

I have opposed the war in Iraq, objected to Guantanamo Bay, and been appalled at people who now see all Muslims as terrorists. However, for all my "liberal" views, I cannot support the government's funding of the Islamic academy in Leicester.

Muslim pupils should not be expected to leave their religion at the school gate, but let schools be of mixed faith. If that means that we have to have one prayer room set aside for the Christians, one for the Hindus, one for the Muslims, etc, then so be it.

Racial harmony in Britain hangs on countering the seeds of prejudice sown in the minds of children. Young people may join a mixed school believing that every Muslim has a bomb in their lunchbox, but real-life experience will counter the myth.

One of the benefits often cited for National Service was that it mixed young men of different backgrounds and they left the forces with a better understanding of how the other half lived. Yet the government seems incapable of seeing that schools can perform the same task. Admittedly it is more difficult in places like Leicester where schools tend to be dominated by one faith or race, but what that says to me is that we need ways of making schools more mixed - not less.

The Christian academy proposed for the Saffron estate runs counter to this - and I am just as opposed to it as I am to the state funding of the Islamic secondary school in Evington. Like some Postbag writers, I am baffled why there is a campaign against the Christian academy when the Muslim school seemingly provoked no comment. All faiths should be treated equally.

I also object to the decision on the Islamic school being taken by central government while the councillors chosen by Leicester voters to run their schools were relegated to commenting on the proposal. That is typical of this government. It has done nothing to reverse the decline of local democracy with councillors struggling to have a say in decisions that affect their electorate.

Householders object to their Council Tax increasing way above inflation, but the Council Tax only accounts for a quarter of the income of local councils. The rest has to be begged, borrowed and squeezed from central government. So if a council is trying to make up a reduction in the amount of money it gets from central government, the Council Tax will go up by a disproportionate amount.

This week central government turned down a plan - agreed upon by both city and county councils - for a park-and-ride scheme. Once again, a bureaucrat and a minister whose constituency lies miles away think they know better than the people who live in Leicester and Leicestershire.

This twisted process of funding and decision-making means it is difficult for voters to judge who is responsible for what - very convenient for those in power.

Until people can tell who is accountable for what interest in local councils will wane until Whitehall gets what it always wants- the chance to take even more control.