

EVANGELISM IN STATE SCHOOLS

The role of external visitors in
publicly funded education

October 2013

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This report covers England and Wales only. A separate report is being prepared concerning the activities of religious groups active in Scotland’s non-denominational schools.

1. Introduction

In recent years there has been a marked increase in the number of parents contacting the National Secular Society with concerns about external visitors to schools exposing their children to unwelcome and wholly inappropriate religious evangelism and proselytization. We have investigated this and found an abundance of material showing that the parents' concerns were not isolated instances.

This Report aims to raise awareness of what we consider to be a growing problem: publicly funded schools being targeted and exploited by evangelical groups as part of their missionary work to relay a particular set of beliefs to young people with the ultimate aim of conversion.

Parents and schools alike should be deeply concerned that evangelical Christian organisations are gaining access to children and young people by seeking involvement in publicly funded education through the provision of religious education, school worship, pastoral work and the setting up of prayer spaces and bible-based clubs in state schools.

We do not doubt that pupils' education can be enhanced by the input made by external contributors, but it appears clear from the evidence (in section 12), that many external school visitors are primarily concerned with evangelisation rather than education.

The report covers external visitors to all publicly funded schools – both religiously designated 'faith schools' and non-religious community schools¹. We see no reason why parental expectations concerning evangelisation and proselytization should differ depending on the type of school. It is important to note that not all pupils at faith schools are admitted on religious grounds in accordance with their parents' stated religion. Some choose a school because of its proximity – often the Church of England school is the only one in the area. In other areas, the growing shortage of school places means many parents have no option other than to send their children to a school with a religious character, and often that religious character is not aligned with their own religious beliefs.

Given the rapidly changing religious landscape in Britain, and in particular the diminishing interest in religion amongst young people (and their parents), it is easy to see why evangelical groups regard access to schools as essential if they are to raise the next generation of believers.

However, as a matter of principle we believe there should be no place in publicly funded schools for evangelism and proselytization. We therefore regard it as disturbing that in schools right across the country religious organisations are being given a platform to evangelise.

We believe their growing presence should be of concern to everyone, religious and non-religious, who cares about the objectivity and integrity of state education and the Human Rights of parents who are entitled to a state education that does not run counter to their own religious and philosophical convictions.

We argue therefore, that there is an urgent need to better question and scrutinise the role of evangelical organisations and individuals working as external visitors in our schools.

¹ An explanation of different types of school <http://www.secularism.org.uk/types-of-school.html>

The primary methodology of this Report consists of extensive online research, sourced evidence and parents' perspectives. We are also undertaking a more long-term project on the issue of evangelism in schools, which involves the submission of Freedom of Information requests to a statistically significant sample of schools. We will report the findings of this more extensive research once it has been completed. In the meantime – we hope the Department of Education, schools and parents find the information and recommendations provided by this report useful – and hope they act on it.

2. Main findings and key recommendations

Main findings

- There is a significant and growing incursion of evangelical organisations into publicly funded education.
- The activities of external visitors are often undertaken in schools without parents' knowledge and with little, if any, opportunity for withdrawal.
- The motivations and aims of external groups, either out of complicity or naivety, are going unquestioned by head teachers, governors, Local Education Authorities and the Department for Education.
- The presence of evangelical organisations and individuals in publicly funded schools, particularly non-religious schools, is undermining the Human Rights of parents who choose a non-religious upbringing, or an upbringing of any other faith.
- The legal obligation on all schools to provide religious education, and a daily act of (broadly Christian) worship provides a foot in the door to organisations with evangelistic intentions.
- The ambiguity about the specific aims and purpose of religious education, and its low status in schools, provides an ideal environment for evangelical groups to exploit.
- Head teachers are insufficiently discerning about the external groups they are allowing into their schools.

Key recommendations

We call on the Department for Education to:

1. Issue national guidance to schools setting out best practice for working with external visitors and contributors, and particularly religion and belief groups.
2. Ensure that accompanying non-statutory guidance relating to any subject area that may involve visits from religion and belief groups (but particularly RE) makes clear that schools must not offer opportunities to groups seeking to evangelise.

We call on all LEAs and schools to:

- 1) Publish and adhere to an external visitor's policy which:

- a) Places a duty on head teachers and RE providers to ensure they are aware of the external contributor's values, aims and objectives and their reasons for working with schools.
 - b) Forbids proselytizing and evangelism. In the same way that teachers are forbidden by law from promoting partisan political views during teaching, we believe it would constitute best practice for schools to place limitations on the promotion of partisan religious views in the classroom. These should be accepted in writing by the contributors and their organisations before they are permitted to contribute. Schools should cease to work with any organisation or individual who breaks this undertaking.
 - c) Makes clear that parents should be given prior and relevant information about the group visiting, and that they must be notified sufficiently far in advance of visits to be able to withdraw their child if they so wish.
 - d) Stipulates that when external groups are invited to assist with educational provision, the parameters of what is acceptable are agreed upon between the school and external visitor in advance. External groups should also be required to submit lesson plans in advance for approval and to facilitate notification in summary to parents.
 - e) Stipulates that a teacher or teaching assistant should always be present to ensure the parameters are not violated.
 - f) Makes clear that schools should only consider soliciting external visits from religion and belief groups when a specifically identified need within the syllabus has been identified.
- 2) Ensure that school budgets are not misused on evangelisation, all children are equally and appropriately catered for – regardless of religion or belief – and all pastoral roles within schools should be provided in an inclusive and secular context.

We call on SACREs² to:

- 1) Monitor and publish details about external visitors to religious education and Collective Worship as part its annual report.

We call on parents to:

- 2) Raise any concerns about the appropriateness of external visitors with the school's head teacher in the first instance, and if necessary, also with the Governors or LEA.
- 3) Inform the NSS of concerns about the appropriateness of external school visitors.

² Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

3. A secular perspective on the place of religion in the curriculum

We consider it both appropriate and desirable for young people to understand the significance of religion in society, and the importance of faith to many people. Room should be made in the curriculum for an objective and balanced subject for all pupils that gives them relevant knowledge of variety of religious, non-religious and secular philosophies and worldviews.

