

# I was concerned about proselytisation on a school trip – and the school listened

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*Sometimes concerns regarding religious interference in education can be easily resolved, simply through clear and polite conversations with the school. A parent shares her recent experiences working together with her school to stop educational trips to a church becoming a platform for proselytising.*

Recently my 8 year old son went on a school trip for R.E to an old C of E church located in a small village about 30 minutes away from the school.

The information that we received about the trip mentioned that one of the teachers at the school worships at this particular church. I was concerned about this and raised it with the class teacher. I told her that I felt the close connection to the church this teacher had may influence the children's view of this church. The class teacher reassured me that the close connection only helped them in arranging the visit.

I also wondered why they were going to visit a church so far away when there was a C of E church in walking distance from the school. I was told the focus would be on the building as it was very old and traditional with beautiful architecture. I could appreciate how this would be of interest so decided to allow my son to go especially as I didn't want him to feel excluded.

When I picked up my son from school the day of the trip, he was carrying a white paper bag decorated with sparkly stickers. I assumed it was from a child in his class who had a birthday. Every child seemed to have one. On the walk home my son told me he had gotten it from the church and it contained: a small packet of Skittles, a small Mars bar, a laminated photo of the Lord's Prayer and a laminated photo of the church. I could feel my blood pressure rise. I was furious.

I immediately wrote an email to the head teacher explaining what my son brought home, along with my initial concerns about the trip. I didn't send it until the next day. I started to second guess myself and didn't want to appear to be overreacting. As an atheist I don't want to come across as unreasonable so I consulted the National Secular Society website and emailed them for advice. I got a prompt and very helpful reply and as a result, I revised my email and asked to meet with the head teacher to discuss how R.E. is taught in my son's non-denominational state school.

When I met with the head she told me that she had already spoken to the church to say the contents of the bag given to the children was inappropriate. She was very apologetic and called it a 'learning curve'. I found out that the church had asked if they could send the children home with a 'gift' but that the school didn't know what it would be and the teacher didn't know the full contents of the bag until the children were back in class.

When I spoke with the teacher the day after my meeting with the head, she was very apologetic as well and said she understood my concerns. I stressed that overall my experience with the school had been excellent and thanked them for being helpful and understanding. I now feel I have a good relationship with the school and am grateful for the advice found on the National Secular Society website and directly through email.

## A Parent

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