodist Church.

They were joined by leaders of high performing faith multi-academy trusts – Hamid Patel of Star Academy Trust, Nitesh Gor of Avanti Schools Trust and Dr Brinder Mohan Singh of Nishkam School Trust.

These trusts are just three examples of faith groups combining their own ethos and values with the freedom and autonomy that academies and free schools enjoy, to create thriving schools providing the education their pupils deserve.

Director of the Catholic Education Service, Paul Barber, said:

The Catholic Church has been a longstanding Government partner in the provision of education, and today's meeting highlights the continued strong working relationship we enjoy with the Department.

Nearly a quarter of all Catholic schools in England are academies and we welcome the continued support of the Secretary of State for Catholic dioceses and their academisation plans.

As the country's second largest provider of schools, we remain committed to providing high quality Catholic education centred around the formation of the whole child.