Although not the focus of this report, we would like to see religious education comprehensively reformed into a new National Curriculum subject under a different name that allows pupils to take a more objective and religiously neutral approach to the consideration of moral and ethical issues. Such a programme of study should include objective education about religious beliefs, but not to the detriment of other important philosophical and ethical perspectives³.

In addition, we would like to see the law requiring a daily act of Collective Worship repealed. Schools that do hold acts of worship should be required to give parents clear information about their right to withdraw and ensure withdrawn pupils are offered alternative educational provision.

We consider the in-depth and confessional teaching of a specific faith to be a parental responsibility, for those who want it, and it should not form any part of education in publicly funded schools. It should no more be the role of the state to instil religious beliefs as it is the state's role to question the validity of religious beliefs. Most people would regard teaching from a party-political perspective to be inappropriate; we see powerful parallels with confessional teaching.

A more secular approach to education, with no obligation to provide worship, and a syllabus with an objective and balanced approach to education about religion would go a long way to shutting the door on groups seeking to use our education system for their own evangelical ends.

³ Our full position on RE is set out in our briefing paper <http://www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/religious-education-briefing-paper.pdf>

4. Missionary objectives of school visitors

The evidence given in Section 12 reveals a concerted and co-ordinated strategy of evangelical organisations in the UK to target publicly funded schools as bases to promote the Christian message to young people most of whom would otherwise have little or no contact with the Church or religious groups.

As with the Church of England, which regards (publicly funded) education as central to its mission⁴, and the Catholic Church, which runs (publicly funded) schools to “assist in its mission of making Christ known to all people”⁵, the groups identified in this report make little attempt to hide the fact that their interest in education is fuelled by their missionary objectives. Ostensibly, the groups are in schools to assist with the provision of religious education (RE) and collective worship primarily, but in reality, the groups are exploiting the state education system to reach otherwise unreachable children and families.

One of the groups identified in this report, Youth for Christ, regard it as their mission to “raise up lifelong followers of Jesus”. Another organisation, Scripture Union, describe their mission as “to go and make disciples of Jesus Christ among children”. Each group identified in this report has similar missionary objectives.

A revealing quote from another group, Christians and Sheffield Schools (CaSS), states:

“An American study found that nearly half of all people who become committed Christians did so before the age of 13 (43%), with 64% finding their faith before they were 18...CaSS believes the small mustard seeds we plant in a child’s life are important”⁶.

The child evangelism movement gained traction following the publication of a report by Christian missionary strategist Luis Bush in which he coined the term “4/14 window”.⁷ The report identified the strategic importance of evangelising to the demographic group from age four to fourteen years old, which research has revealed to be the most open and receptive to every form of spiritual and developmental input.

Christian groups in Britain appear to be imitating a model from the United States, largely orchestrated by the Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF), a worldwide organisation “dedicated to seeing every child reached with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, disciplined and established in a local church”⁸. In the United States, conservative evangelical groups have successfully established themselves as part of America’s ostensibly secular public education system.

According to New York journalist Katherine Stewart’s exposé of their successful attempts to use the public education system in the U.S. to advance a fundamentalist agenda, evangelical groups employ a “stealth strategy that relies on low visibility”⁹.

⁴ <http://www.churchofengland.org/education/church-school-of-the-future.aspx>

⁵ Christ at the Centre: Why The Church Provides Catholic Schools. http://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/catholic-education/publications/item/download/18680_d176c293fbf2a5bb46e2eb21e9b72970

⁶ <http://www.cass-su.org.uk/documents/CASS%20Newsletter%20Christmas%202012%20Prayer.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.4to14window.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/4-14%20Window%20Booklet%20Full%20Resolution.pdf>

⁸ http://www.cefonline.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&id=8&Itemid=100032

⁹ Stewart, K, The good News Club (2012) Public Affairs Books <http://thegoodnewsclub.com/book>

There is a clear clash of agendas between schools – whose purpose is education, and evangelical groups – whose primary concern is that of evangelisation. However, by disingenuously labelling their evangelism as ‘educational’, well-organised and often well-funded evangelical groups and individuals are able to pursue their missionary objectives to ‘bring children to Jesus’ by providing schools with subjective and manipulative teaching resources, delivering lessons (not only as part of religious education), and by preaching to pupils during schools visits.

At their worst, evangelists turn school classrooms into pulpits to preach their own interpretation of the gospel. Often, however, aware of the need to justify their activity in schools on educational grounds, their approach is much more surreptitious, but no less manipulative.

The duplicity of their approach is perfectly illustrated by the following comments from one Christian schools worker:

“We’d never ever got to grips with the relationship between education and evangelism. It’s the dark shadow in the closet of schools work. To the churches we talked evangelism. To the Head Teachers we talked education. We prayed the two would never meet.”¹⁰

5. Foot in the door: RE and Collective Worship

Legal obligations

There is a statutory duty on schools (under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998) to provide a daily act of Collective Worship for all pupils¹¹. The Act says that this Collective Worship should be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character” and should reflect “the broad traditions of Christian belief without being distinctive of any particular Christian denomination”¹².

In addition, religious education is a statutory part of the basic curriculum in all maintained schools by law (and academies by virtue of their funding agreement). The law states that the agreed syllabus for religious education must reflect that “the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain”.¹³ Many schools and academies designated as having a religious character (faith schools) are free to make their own decisions in preparing their syllabuses and are (we regret) permitted to teach RE from a selective, exclusive or confessional viewpoint.

The law additionally requires the curriculum for a maintained school (or maintained nursery school) to “promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils”.¹⁴ The word ‘spiritual’ has such wide usage that it has become almost meaningless, but is often taken to mean ‘religious’ by schools and external groups seeking to work in schools.

¹⁰ The Death of Schoolswork http://www.schoolswork.co.uk/media/files/Education_and_Evangelism.pdf

¹¹ Sections 70 and 71 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

¹² Schedule 20 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998

¹³ Section 375(3) of the Education Act 1996

¹⁴ Section 78 of the Education Act 2002

The above legal obligations on schools and the inherent Christian bias in state education provide numerous opportunities for evangelical Christian groups in particular to involve themselves in educational provision.

