

Government takes action to combat creationism in free schools

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The Government has taken steps to ensure that creationism and "intelligent design" is not taught in free schools.

The Department for Education (DfE) has amended the [model funding agreement](#) which provides the framework within which the free schools operate. The new clause states:

The Academy Trust shall not make provision in the context of any subject for the teaching, as an evidence-based view or theory, of any view or theory that is contrary to established scientific and/or historical evidence and explanations.

A statement later released by the DfE clarified this:

No school, free or otherwise, will ever be allowed to teach creationism instead of valid and thoroughly evidenced scientific theories.

The Education Secretary has been crystal clear that teaching creationism as scientific fact is wrong. He will not accept any academy or free school proposal which plans to teach creationism in the science curriculum.

All free school proposals are subject to due diligence checks by the new specialist unit within the Department for Education to ensure that people that are setting up the school are suitable.

Valid and thoroughly evidenced scientific theories, such as evolution, will always be the foundation of science teaching in all schools in England.

Stephen Evans, Campaigns Manager at the National Secular Society commented: "Last year the DfE gave assurances to the National Secular Society that groups advocating creationism as a scientific theory would have their free school applications turned down. We are naturally very pleased that they have now delivered on their promise. This latest development sends a clear message to all schools that there is no place for the promotion or teaching of creationism or 'intelligent design' in the classroom."

A recent petition called for the Government make clear that creationism and 'intelligent design' are not scientific theories, and to prevent them from being taught as such in publicly-funded schools. The [petition](#), organised by the British Humanist Association, was backed by leading scientists and science educators including Sir David Attenborough, Professor Richard Dawkins and Professor Michael Reiss and attracted over 20,000 signatures.

One man "unhappy" with the latest announcement from the Government is Ken Walze, head teacher of Bethany Christian School in Sheffield which is backing the proposal for the [Sheffield Christian Free School](#). The school's plan to use public money to indoctrinate children now appears

to be in ruins. The proposed plan had hoped 'to provide a school staffed with committed Christians using a distinctively biblical approach to knowledge and learning.' The website for the proposed school states:

"For a Christian, science is not the study of impersonal chance laws, it is the study of God's created order and design. History is not the examination of random events or the march of progress; for the Christian, history is the unfolding of God's plan. If a school leaves God out of the curriculum the school is making a religious statement, namely that God is not relevant to the majority of life, that life can be interpreted without reference to God."

From the outset, the National Secular Society warned that the Government's "free school" programme could open the doors to extremists. The Government now appears to have realised this and taken steps to remedy the situation.

Undeterred however, the Evangelical Everyday Champions church based around creationism which had its free school application [rejected](#) by the DfE last year has returned with a new proposal under the guise of the Exemplar Academy. The Academy website says "a new team has been working hard on a New Free School proposal for Newark building on all that the Department for Education liked about the 2011 Everyday Champions proposal" – which presumably means they will be keeping their creationist ideas quiet this time around.

Stephen Evans said: "We sincerely hope that groups advocating creationism will fall foul of the Government's 'fit and proper persons' test when considering what groups are appropriate to run publicly funded schools. What sponsors of free schools say they will do on their applications and what they actually do when they have the school under their control may not necessarily be the same thing. We have therefore called on the Department for Education (DfE) to closely monitor schools when they are up and running to ensure that neither creationism nor other extremism is allowed to creep in later in contravention the assurances given at the outset".

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