

Bill to end compulsory worship in non-faith schools proposed

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A bill that would end a requirement to hold acts of collective worship in schools without a religious character in England is set to be presented to parliament.

The bill, from Liberal Democrat peer Lorely Burt, would replace worship with assemblies which are inclusive of pupils regardless of religion or belief.

The bill was drawn ninth in a ballot of private members' bills this week, meaning there is a decent chance it will be debated in this parliamentary session.

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.

Legal requirement to hold worship

[Since 1944](#) all schools in England and Wales have been legally required to hold daily acts of worship which are "wholly or mainly of a Christian character".

Many schools ignore the legal requirement or hold inclusive assemblies where pupils may choose or not choose to pray.

But in recent remarks to parliament a minister suggested the government would ["investigate" such breaches](#).

The National Secular Society, which campaigns for the [repeal of the compulsory worship law](#), has asked the Department for Education to clarify those remarks.

NSS comment

NSS head of education Alastair Lichten welcomed the bill.

"Where the collective worship requirement is enforced in schools, it can be deeply coercive and alienating. And where it is not enforced it creates a farcical disconnect between the law and reality.

"The passage of this bill would be a significant step in the right direction. And the principle behind it should apply in every school. No child should be forced to worship in school, and no school should be forced to hold acts of worship."

Notes

- The full text and Explanatory Notes of The Education (Assemblies) Bill [HL] can be read here: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2878>
- A very similar bill was introduced to the Lords last year, but it was drawn lower in the ballot and was not considered.

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