

Gibraltar yields to campaign for opt out from religious studies in schools

Posted: Tue, 10th Sep 2013

A campaign by secularists in Gibraltar to allow students to opt out of religious education appears to have succeeded.

It is now possible for students to take an alternative GCSE to Religious Studies (RS). Whereas previously if students opted out of RS they were not able to take a replacement subject, now they can opt for General Studies instead.

The campaign has been led by Dave Gibbins, secretary of the Secular Humanist Society of Gibraltar (SHSG), who was told earlier this year by the Department of Education that there was no prospect of the policy changing. But the department has done a u-turn, saying parents can write to their children's school stating that they wish to opt out of RS and opt into General Studies.

In a statement, the SHSG said: "If your child is not religious or has no interest in the subject and wishes to do something else now is the time to act. The SHSG supports freedom of religion but also freedom from religion. We feel it is important for people to be aware that RE is not defined as a 'core subject' under the Education (National Curriculum) Regulations, 1991 as has been claimed, and opting out is a simple process."

In response, the Gibraltar Government told the *Gibraltar Chronicle* that "each request from a person wishing to opt out of Religious Education (RE) will be looked at on a case-by-case basis". The Department of Education told the paper: "The DoE is dealing with this matter directly with those concerned. Its main concern is, and always has been, to afford the best educational provision possible therefore enabling every child to achieve their true potential. Furthermore, the decisions it takes are always firmly grounded on educational arguments."

The Education (National Curriculum) Regulations 1991 provide that the basic curriculum shall include provisions for religious education for all registered pupils. It is not a core subject.

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