

Open letter to Education Secretary: Government must respect children's rights and abolish collective worship requirement

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Thirty campaigners, including academics, MPs, peers, faith groups and educators, have called on the Government to abolish the law requiring Christian worship in English schools, following criticism of the practice from the UN.

The signatories to the letter, organised by the National Secular Society, include Ted Cattle, who warned over a decade ago that religious and ethnic communities in Britain were living "parallel lives", Paul Rowe, the CEO of Educate Together, Caroline Lucas MP, historian Dan Snow, Professor AC Grayling and a range of educators concerned about the imposition of Christian worship on pupils.

"There is a growing consensus," the signatories say, that collective worship in schools should be abolished.

Current law fails to reflect children's Human Rights, the letter adds.

The letter follows a [recommendation from the United Nations Committee](#) on the Rights of the Child that pupils be given an independent right to withdraw themselves from religious worship held in schools.

The UN said it was "concerned" that UK law required pupils to take part in worship and that they couldn't opt themselves out.

In a recommendation to the UK government, the Committee said that action should be taken to "repeal legal provisions for compulsory attendance at collective worship in publicly funded schools and ensure that children can independently exercise the right to withdraw from religious worship at school."

Open letter to Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP, Secretary of State for Education

Dear Ms Morgan,

There is a growing consensus among educators, academics, parents and pupils that the law requiring the provision of 'broadly Christian' worship in English schools should be abolished.

Last week the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child became the latest body to recommend that the UK repeal legal provisions for compulsory collective worship in publicly funded schools and ensure that children can independently exercise the right to withdraw.

This echoes the recommendations of a study by the former Education Secretary Charles Clarke and professor of sociology of religion at Lancaster University, Linda Woodhead, which similarly concluded that the current requirement should be abolished.

The 70-year-old statute on collective worship was drawn up before any human rights charters and fails to recognise that pupils have human rights too.

Inclusive assemblies can play an important role in fostering a sense of community in schools. Assemblies with an ethical dimension can promote shared values and aid pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Acts of religious worship are neither necessary nor desirable to achieve these valid educational goals.

The law mandating worship in schools is an anachronism; the legacy of a society unrecognisable from the diverse and pluralistic Britain of today where citizens hold a wide variety of religious beliefs, and increasingly, no religious beliefs. It is also deeply unpopular, widely flouted and wholly incompatible with a genuine commitment to religious freedom.

We therefore urge you to implement the recommendation of the UN Committee of the Rights of the Child and repeal legal provisions for collective worship and ensure that pupils can independently exercise the right to withdraw from any acts of worship that are held in schools.

Professor Peter Atkins

Jonathan Bartley, Director, Ekklesia

Ted Cattle CBE, Director the iCoCo Foundation

Lord Cashman

Nemu Chandaria OBE, Chairman Institute of Jainology

Tim Farron MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats

Dr Rob Freathy, Associate professor of history of education, University of Exeter

Lord Garel-Jones

Professor A C Grayling

Lord Harrison

Virginia Ironside

Tehmina Kazi, British Muslims for Secular Democracy

Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead

Caroline Lucas MP, Green Party

Derek McAuley, General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

Neil McKain, Head of religious studies

Maajid Nawaz, founding chairman of Quilliam

Pragna Patel, Director Southall Black Sisters

Paul Rowe, CEO Educate Together

Martin Rowson

Aliyah Saleem, Co-founder of 'Faith to Faithless'

Alom Shaha, Teacher and science communicator

Terry Sanderson, President, National Secular Society

Joan Smith

Dan Snow

Peter Tatchell

Lord Taverne QC

Lord Warner

Dr Jacqueline Watson, School of education and lifelong learning University of East Anglia

Baroness Young of Hornsey

Dr Romy Hasan, University of Sussex

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