

Scrap faith groups' inspections of schools, says NSS report

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Inspections of state schools which are carried out by religious groups are inappropriate and should be scrapped, a National Secular Society report has said.

The NSS's report, [*Religiosity inspections: the case against faith-based reviews of state schools*](#), says the inspections give religious groups undue influence over children's education.

The inspections are legally required under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005, in England, and Section 50 of the act in Wales.

They are intended to ensure that schools' religious education, denominational worship and overall environment promote a rigorous and specific faith ethos.

Report findings

The NSS's report draws on evidence from case studies and qualitative and quantitative analysis of inspection reports.

It says faith bodies use the inspections to promote their own interests and exert influence over the way education is provided.

It adds that the inspections help to enforce a different set of standards and educational aims in faith schools.

It also says:

- More than four in five of the inspection reports which the NSS analysed framed widely held values as uniquely or fundamentally Christian, with more than six in 10 urging schools to be more explicit about this.
- The inspections cost £760,000 a year on average. Each added the equivalent of up to 14% of the cost of a standard inspection.
- The reports tended to conflate successful RE with the promotion of Christian viewpoints, with half of them explicitly promoting the Church of England's own evangelical resource.
- The inspections create additional standards and aims to those carried out by Ofsted and Estyn, and can place a significant stress on teachers and senior leaders.

Key recommendations

The report recommends the repeal of Sections 48 and 50 of the Education Act, to end the inappropriate inspection regime, and extending Ofsted and Estyn inspections to cover religious education in all schools.

It also says:

- Public funding of faith-based inspections should end.

- The government should issue guidance on third party inspections of state schools.
- Ofsted and Estyn inspections should be strengthened to ensure all schools are promoting an appropriate and inclusive ethos.

Comment

NSS head of education Alastair Lichten said: "Religiosity inspections are an inappropriate platform for faith groups to push their agendas in school.

"The inspections make it harder for schools to teach about religion impartially, and for the state to hold them to account for doing so, while creating needless burdens for both the taxpayer and teachers.

"Religious groups should have no business inspecting state-funded schools. The government should scrap this requirement and ensure any school inspection regime is based on secular educational aims."

Read more: [Faith groups have no business inspecting schools](#), by NSS CEO Stephen Evans on Medium.

Update, 8 June 2020:

The government has said there are "[no plans to change the current arrangements](#) for the inspection of designated faith schools" after the NSS's report was raised in a parliamentary question.

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