

# Bill to end compulsory worship in non-faith schools progresses

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A bill to end the duty on non-faith schools in England to hold daily acts of Christian worship has progressed in parliament.

The private member's bill, introduced by Liberal Democrat peer Lorely Burt (*pictured*), today passed through its committee stage in the House of Lords and will progress to a third reading if the government makes time available for debate.

Schools in England and Wales are legally required to hold daily acts of collective worship which are "wholly or mainly of a Christian character".

Under Baroness Burt's bill:

- Schools would not be required to organise compulsory acts of religious observance, but pupils would be permitted to opt into 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.

Faith schools would still be able to hold collective worship, but would be required to provide a [meaningful alternative](#) for pupils withdrawn.

A majority of peers [supported](#) the bill at its second reading in the House of Lords in September.

The National Secular Society, which has briefed peers throughout the bill's progression, has also welcomed the bill as a significant step in the right direction.

In its briefing, the NSS said the bill "responds to successive governments' failure to reform the law or guidance surrounding collective worship."

It said it "provides relief" to the majority of non-faith schools which "must currently skirt the law in order to provide inclusive assemblies", and "resolves conflicts" between the legal requirement for collective worship and human rights laws and obligations.

But the government is opposing the bill, which makes it unlikely to become law.

## NSS comment

NSS head of education Alastair Lichten said: "The government has no business mandating worship in schools, and schools have no business coercing religious observance from pupils.

"Inclusive assemblies that do not incorporate acts of worship are far more suited to 21<sup>st</sup> century education and far more conducive to a cohesive school environment where all children from all backgrounds are treated equally.

"The cross-party support and incoherent opposition to this bill shows the clear will for change. The government should ensure this bill has time for debate, as a first step in fulfilling their duty under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to respect pupils' freedom of belief."

## Notes

- The current law has long been [widely ignored](#), with the de facto acceptance of the Department for Education and Ofsted inspectors. But the government recently said it would "investigate" schools which breached the law requiring worship in schools.
- The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child [recently asked](#) the UK what steps it was taking to repeal laws requiring worship in schools.

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