Gaining entry to schools appears to be a relatively easy process for such groups. According to a recent newsletter of one of the groups identified in this report:

“More and more people are grasping the simplicity with which churches can extend and enjoy their ministry to every child in their locality – especially to the ‘unchurched’ and their families.”¹⁵

Infiltration of this type is aided by the widespread ambiguity about the specific aims and purpose of religious education. The fact that RE lessons are frequently taught by teachers with no qualifications in the subject¹⁶ is also an aggravating factor.

The low priority given to RE and Collective Worship in many schools, combined with the short supply of qualified RE teachers and general pressure to provide sufficient teaching hours provides an ideal environment for evangelical groups to exploit. As one Christian organisation that provides assemblies states on its website:

“Meeting the standards set down by the government on collective Christian Worship and Religious Education can become an extra burden in a busy teacher’s day. The Assembly Angels are here to help.”¹⁷

“In some cases, it seems likely that visits to schools (including non-religiously designated schools) are being facilitated by sympathetic head teachers and teachers who are themselves evangelical in nature, and keen to give such groups access to pupils. In other cases, schools are naïvely welcoming offers of help from evangelical groups, happy to use them as a substitute for objective teacher-led religious education or Collective Worship provision, or simply as a free resource of teaching hours.

Guidance

The current non-statutory guidance for RE¹⁸ suggests that visitors should not replace regular teachers of RE. It does however describe the invitation of external visitors to the classroom as “good practice”. The guidance claims external visitors give pupils “the chance to interact with different religions and non-religious groups locally.” Likewise, guidance on religious believers visiting schools issued by the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) states that “religious believers are a rich and exciting resource for schools.”¹⁹

This may be true, but the same guidance seemingly acknowledges that many visitors will have evangelical intentions. It weakly advises in its ‘code of conduct’ that religious visitors “develop ways of speaking to pupils that communicate their open approach, avoiding any hidden agenda to ‘convert’ or proselytize.”

More robust guidance is required to ensure that schools are fully aware of the issues surrounding religious visitors to schools. Head teachers and teachers also clearly need to show greater responsibility and better judgement in this area, so

¹⁵ http://www.openthebook.net/downloads/OtB-News_0413.pdf

¹⁶ RE: The Truth Unmasked <http://www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/re-the-truth-unmasked.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://assemblyangels.com/for-schools>

¹⁸ Religious education in English schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010
<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/religious%20education%20guidance%20in%20schools.pdf>

¹⁹ Religious Believers Visiting Schools Guidance and a Code of Conduct, NATRE
<http://www.natre.org.uk/docstore/rbvs.pdf>

as not to allow their schools to become playgrounds for evangelists on outreach missions.

Furthermore, while the non-statutory guidance refers to visitors of “different religions and non-religious groups”, the reality is that most visitors to RE lessons are evangelical Christians who have organised themselves to best exploit the opportunities made available to them by schools seeking to fulfil their legal obligations.

Other opportunities for involvement

In addition to RE and Collective Worship, evangelical groups have also identified opportunities to spread their particular Christian message in other subject areas, such as PSHE, SRE and even PE, school sports, IT, singing, and creative arts, sometimes described evasively as “workshops”. Each raises additional concerns, particularly SRE.

The impact of these groups in the areas of the curriculum that deal with sexual health and reproduction is extremely troubling; the material taught is persistently inaccurate and biased with serious long-term effects on the lives of pupils of both sexes but especially girls.

This area has been researched by Education For Choice (a project of Brook, the young people’s sexual health charity) and their findings and recommendations are set out in their Report *Abortion education in the UK: Failing our young people?*²⁰

Groups with an evangelical agenda are not limiting themselves to lesson time or collective worship, they are also impinging on other academic or leisure activities: lunch times and after school activities, (sometimes forming clubs), day trips, reflection days, whole mission weeks, and a “residential experience”. All of which are potentially more difficult, if not impossible, to monitor and supervise, despite arising directly out of the pupils’ involvement with school.

6. School chaplaincy

A number of the Christian organisations identified in this report have highlighted school chaplaincy as a vital part of their plans to fulfil their aims in the future.

School chaplaincy certainly appears to be a boom industry. Academies now enjoy greater freedoms over how they use their budgets and the proliferation of faith-based academies appears to be responsible for an increase in publicly funded religious chaplaincies in schools. According to a Guardian report from 2009, the number of dedicated school chaplains increased by 25% in five years²¹.

The School Chaplains and Leaders Association (SCALA) says it is currently working in a core of around 100 schools, mostly secondary, in both the independent and maintained sectors of education. SCALA is now hoping to treble its base²².

²⁰ http://www.brook.org.uk/images/brook/professionals/documents/page_content/EFC/abortioneducationreport.pdf

²¹ Guardian, 22 December 2009
<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2009/dec/22/school-chaplains-faith-academies>

²² <http://www.scala.uk.net/faqs>

The spread of evangelism in schools through chaplaincy programmes is of particular concern, and we are keen to ensure that public money intended for education is not used to subsidise or pay the salaries of those whose *raison d'être* is evangelisation.

In addition to chaplaincy, the new phenomenon of 'school pastors' is yet another initiative used by Christians to gain access to schools. The programme is operated by The Ascension Trust, best known for the Street Pastors movement²³, which now has teams of volunteers 'patrolling' Britain's high streets. In a similar way, school pastors 'patrol' schools "making good and positive relationships with pupils"²⁴.

According to their website, "School Pastors teams find that there are opportunities to work in partnership with other Christian organisations in schools, for example, with sexual health projects or life coaching groups"²⁵.

7. Youth evangelism: a growth industry

The information provided by the websites of evangelical organisations active in schools suggests their level of their involvement in publicly funded education is significant and growing.

Youth for Christ, one of the organisations identified in this report, employs over 400 full-time staff and operates 70 local centres across England, Scotland and Wales. The group currently claims to be in touch with over 250,000 young people every month but says its vision is to reach a million young people a month. The group provides "one of the largest online resources for teaching about Christianity for UK Schools."

An organisation that sets up 'prayer spaces' in schools claims to have reached more than 100,000 children and young people, many of whom "have prayed personal prayers for the first time in their lives." Almost 600 prayer spaces have been set up in primary and secondary schools in the UK.

