

New petition calls for an end to compulsory worship in schools

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A [petition](#) has been launched calling on political parties to commit to ending compulsory worship in schools.

With parties developing their education policies ahead of next year's general election, the petition calls on the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats to make a commitment to removing the requirement on schools to hold acts of worship in their future plans for education.

The legal obligation on schools in England and Wales to provide 'broadly Christian' acts of worship was introduced by the 1944 Education Act, but is widely flouted by schools.

In a recent BBC commissioned [ComRes poll](#), 64% of parents reported that their children did not attend daily worship at school. Just 30% of parents said the law that prescribes a daily act of worship should be enforced.

The National Secular Society said schools that follow the law are forcing children to take part in worship regardless of what they believe, violating their religious freedom.

An opt-out allows parents to withdraw their children from worship but is not widely used as it draws unwanted attention to children and means they miss out on other aspects of assemblies. Other than sixth-form pupils, children and young people are not permitted to excuse themselves from acts of worship.

The National Governors' Association last week became the latest body to recommend that the 70-year-old law should be scrapped. In a [policy statement](#) it pointed out that an "act of worship" implies belief in a particular faith which was "meaningless" when schools are made up of pupils of different cultures and religions. At its recent meeting the NGA's Policy Committee decided that the NGA should seek the abolition of the requirement.

Stephen Evans, National Secular Society campaigns manager, urged people of all faiths and none to get behind the campaign. He said: "A law that requires worship is incompatible with genuine commitment to religious freedom. Even with limited withdrawal rights, requiring a daily act of worship, in which pupils by law are required to 'take part', undermines young people's freedom of religion or belief and impedes parents' abilities to raise their children in accordance with their own religious or philosophical convictions.

"Plenty of opportunities exist within the school curriculum to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. School assemblies with an ethical framework also have an important role to play, but legally imposed acts of worship are not necessary to achieve these educational goals."

[Add your name to the petition to end compulsory worship in schools.](#)

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