

Lady Massey asks why children are forced into collective worship

Posted: Thu, 29th Mar 2012

Baroness Massey of Darwen has asked a Parliamentary Question in the House of Lords about whether allowing non-religious parents to withdraw their children from collective worship is an adequate alternative to having their children attend worship.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Lord Hill of Oareford) said, "We think that the right of parents to have a choice about having their children educated according to their religious or philosophical belief is fundamental. The option for parents to withdraw their children from collective worship gives them the right to exercise this choice. Parents can also discuss with the school options for their child to attend alternative provision for collective worship.

"Schools are required to design collective worship provision so that it is appropriate to all pupils, regardless of whether or not they hold a religious belief. Schools also have the flexibility to lift the requirement for broadly Christian collective worship, enabling schools to provide collective worship that best meets the needs of their local communities."

Baroness Massey then asked what assessment the Department for Education has made of the options open to parents who do not wish their children to attend collective worship, and of whether children who are withdrawn from collective worship by their parents are victimised by their school or their peers.

Lord Hill of Oareford said the law enables parents to decide the most appropriate way for their children to participate in collective worship. He said: "They can choose to withdraw their children from all or part of collective worship, without having to give a reason. Parents can also discuss with the school options for their child to attend alternative provision for collective worship.

"We have no evidence of children having been victimised because they are withdrawn from collective worship. Governing bodies of schools are under a duty to promote their pupils' well-being as part of their responsibility for running the school. Schools are required by the Equality Act 2010 not to harass or victimise a pupil in relation to education or the benefits, services and facilities they offer pupils. Schools are also under a duty to address any form of victimisation or bullying".

Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, said: "Even as this question was being asked we received a phone call from a distressed mother who said that she had told her daughter's school that she wanted to withdraw her daughter from collective worship because the whole family was atheist. This was agreed, but last week there was hymn-singing in class, which the child refused to take part in. This resulted in a confrontation with the teacher who said the girl's atheism was "rubbish" and "nonsense" and insisted that she join in the hymns. The teacher threatened to send the girl to the Principle's office, which resulted in the child bursting into tears and becoming distressed."

Mr Sanderson said that given she had formally requested withdrawal of her daughter from religious activities - which she is legally entitled to do - the mother had approached the head about the teacher's behaviour. We are waiting to hear the response.

- [Share on What's App](#)
- [Share on Facebook](#)
- [Share on Twitter](#)
- [Share on Email](#)
- [Subscribe to RSS Feed](#)

Tags: [Collective worship](#), [Faith schools](#)

Related Campaigns

-

[**Compulsory worship**](#)

No child should be compelled to pray in school.

[Read More](#)

-

[**No more faith schools**](#)

We need inclusive schools free from religious discrimination, privilege or control.

[Read More](#)

Related Articles

[**Remove religious barriers to inclusion in NI schools, paper says**](#)

"Little change" in school religious composition for over two decades, research finds [Read More »](#)

[**Peer calls for more secular democracy in RE debate**](#)

Lord Warner challenges prayers in parliament and schools, bishops' bench, and faith schools.

[Read More »](#)

[**NSS highlights religious barriers to inclusive education in NI**](#)

NSS response to inquiry calls for more integrated schools and more secular education system in Northern Ireland. [Read More »](#)

School “misleading” parents on plan to join CofE academy trust

Primary school fails to tell parents academy trust is run by Church of England and all its schools are faith schools. [Read More »](#)

Church plans to use schools to drive conversion of children

The Church of England has unveiled plans to use schools to drive recruitment of children and young people to Christianity.... [Read More »](#)