Another organisation that provides schools with a mobile classroom multimedia resource designed to "show the relevance of Jesus" has been visited by more than 365,000 school children since it was launched in September 2000.

Another group that sends teams of Christians from local churches into schools to perform dramatised Bible stories, estimates that over 250,000 primary school children are regularly being visited by the group, primarily through school assemblies. The group began as a local initiative in Bedford but has now grown into a much bigger national enterprise. Since becoming a national organisation in 2007, over 1,400 schools have received visits from the group. According to the group, in Bury there are just two schools where they don't operate.

The sheer number of evangelical organisations carrying out schools work, and the scale of their activities indicates a growing and sophisticated movement, very much focused on exploiting the state education system to "to go and make disciples of Jesus Christ among children"²⁶.

²³ <http://www.streetpastors.co.uk/>

²⁴ <http://www.vineyardchurch.org/in-our-community>

²⁵ <http://www.schoolpastors.org.uk/>

²⁶ Scripture Union Movement Plan 2012–15
<http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/AboutScriptureUnion/MovementPlan2012%E2%80%9315/166386.id>

8. Appropriateness of the message

Aside from their evangelical objectives, another cause for concern is the appropriateness of the message being delivered by a number of external visitors in schools.

The Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, has made it very clear that the teaching of creationist views as a potentially valid alternative to scientific theory should have no place in a 21st-century publicly funded school²⁷.

Biblical or other faiths' creation stories can, however, be covered as part of religious education – provided it is not being taught as science or fact. Although this distinction will not be recognised by impressionable pupils.

External visitors to schools will be regarded as figures of authority, particularly by younger pupils. When fundamentalist Christians express their sincerely and passionately held belief in the creation story, few children are likely to differentiate between what is being presented as a 'belief' and what is being taught as a 'valid scientific theory'.

As a number of parents have found, children are likely to regard dramatised Bible stories concerning Adam and Eve or Noah, for example, as factual reconstructions of actual events. It is therefore educationally irresponsible to allow external visitors to promote their fundamentalist beliefs in this way.

Testimonies from concerned parents have revealed inappropriate views are also being expressed by external visitors on a number of other social and moral issues such as celibacy, abortion, and gender equality, for example. Furthermore, many of the evangelical groups present ethical and moral issues, such as environmentalism, as uniquely Christian concepts. We are concerned that this biased approach leaves pupils with a skewed and very poor understanding of ethics.

As detailed in a later section, 24-7 Prayer International, the organisation behind the 600 prayer spaces that have been set up in primary and secondary schools in the UK, claims that "organic healings" have taken place in its prayer spaces, including an 8-year-old girl being healed of eczema. Such claims should be sufficient to ensure that this particular organisation finds no place in any school.

9. Parents' perspective

Our investigation into the activities of evangelical organisations in schools was prompted by parents contacting us with their concerns. What follows is the testimonies of a few of those parents.

"Our son attends a non-religious [community] state Junior School in Sheffield and our understanding therefore was that the school would not have any affiliation with a Church or any other religious organisation. Quite by chance we became aware that members of a local evangelical church were visiting the school on a regular basis to conduct whole school assemblies. After writing to the head teacher, we were informed that the school had a "long-standing relationship" with an evangelical church that adheres to a profoundly conservative and avowedly missionary agenda. We attempted to enter into a dialogue with the school in order to seek clarification

²⁷ <http://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2012/01/government-takes-action-to-combat-creationism-in-free-schools>

about the exact nature of the relationship and to raise questions about whether a relationship with this type of church was in fact appropriate or lawful given that the school is a non-religious school and that parents had not been informed that any such relationship existed. Unfortunately, the response of the school leadership and governing body has shown a profound reluctance to engage with the issues and we have been repeatedly denied prompt access to information about policy and practice at the school. Our Local Education Authority has appeared equally reticent to get involved pro-actively and to take our parental concerns seriously and we have been refused sight of legal guidance on the issues.

“We could never have predicted the delaying, obfuscation and hostility that we have faced as parents who have simply voiced concerns about the crucial issue of access to children in a state school. We have been left with a strong feeling that the degree of entryist “capture” of the school goes further than we had initially suspected. The school governing body has voted on a “new” policy on religious visitors to the school that has merely formalised the relationship with the evangelical church, but parents were refused any input into the new policy. The school has refused to disclose how many members of the governing body are in fact members of the church concerned and therefore no governors have at any stage declared an interest and absented themselves from discussion and votes on the policy. We have repeatedly pointed out to the school and the LEA that this is in clear breach of national and local regulation but again our complaints have simply been ignored. We have been left feeling disempowered and marginalised and meanwhile an ultra-conservative Christian evangelical church that openly preaches against both gender equality and freedom of sexuality has maintained privileged access to children at the school. We believe that access to children at a state school is not a given “right” for any religious group that seeks to avail itself of a missionary opportunity. The fact that local and national governance, accountability and democratic safeguards appear powerless to challenge this activity is highly disturbing.”

— Saul, Sheffield

“I only found out about a local Baptist minister visiting my daughter’s school after she came home talking about Adam and Eve and the creation story from Genesis. She understood this as factual, which concerned me as we specifically chose a community school over a faith school because we don’t want a religious upbringing for our children.

“I contacted the Department for Education with my concerns but they weren’t interested. They simply pointed out that RE and worship are both required by law, but for me there’s a massive difference between providing education and allowing evangelicals to target children in schools.”

— Mike, West Midlands

“There is a Christian organisation which has successfully inveigled itself into every school in West Suffolk and visits them regularly spouting all sorts of unacceptable stuff. No other religious groups or associations visit at all. The visits are, ostensibly, to debate values, morals and society. When I’ve complained, I’ve been told that there just aren’t any other equivalent groups in the region. The trouble is, the staff at the schools are so naïve, they have no concept of how unacceptable the things that this group says to them are.

“On a recent visit to my son’s school ‘Matt the Christian’ was ‘discussing’ the merits of celibacy before marriage. I and my partner have been together for 20 years and are not married. We have two children aged 14 and 11 years. Matt also said that there wouldn’t be any paedophiles if there was more celibacy. On a previous

occasion Matt has said that because he follows the bible, as the man in his house, he has the final say in any decision. This group visits the middle and upper schools on a regular basis.

