



**Baroness Barran**

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Lord Shipley OBE,  
House of Lords,  
London,  
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27 June 2022

Dear John,

During Day 2 of Committee Stage for the Schools Bill, held on 13 June, you asked three questions on which I committed to write. I am grateful for your participation in the debate on these important matters.

Firstly, you referred to the 2015 case of *Fox v Secretary of State for Education*, noting its conclusion that 'religious and non-religious world views, such as humanism should be afforded equal respect in the RE curriculum'. You then set out that amendments 54 and 56 would ensure that equal respect would become a statutory requirement (Hansard, column 1459, 13 June 22) and you asked whether I see this in the same way.

I agree that the court stated that a religious education syllabus should accord equal respect to different religious convictions and to non-religious beliefs. Whilst amendment 56 would make it a statutory duty for academies without a religious character to include non-religious worldviews as part of their RE curricula, it does not mean that religious and non-religious worldviews must be given equal teaching time.

Secondly, you expressed concern about the United Kingdom having differences in matters of law. You asked whether there might be a case for the introduction of similar legislation in England to that which will soon apply in Wales in relation to 'religion, values and ethics' education, in order to ensure that there is a 'single legal understanding' (Hansard, column 1459, 13 June 22).

As you know, this government is proud of the unity of the United Kingdom and greatly values the part that each devolved administration plays. It is the case that the devolved governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have responsibility for determining their own policies on education, including religious education, and it is inevitable that this may lead to some divergence of approach. We do not believe that one particular approach taken by one government in the United Kingdom should necessarily be adopted the others. I do, however, accept that there may be lessons to learn over time from the implementation and impact of differing policies across the UK.

Ministers and officials from the Department for Education hold regular meetings with the devolved governments, including the Welsh Government, on different policy areas and to share the latest developments about our education systems. The government will continue to be innovative and data-driven.

In my response during the debate regarding your concerns about rural schools joining multi academy trusts (MATs) and consequently losing money (Hansard, column 1445, 13 June 2022), I noted that there is a requirement for trusts to publish independently audited accounts each year. All academy trusts must publish these on their websites by 31 January. Additionally, under the Companies Act 2006, trusts must file their accounts with Companies House within 9 months of the end of their accounting period. These can be accessed publicly at <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/>. The department consolidates trusts' accounts into a sector annual report and accounts which can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/academies-sector-annual-reports-and-accounts>.

As the single accountable body for its schools, it is important that the MAT retains the flexibility to use funding to benefit all pupils across the MAT in a way that delivers the best possible education and outcomes for those pupils. We will continue to closely monitor MAT performance and will take action where MATs are not delivering the right standard of education for their pupils.

MATs can focus spending and investment towards the right areas, whether this is investing in new IT across the trust or securing additional staff to work across all of the trust's schools. This can include targeting funding towards small, rural schools to provide services that would otherwise not be viable.

I would also draw your attention to my [letter](#) to Peers dated 1 June 2022, following the Schools Bill's Second Reading, which provided details of the recent increases in funding directed to small, rural schools through the National Funding Formula sparsity factor.

I hope this letter provides you with reassurance on these matters. I am placing a copy of this letter in the library of the House.

Yours sincerely,



**BARONESS BARRAN**  
**PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE**