

Calls for national debate over collective worship requirement in schools

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Renewed calls have been made for a national debate about the requirement on schools to hold acts of collective worship. The calls came during an [Education Committee evidence session](#) on extremism in schools in the wake of the Trojan horse schools affair in Birmingham.

One of the recommendations of the report commissioned by Birmingham City Council (BCC) following allegations made in the anonymous Trojan Horse letter was for the Council to consider leading a debate about the requirements of secular schools to provide a daily act of collective worship in schools which must be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character".

Labour MP Siobhain McDonagh asked the report's author, Ian Kershaw, whether the requirement to conduct a daily act of collective worship is causing problems in British schools, and whether abolishing the law would enable schools to better promote community cohesion.

In response, Mr Kershaw told the education committee that the legal requirement to hold worship was "clearly a subject that needs to be looked at enormously carefully in the future".

Councillor Brigid Jones, BCC Cabinet Member for Children and Family Services, suggested a national debate was needed.

When asked by Labour MP Alex Cunningham whether Birmingham City Council would be willing to lead a debate on the collective worship requirement, and the place of religion in schools, or whether it was "too hot to handle", Cllr Jones replied:

"Personally, I think it is a debate we ought to be having nationally, because it is a national piece of legislation. It has been recommended for Birmingham to do it. Birmingham would be an incredibly appropriate place to do it, in some respects, because we are the most diverse city in the UK."

Asked whether the issue of collective worship should ideally be on the education Committee's agenda, rather than Birmingham City Council's, Cllr Jones said:

"You will have the full spectrum of views represented in Birmingham. It is certainly not a debate I want to shy away from, but it is one we really ought to have nationally in 2014 in modern Britain."

The calls have been welcomed by the National Secular Society, which is campaigning for an end to the law that requires schools to hold acts of worship.

Stephen Evans, National Secular Society campaigns manager, said: "The collective worship requirement is hopelessly outdated, deeply unpopular, and in many schools, wholly unworkable. Particularly in a religiously diverse society such as ours, any law requiring worship clearly poses a threat to cohesion and people's religious freedoms."

"Politicians on all sides need to recognise this and commit to abolishing the law. Our schools can then focus on providing meaningful and relevant assemblies for all pupils, regardless of their religion or belief background."

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