

'Faith schools' plan to up the amount of religion condemned as "brainwashing"

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The National Secular Society has condemned plans by the Church of England to intensify the amount of evangelisation that takes place during school lessons as "brainwashing" and a misuse of public money.

The comments come after it was revealed that researchers from the National Institute for Christian Education Research (NICER) and the Centre for Christian Education at Liverpool Hope University are to investigate ways in which Church of England and other Christian schools can push religion into all subjects taught in schools.

Professor Trevor Cooling, who leads NICER's programme, said that it would involve C of E and Roman Catholic schools, and at least one from the Oasis group of academies.

Researchers would work with five schools to include Christian values in the teaching of every subject in the curriculum including maths and foreign languages, he said. Parents would be involved with the project, and asked to help to assess the long-term effect of the changes on their children's attitudes.

Speaking at a seminar to launch the project, the Bishop of Oxford, the Rt Revd John Pritchard, chairman of the Board of Education, said: "Letting the narrative of Jesus colour the whole character of a school's life gives the distinctive results parents understandably want. Whatever secular beliefs they express, huge numbers of parents instinctively recognise that Christian education offers a framework they want their children to inhabit."

Terry Sanderson, president of the National Secular Society, said: "This is a plan to brainwash children, not educate them. The Bishop of Oxford rather arrogantly asserts that he knows that parents want their children to be indoctrinated in this way, but he has no evidence for it. It seems our schools are now just playgrounds for religious proselytisers, and the Government is happy to go along with it."

Mr Sanderson concluded that using schools as indoctrination centres in this way was not an appropriate use of public money. He said: "Schools are there to educate children, not create the next generation of churchgoers. This is a blatant abuse of the privileges churches have in our education system, but such is the indulgence of religious bodies by this present government it is unlikely that these plans will be seriously challenged."

He pointed to the rise in the number of chaplains that are being employed by Church of England schools to enforce religious worship ([Bluecoat School in Coventry](#) has no less than six chaplains). The salaries are being paid out of the schools' budgets that were provided by the taxpayer to fund children's education, not employ vicars. A recent advertisement in the *Church Times* for a chaplain at Trinity Academy in Halifax was offering a salary approaching £50,000.

Terry Sanderson commented: "This emphasis on chaplains in religious schools is part of a carefully thought-out strategy of evangelism revealed in an educational supplement in a recent edition of the

Church Times. It said: 'If school chaplaincy is indeed 'at the heart of the mission of God' as the Bishop of Oxford...says, and schools are now the meeting point between the young and our nation and the ministry of the Church, then school chaplaincy in its varied and increasing forms must surely be a strategic priority.'

Mr Sanderson said that the Church of England was on an evangelising mission in schools as an attempt to rescue it from what are surely its final days. "It is disgraceful that we are allowing schools — paid for with public money — to be used as indoctrination centres and recruiting grounds for a dying religion."

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