

Cambridge secularists sever ties with “discriminatory” RE Advisory Council

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The Cambridge Secular Society (CSS) has cut off links with the Cambridge RE council, and will now focus on helping parents withdraw their children from Collective Worship.

The Cambridgeshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE), has been accused of "discrimination" against people with different points-of-view and of failing to consider non-religious viewpoints, despite 30% of Cambridgeshire parents stating that they had no religion.

SACREs advise their Local Authority on "matters relating to collective worship in community schools and on religious education." SACREs are required to develop a locally agreed syllabus for RE, and they are formed of "representatives from the Church of England, from other Christian denominations, representatives of other faiths, and teacher members, and local authority representatives."

The Cambridge Secular Society reports that it has spent two years trying to gain representation on the committee, which currently has just one non-religious representative, who is not allowed to propose motions or to vote. The CSS says the SACRE have "restricted at every turn" their attempts to gain membership of the committee, and accused the Committee of acting like a "cabal of self-selected religious spokespeople."

Graham Davis, secretary of the CSS, said: "It is clear to us that the Cambridgeshire SACRE has no intention at all of working constructively with the CSS and is in fact actively seeking to silence the views of any group that disagrees with the status quo.

"Therefore it is with regret that the CSS has decided to withdraw from any further interaction with the Cambridgeshire SACRE.

"This is not our choice but has been forced upon us by the obstructions we have faced. As a result we have decided to instead work directly with parents and schools to ensure that the teaching of religious education is supportive of all families of all faiths and none."

Having been denied membership of the Cambridgeshire SACRE, the CSS is now going to focus on helping parents who do not want their children to take part in "broadly Christian" Collective Worship, which is still a legal requirement in all state schools.

The CSS has also called upon schools to publish their policy towards children who are withdrawn from acts of worship to ensure that children are not made "to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable" if they do not take part in Collective Worship. The CSS is concerned that children are sometimes ostracised if withdrawn from Collective Worship.

The National Secular Society has previously drawn attention to the practical problems of withdrawing children from Collective Worship. One parent [described](#) how their son was "left sobbing" when he was taken out of an assembly, and said that he was "really upset and confused."

NSS campaigns manager, Stephen Evans, said: "There is no valid reason why religious groups should enjoy privileged input in determining what gets taught in schools. One of the fundamental problems with RE is that its curriculum is determined locally – either by faith schools or by committees dominated by religious interests.

"To ensure all young people receive the objective and balanced education they need to navigate the modern globalised world we live in, any subject covering religions, beliefs, and ethics should form part of the National Curriculum and be treated like any other subject. The next government should commit to carrying out the necessary reforms to ensure SACREs make way for educationalists.

"As for school worship, it's affront to young people's religious freedom and has no place in a 21st century education system. The law requiring it is indefensible and should be abolished at the earliest possible opportunity."

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