

NSS welcomes bill to end compulsory worship in non-faith schools

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The National Secular Society has welcomed a bill that proposes to scrap compulsory religious worship in non-faith schools in England and replace it with inclusive assemblies.

The Education (Assemblies) Bill 2020, which has been proposed by Liberal Democrat peer Lorely Burt, would amend the [current legal requirement](#) to hold acts of worship.

Under the bill:

- Schools would not be required to organise compulsory acts of religious observance, but pupils would be permitted to opt in to voluntary acts of worship if they wish.
- Schools which are not religious in character would be required to provide assemblies that develop the "spiritual, moral, social and cultural education" of pupils regardless of religion or belief.

Schools in England and Wales are currently legally required to hold acts of collective worship, and to require children to participate, under the [1944 Education Act](#).

Many schools ignore the law with the tacit approval of the Department for Education and Ofsted inspectors.

NSS chief executive Stephen Evans said the measures proposed in the new bill would represent "a welcome step".

"Ending the requirement to hold acts of worship in non-faith schools would strike a blow for children's rights and common sense. There is no good reason why schools which have no religious character are legally required to impose religious practice on children.

"Ultimately no child, whether in a faith school or not, should be compelled to worship in school. The current law requiring schools to hold acts of worship is out of step with contemporary society and incompatible with a genuine respect for human rights. It should be repealed."

The NSS [campaigns](#) to end the collective worship law; advocates inclusive, secular assemblies for all; and argues that worship should not form part of the official school day.

The bill comes shortly after two parents, Lee and Lizanne Harris, [secured](#) a commitment to provide an inclusive alternative assembly at their children's school after threatening legal action.

The bill has been proposed with support from Humanists UK. It was entered into the ballot of bills to be heard in the House of Lords in the new parliament on Friday.

It is due to be introduced to the Lords on Thursday 23 January.

Other legislation being brought forward in the Lords in this parliamentary session includes a bill to [remove](#) the Church of England bishops' automatic right to sit in the House of Lords. The House of Lords (Removal of Bishops) Bill has been drafted with NSS assistance.

Listen: [NSS podcast episode 20](#), with Lee and Lizanne Harris.

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