



originally drafted in Schools Bill relating to land transfers

The Church of England's lead Bishop for Education has welcomed a Government amendment to a Bill which safeguards land held for Church academies.

Today's amendment to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill will reintroduce clauses originally found in the Schools Bill, with which the Government decided not to proceed.

The clauses ensure that new sites for church academies, where they are relocated, continue to be held on charitable trust.

The amendment was brought by the Government at the House of Lords Committee stage.

The Bishop of Durham, Lead Bishop for Education for the Church, said: "We have been working closely with the Government, and very much welcome this amendment - a vital step towards ensuring school sites continue to be used for those original charitable purposes and enabling schools with a religious character to engage with the changing educational landscape.

"The decision not to progress the Schools Bill would have meant that this uncontroversial but very important change to legislation might have been lost, so we welcome the work done by the Departments for Education and Levelling up to allow it to go forward and fulfil the Government's commitment.

"Church of England schools provide a highly valued education to over a million children which is distinctly Christian, but serves a diverse community of all faiths and none.

"But this legislation is important for all schools with a religious character, and it will provide reassurance to dioceses regarding academisation and the protection of land provided for the purposes of a church school.

"We look forward to our continued work with the DfE on governance arrangements which will sit alongside this legislation to support Diocesan Boards of Education in the development of their families of church schools, and which will help to secure that provision for the future."

The Bishop of Chelmsford, Guli Francis-Dehqani spoke in the debate in support of the amendment.

"We welcome this amendment to preserve trustees' existing land interest once schools whose sites are held on educational endowments become academies," she said.

"This is a vital step towards ensuring school sites continue to be used for those original charitable purposes."

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill concerns the improvement of educational standards (of which Academy expansion requiring a new site would be an example) and with the functions of a local authority in its capacity as a landowner and otherwise in relation to land.

The DfE White Paper 'Opportunity for All' acknowledged barriers for the Churches full participation in the academy agenda.

It included a commitment to removing those barriers through bringing forward legislation to ensure the statutory freedoms and protections that apply to Church maintained schools also apply to academies with a religious character.

One of those barriers relates to issues arising from the occupation of land by Church academies. This amendment will ensure continuity of charitable trusts where an academy relocates its site.

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