“I really do feel that it is naivety and ignorance on the part of the schools and that the evangelists take advantage of this.”

— Natalie, West Suffolk

“Having elected to send our children to a state school, confident that Religious Education would be delivered as an academic subject according to the national curriculum, we were greatly dismayed to discover that the school had long since been infiltrated by a local conservative evangelical Christian church who visit regularly to give assemblies and lead collective acts of worship in school time, and on whose premises the school’s annual Christmas concert takes place. When we went in search of information to parents about this relationship or affiliation between school and church, we found there was none available. When we asked directly about it, we were told that the relationship was of ‘long standing’. A single sentence buried deep in the prospectus – ‘local churches sometimes come into school to give assemblies’ – gave a false impression that local Christian denominations were equally represented.

“Quite apart from the grave concerns we have about the recruitment methods, the aggressively evangelical mission statement and the content of this church’s preaching, we remain greatly dismayed that it should be possible for any one religious group to seek such access to a non-faith state school; that they should be granted such access; that the relationship, unannounced and consequently unquestioned, could become traditional over time; that parents and prospective parents of children at the school should not be made aware of the arrangement; that it should be informally, secretively entrenched in school life; that the only recourse available to any parent with any objection should be to exercise the right of withdrawing their children from assemblies or acts of worship led by members of the church; that no parent was in any case in a position to exercise this right, because no information was ever circulated about religious visitors to the school. At time of writing, nearly a year after concerned parents questioned the propriety of the situation, it remains unchanged and there is still no information about it available on the school’s website or in its prospectus.”

— Eleanor, Sheffield

“What is arguably most disturbing about our experience is the covertness of the relationship between our child’s community school and the evangelical church. The church’s visits are not publicized, and therefore most parents have no idea that they are taking place.

“We are not opposed to our children learning about the world’s religions. And as parents we consistently encourage them to respect other people’s beliefs. But we expect their school to provide them with a wide, balanced, and non-partisan view. We do not want any faith organisation, evangelical Christian or otherwise, to have privileged links with the school. And we certainly expect to be informed if such links exist.”

— Jason, Sheffield

10. A Human Rights perspective

Article 2 Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights provides:

“In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and teaching, the state shall respect the rights of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.”²⁸

This does not require states to provide publicly funded Christian schools; for example, it prevents states from proscribing schools in conformity with parents’ religious and philosophical convictions²⁹.

The presence of evangelical organisations and individuals in publicly funded schools, particularly non-religious ones, undermines the rights of parents who choose a non-religious upbringing, or an upbringing of any other faith. Even in faith schools however, it is never appropriate to assume the belief of a pupil or the religious/philosophical convictions of their parents.

Children who are subjected to confessional materials with little or no opportunity of hearing differing views are being denied not only their right to an objective and balanced education but also their own religious freedom.

Apologists for evangelism in schools may well seek to claim that attempts to obstruct their intrusion into schools impede their freedom of speech and religious freedoms. Secularism seeks to defend the absolute freedom of religious and other belief, and protect the right to manifest religious belief insofar as it does not impinge disproportionately on the rights and freedoms of others. A secular approach to education would ensure that the right of individuals to freedom of religion is always balanced by the right to be free *from* religion. Removing Christian evangelism from schools does not run counter to Christian parents’ Human Rights entitlements, but the presence of evangelistic teaching in state schools certainly runs counter to non-Christian parents’ rights.

In the same way that teachers are forbidden by law from promoting partisan political views in the teaching of any subject in schools³⁰, it is reasonable to expect limitations on the promotion of partisan religious views in the classroom, particularly in publicly funded schools.

²⁸ <http://www.hri.org/docs/ECHR50.html>

²⁹ “this right does not impose on States an obligation to establish at their own expense, or to subsidise, education of any particular type or at any particular level”
<http://ukhumanrightsblog.com/incorporated-rights/articles-index/protocol-1-article-2/>

³⁰ Under sections 406–7 of the Education Act 1996
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/part/V/chapter/IV/crossheading/politics>

11. Context: Religion and belief demographics

Although the concerns we raise in this Report are ones of principle; they also need to be seen in the context of a low and continuing decline in religious belief/affiliation. Attendance of those of school age and their parents are entitled to have their wishes respected.

Church attendance in the UK has been in decline for at least a century. In particular, church attendance in Britain by the under-19 year-olds has dropped by two thirds in the last twenty years and is predicted to fall by a further two thirds in the next fifteen years³¹.

Between 1979 and 2005, the percentage of under-19s attending church on a normal Sunday dropped from 14% to 6%³².

More importantly for the purposes of this Report, the percentage of adults in the 20–29 and 30–44 age ranges (the most likely age of parents with school aged children) attending church on a normal Sunday dropped to just 3% and 4% respectively over the same period.

While there are some areas of growth in church attendance, the overall figures show this decline to continue sharply, particularly for the young³³.

The under-19s recorded as Christian in the 2011 Census was 51%, but the figures for Christian affiliation are widely accepted to be inflated because a large number of ‘cultural Christians’ ticked the Christian box and because many returns were compiled by heads of household. According to a National Centre for Social Research report, only 27% of teenagers in 2003 regarded themselves as Christian³⁴.

The corollary of the low and declining figures for Christian affiliation, belief and practice is rapidly growing figures for minority religions and the non-religious – by some definitions now the largest ‘belief’ group. It is their Human Rights that are being infringed, with little if any concern from schools, LEAs or the Department for Education.

The UK branch of the Child Evangelism Fellowship has expressed its concern that 96% of children in Britain are growing up without any exposure to the Church or its message³⁵.

Similarly, Scripture Union, whose priority is to “reach the unreached with the gospel”³⁶ bemoan the fact that:

“Children and young people are under growing pressure to adopt secular values, with less than 5% having any regular contact with church”³⁷.

³¹ UK Christian Handbook – Religious Trends 7 (2007/2008) Publ Christian Research Ed Peter Brierley ISBN 978 1 85321 176 8, derived from Table 12.7.1 (no England data of this detail shown)

³² (applies to both <19 and 30-44 figures) UK Christian Handbook – Religious Trends 6 (2006/2007) Publ Christian Research Ed Peter Brierley ISBN 978 1 85321 174 4, derived from Tables 12.2 and 12.3

³³ UK Christian Handbook – Religious Trends 7 (2007/2008) Publ Christian Research Ed Peter Brierley ISBN 978 1 85321 176 8, derived from Table 12.7.1

³⁴ *Research Report No 564*

³⁵ <http://www.cefbritain.org/>

³⁶ <http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/AboutScriptureUnion/MovementPlan2012%E2%80%939315/166386.id>

³⁷ <http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/AboutScriptureUnion/Whyweexist/126664.id>

Against this backdrop, it is easy to understand why evangelical churches and organisations are so keen to take the church out to the people on ‘outreach’ programmes. It is, however, necessary to question the appropriateness of allowing publicly funded schools – which children are bound by law to attend – to be used for this purpose. Often contrary to their parents’ religious and philosophical convictions, whether of a non-Christian religion or a non-religious perspective.

12. List of evangelical groups active in schools

What follows is a by no means exhaustive list of evangelical groups currently active in schools in England and Wales. In addition to the groups identified below, many schools often have ‘relationships’ with local churches and individuals who visit schools to participate in school worship and assist with RE provision.

Youth for Christ (YFC)³⁸

YFC was founded by the American evangelist Billy Graham during a visit to Britain in 1946. Today, the organisation employs over 400 full-time staff and countless local volunteers specialised in working with unchurched youth. YFC have 70 centres across England, Scotland and Wales, with outreach projects taking the ‘good news’ to young people.

Part of YFC’s mission is to “raise up lifelong followers of Jesus”. The group currently claims to be in touch with over 250,000 young people every month but says its vision is to reach a million young people a month.

Local centres³⁹ work closely with schools delivering RE lessons, lunch clubs, and assemblies.

In association with Alpha International, YFC supplies RE resources to schools including ‘ready-to-go’ RE lesson plans, short films and even a residential experience.

It supplies schools with *exploRE*⁴⁰ – a 12-week programme of study for use with students aged 11 to 14 in RE lessons, and it describes its *RE:quest*⁴¹ initiative as one of the largest online resources for teaching about Christianity for UK Schools.

It also provides materials⁴² “with clear biblical wisdom at its core, gently introducing young people to Christian ethics” through sport, IT, citizenship, PSHE and creative arts.

According to its website:

“Taking the Gospel relevantly is what we do. That has always been our vision, and it always will be...until every young person in Britain has heard and responded to the good news of Jesus Christ.”

³⁸ <http://yfc.co.uk/>

³⁹ <http://www.bathyfc.co.uk/>

⁴⁰ <http://www.exploreforschools.co.uk/faith>

⁴¹ <http://request.org.uk/>

⁴² <http://yfc.co.uk/what-we-do/education-resources/the-crux/>

OAC Ministries⁴³

OAC evangelists claim to have one of the most extensive schools' ministries in the United Kingdom. According to their website: "Biblical truth is communicated in relevant ways according to age by such means as sketch board, object lessons and puppet shows." They claim thousands of school children are spoken to each week during term time.

Their website states: "In an age when less people in this country are engaging with the Christian Church and its message than ever before OAC is committed to taking the Gospel of Jesus Christ to unchurched people, wherever they are, through open air evangelism, schools work, and other outreaches".

Youth Alpha⁴⁴

In addition to supplying 'educational resources' in conjunction with Youth for Christ, Alpha International also runs a Youth Alpha course in a number of state schools.

Based on the controversial adult Alpha courses, run in churches, universities and prisons, the course "gives 11–18 year-olds the opportunity to explore how everyday life can be interwoven with the Christian faith". The course has been criticised for its narrow version of Christianity⁴⁵ and its manipulative psychological techniques⁴⁶.

Counties⁴⁷ / GSUS Live⁴⁸

Counties is a UK-based evangelical Christian charity that wants to see individuals experience "life in all its fullness through an encounter with the living Jesus Christ". The group is part of the Evangelical Alliance.

According to its website:

"Counties began in 1899 when some saw the desperate need for the counties of Britain to hear the good news of Jesus Christ... As society changed, so did methods. But the core task of communicating the Christian faith remains at the heart of all that Counties does."

The charity provides state secondary schools with *GSUS Live* – a resource designed to show the relevance of Jesus⁴⁹.

GSUS Live is provided to schools free of charge and is funded by individuals, churches and Christian trusts. Since it was launched in September 2000, more than 365,000 school children have visited the unit.

GSUS Live includes two mobile classrooms with a fully functioning multimedia computer suite designed to take classes of up to 32 Key Stage 3 pupils for a 45 to 60 minute lesson to "investigate Jesus' teachings on forgiveness, fear, and rejection".

⁴³ <http://www.oacgb.org.uk/index.asp?page=schools>

⁴⁴ <http://uk-england.alpha.org/youth/home>

⁴⁵ <http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6029097>

⁴⁶ <http://www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/the-alpha-course-in-our-school.pdf>

⁴⁷ <http://www.countiesuk.org/about-us/locally-and-nationally.html>

⁴⁸ <http://www.gsuslive.co.uk/index.html>

⁴⁹ <http://www.gsuslive.co.uk/>

The GSUS Live website includes endorsements from numerous schools and RE teachers.

The charity also runs LIFE, a multi-media mobile exhibition which focuses on the life of Jesus, primarily aimed at Key Stage 2 schoolchildren⁵⁰.

Prayer Spaces in Schools⁵¹ / 24-7 Prayer International⁵²

Prayer Spaces in Schools is an initiative of 24-7 Prayer, an organisation that exists “to reconcile the world to God in Jesus Christ”.

Almost 600 prayer spaces have been set up in primary and secondary schools in the UK and the group provides a range of resources, including complete RE lesson plans. Its website includes enthusiastic endorsements⁵³ from head teachers, RE teachers, school governors and pupils.

According to Prayer Spaces in Schools, its work helps to enable young people to meet many of the requirements for religious education in primary schools. 24-7’s vision for the UK is to “establish a national project working with teachers to serve the national curriculum so that hundreds of thousands of students can swap talking about God in Religious Studies classes to talking to Him”.

According to its website, the initiative has reached more than 100,000 children and young people, many of whom “have prayed personal prayers for the first time in their lives”.

A video on the 24-7 Prayer International website proclaims that healings have taken place in prayer spaces – which can be anything from dedicated classrooms or areas of classrooms, to areas in school recreation and communal spaces such as cafeterias. An extract from the transcript of the video shows the presenter stating:

“We have seen organic healings take place in prayer rooms. We have seen an 8-year-old girl healed of eczema, we’ve seen a guy get healed of a stomach condition, we’ve seen someone else get healed of Crohn’s disease.”⁵⁴

According to their 2020 Vision report⁵⁵, the global priority for 24-7 Prayer is Europe, which they consider to be “the darkest and most urgent mission field of our time”.

Scripture Union⁵⁶

Scripture Union is an international mission movement that seeks to make “God’s good news known to children”. It describes its mission as “to go and make disciples of Jesus Christ among children”.

The group’s goal is to ensure “that all may come to a personal faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, grow in Christian maturity and become both committed church members”. With the aim of “reaching the unreached with the gospel”, Scripture Union says working in schools is one of its main priorities.

⁵⁰ <http://www.lifeexpo.co.uk/>

⁵¹ <http://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/home>

⁵² <http://uk.24-7prayer.com/about/>

⁵³ <http://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/feedback>

⁵⁴ <http://uk.24-7prayer.com/stories/kingdom-come-500-prayer-rooms-so-far/>

⁵⁵ <http://www.24-7prayer.com/data/24-7prayer/downloads/2020%20Vision.pdf>

⁵⁶ <http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/about/107.id>

Scripture union provides an RE teaching resource called Into the Bible⁵⁷ for Key Stage 2 and provides teachers with lesson plans, activity sheets, artwork and extension suggestions. The group also runs an RE day trip called Lifepath⁵⁸, which it describes as “educationally valid” and appropriate for pupils of all faiths or none. The promotional video⁵⁹ exposes the initiative for the blatant proselytization that it is.

The group also plays an active role in setting up and running Christian groups in schools and provides schools with a number of resources for bible-based assemblies⁶⁰ including a DVD resource presenting the gospel message in a sporting context⁶¹.

Scripture Union run an Associate Scheme as a means of “multiplying their ministry”. The scheme provides support for local churches and other Christian groups seeking to reach children and young people in schools.

Barnabas in Schools⁶²

Barnabas in Schools is an initiative of the Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) – a group that describes its mission as to “enable people of all ages explore the Christian faith and to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ”.

It provides a number of classroom and assembly resources for RE teachers including ‘Barnabas RE days’ – a full day’s programme of exploring Christianity through storytelling and drama.

One of the ‘RE Days’ aimed at Key Stage 1 pupils includes a study of the Christian story of creation in Genesis with a focus on God as Father and Creator⁶³. Others explore “caring for others” and “compassion” as uniquely Christian concepts⁶⁴. Its website includes endorsements⁶⁵ from a number of schools, including community schools as well as faith schools.

Christians in Schools Trust (CiST)⁶⁶

CiST is a Christian organisation established in 1996 to support primary schools in the Stockport area in the delivery of ‘professional religious education’. The group describes its aims as seeking to promote excellence in RE and to “share the relevance of Jesus with young people”.

The group visits schools to take “Christian assemblies” and provides resources for RE teachers nationwide. CiST advocates “teaching RE from a Christian perspective”.

The group says it has:

“been in schools; running clubs, teaching RE from a Christian perspective and taking Christian assemblies, building relationships with staff and students.

⁵⁷ <http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/YourCommunity/Schools/Resources/IntotheBible/23786.id>

⁵⁸ <http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/Lifepath/10352.id>

⁵⁹ <http://youtu.be/emzUjrOePdU>

⁶⁰ <http://www.biblebasedassemblies.com/what-are-bible-based-assemblies/>

⁶¹ <http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/YourCommunity/Schools/Resources/AssemblyResources/22367.id>

⁶² <http://www.barnabasinschools.org.uk/>

⁶³ <http://www.barnabasinschools.org.uk/whose-world/>

⁶⁴ <http://www.barnabasinschools.org.uk/who-is-my-neighbour/>

⁶⁵ <http://www.barnabasinschools.org.uk/what-schools-have-said/>

⁶⁶ <http://www.cist.org.uk/wordpress>

“This model of schools work means that the worker remains a visitor, coming in from outside to influence the school for the Lord.”

The group has identified school chaplaincy as a vital part of its plans to fulfil its aims in the future.

PSALMS⁶⁷

PSALMS is an associate of Scripture Union and has close links with Christians in Sport.

With an emphasis on sports ministry, the group reaches hundreds of children and young people in Gloucestershire by working with many of the local schools. Its activities in schools include mentoring, sports coaching, lunchtime/after-school sports clubs, drama, singing and performing arts clubs and workshops, ‘Mission weeks’, RE and PE Lessons and assemblies.

It also works to engage both church and non-church young people through a network of youth clubs which take place in schools and colleges.

The insidious nature of its approach, typical of the child evangelisation movement generally, is revealed in its most recent annual report, which stated:

“Work in local schools has continued. Mentoring at Maidenhill High School [non-religiously designated] involves five trained mentors delivering this resource and support to the school. This school is due to have a new Head of Religious Studies, who is a local Christian, and so PSALMS is looking forward to finding ways to build upon this.”

Assembly Angels⁶⁸

Assembly Angels is a Christian organisation that offers primary school assemblies with “teachings grounded in biblical principles and advice”. Its promotional video⁶⁹ reveals the proselytizing nature of these assemblies.

The group also offers a “Moving On” workshop to “help children think through their move up to secondary school”. Each child attending the workshop receives a copy of the book *It’s Your Move* published by Scripture Union. The noble-sounding intention behind this venture is undermined by a promotional video⁷⁰ that reveals the book to be little more than a “gospel opportunity”. As Tim Hastie-Smith, the National Director of Scripture Union explains:

“In my corner of rural Gloucestershire all the children in the 9 primary schools have received copies of ‘It’s Your Move’. There’s virtually no kids in church but every single child has received a copy of it from a Christian in their local [school]. Bridges are built, opportunities are created for sharing the love of God. And that’s what ‘It’s Your Move’ is. It’s a bridge. It’s a doorway. It’s an opening. It’s an opportunity.”

⁶⁷ <http://www.psalms.uk.net/schools/>

⁶⁸ <http://assemblyangels.com/>

⁶⁹ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hM_KNKLLZW8&feature=c4-overview-vl&list=PL6451677E3B7D2038

⁷⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLA9E4E86F58957AF1&v=DUqzaDpjj8c>

Open the Book⁷¹

Open the Book is a national organisation that sends teams of Christians from local churches into schools to perform dramatised Bible stories. According to the group, their ‘storytellers’ use drama, mime, props, costumes – deliberately involving the children and staff themselves – to present the interactive stories.

Their evangelical objectives are made clear on their website which quotes Psalm 78:4,6: “We will tell the next generation...and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God...”.

Open the Book estimates⁷² that 254,500 primary children are regularly being visited by the group, primarily through school assemblies. According to its website, 8,429 volunteers are going into 1,473 schools.

A recent newsletter⁷³ states: “more and more people are grasping the simplicity with which churches can extend and enjoy their ministry to every child in their locality – especially to the ‘unchurched’ and their families”.

One of their trustees is the vice chairman of Scripture Union and a member of the General Synod’s Board of Education⁷⁴.

Gideons International⁷⁵

Gideons International is an evangelical Christian organisation famous for leaving Bibles in hotel rooms. With the aim of encouraging children to “discover God in a personal way”, the Gideons use school assemblies to present personal copies of the New Testament and Psalms to children in thousands of British schools every year. One parent contacting the NSS said her nine-year-old son had been given a Gideon Bible at school and told it was the “most important book you will ever read – far more important than any science book”.

Christians in Sport⁷⁶

Christians in Sport exists to “reach the world of sport for Christ”. Its vision is to see a Christian in every one of the 150,000 clubs and teams in the UK. However, it also operates in schools. It offers a range of activities intended to “raise awareness of the value of sport but also of the values of the Christian faith”.

The activities it offers, which include RE lessons, assemblies and sports workshops can be delivered in a one-off visit, a one-day ‘reflection day’, or spread across the course of a ‘mission week’ within the school.

Christian Council For Schools In Wales (CCSW)⁷⁷

CCSW’s vision is “To give every pupil in Wales an opportunity to explore the Christian Faith personally”. According to its site: “each year, many thousands of young people

⁷¹ <http://www.openthebook.net/home.php>

⁷² http://www.openthebook.net/downloads/OtB-News_0413.pdf

⁷³ http://www.openthebook.net/downloads/OtB-News_0413.pdf

⁷⁴ <http://www.openthebook.net/trustees.php>

⁷⁵ <http://www.gideons.org.uk/index/news>

⁷⁶ <http://www.christiansinsport.org.uk/page.asp?section=172§ionTitle=Schools>

⁷⁷ <http://www.ccsww.org.uk/>

and children across the nation have the opportunity to learn about and respond to the Christian Faith in their places of education”.

CCSW makes hundreds of visits to schools – leading assemblies, taking lessons, running Sixth Form RE Conferences, and generally “building relationships”. The organisation also supports and establishes Christian ‘lunchtime’ and ‘after-school’ groups in primaries and secondary schools.

Luton Churches Education Trust (LCET)⁷⁸

LCET is an organisation established by Luton churches “to see Christ’s message of hope and justice expressed to and among young people”. The group delivers assemblies and RE lessons and provides schools with a range of material for the curriculum “to help foster spiritual development”. The organisation also offers RE theme days for all year groups, from Year 7 to sixth form.

According to its website:

“We are interested in getting students engaged with the big questions of life, critically examining their own and others beliefs, and finding ways to express themselves spiritually.”

In 2007, LCET launched schoolswork.co.uk⁷⁹, a project to support Christian work in schools across the UK. The project is also a member of Youthwork⁸⁰, a wider collaboration of Christian youth organisations in the UK.

Bury Christian Youth (BCY)⁸¹

BCY is an organisation that upholds the Old and New Testament Scriptures as the “inspired, infallible, truthful Word of God”.

BCY has inveigled itself into West Suffolk schools where the group regularly visits, taking Christian assemblies, PSHE and RE lessons, and running lunchtime clubs. The group aims to provide a “clear Christian input into RE and other areas of the school curriculum”. The group runs a sex and relationships education workshop in schools which it uses to promote abstinence.

Christians and Sheffield Schools (CaSS)⁸²

CaSS exists to develop and maintain links between schools and churches and Christian organisations. The group employs a ‘schools links adviser’ (who also teaches RE to 4–11 year-olds) to coordinate volunteer members drawn from several churches around Sheffield. It also provides support and assistance to volunteers carrying out activities in schools.

⁷⁸ http://www.lcet.org/chaplaincy_work/chaplaincy

⁷⁹ <http://www.schoolswork.co.uk/home/>

⁸⁰ <http://youthwork-magazine.co.uk/main/index.php>

⁸¹ <http://www.bcy.org.uk/>

⁸² <http://www.cass-su.org.uk/what.php>

Christian Initiative in Calderdale Schools (CICS)⁸³

CICS is a fundamentalist Christian organisation based in Calderdale, West Yorkshire. It describes its objective as “the advancement of the Christian religion...amongst young people in Schools and Colleges in Calderdale”.

It is welcomed in 10 local secondary schools (including non-religious community schools) where it delivers assemblies and gives RE lessons on topics such as poverty and abortion. It is also involved in ‘Faith Days’ with Key Stages 4/5 and it supports lunchtime activities in eight secondary schools.

The group is supported (including financially) by over 50 local churches and has recently expanded taking on new staff and office space. According to its site:

“We know it will cost more in effort, time and finance, but we believe that we must help our ‘young citizens’ grow to maturity in Calderdale, knowing about God and knowing God.”

⁸³ http://www.cicscalderdale.org.uk/what_is_cics

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