

## BHA BRIEFING 2010: Worship in Schools

5<sup>th</sup> July 2010

### Briefing from the British Humanist Association on Religious Worship in Schools

We are strongly in favour of inclusive school assemblies, which can help to build shared values and a sense of community. We oppose acts of collective worship in school, since these exclude many, and believe that the parental right of excusal is not a proper solution.

#### Worship

We would like to see the immediate withdrawal of the government's statutory guidance on collective worship contained in the document *Circular 1/94*<sup>1</sup> (which insists on a narrow interpretation of the legal requirement for "broadly Christian" worship) in favour of new guidance from the Department for Education recommending inclusive assemblies, suitable for all in our increasingly diverse society. This should be followed by repeal of the legislation requiring acts of worship in schools and for them to be replaced with flexible requirements for them to provide school assemblies that focus on shared values.

Although parents have the right to withdraw their children from worship in any state school, the reality for children who are withdrawn may be that they are left isolated and parents unwilling to inflict this on their children are left in an impossible situation.

For as long as there is a requirement for schools to hold acts of worship, we want the right to withdraw from acts of worship to be extended from a parental right and for sixth formers to all competent children – a position supported by the parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights.

#### Academies

We want Academy schools, which are not bound by Education Acts as they are seen in law as independent schools, to be treated as other state-maintained schools in relation to holding acts of worship. This would include ensuring that the right to withdraw from such acts is written into their Agreement with the Secretary of State. Ideally, we would like to see the requirements for holding collective worship excised from those Agreements altogether.

#### Inclusive assemblies

We endorse the educational value of school assemblies and their role in supporting shared values and the school community and ethos. School assemblies can and should include the whole school community. Many teachers share this view and, while they do not wish to lead worship, would be happy to contribute to assemblies which inspired their pupils to lead good lives or to think deeply about moral issues. Assemblies that build on the common ground of our humanity can have an important role to play in inclusive Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) Development and education for Citizenship.

#### What can you do?

- 1) You can support EDM 395 entitled *Collective Worship*, which reads "That this House notes the Government's wish to free schools from prescriptive legal regimes; notes the fact that the law still

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<sup>1</sup> Available at

[http://www.teachemet.gov.uk/\\_doc/5670/310194%20R%20E%20and%20Collective%20Worship%20circular%201-94%20final.pdf](http://www.teachemet.gov.uk/_doc/5670/310194%20R%20E%20and%20Collective%20Worship%20circular%201-94%20final.pdf)

requires maintained schools to hold a daily act of collective worship wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character and that teachers and others have repeatedly opposed this provision; notes the diversity of society and rights to freedom of conscience, thought and belief as protected in domestic law; at the same time notes the educational value of inclusive school assemblies and their role in supporting shared values and the school community and ethos; and calls on the Government to repeal the requirement for compulsory worship in schools and to encourage schools to hold educational assemblies that will include all children.”

- 2) You can table and support amendments to the Academies Bill and the forthcoming Education and Children’s Bill which seek to repeal the law on collective worship and/or extend the right of withdrawal to all competent children.
- 3) You can write to Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Education, urging for the immediate withdrawal of *Circular 1/94* and its replacement with guidance recommending that schools hold inclusive assemblies.

### **About us**

The British Humanist Association (BHA) is the national charity representing and supporting the non-religious and campaigning for an end to religious privilege and discrimination based on religion or belief. Our expertise lies in the ‘religion or belief’ equality strand, which includes non-religious beliefs such as Humanism, and how that strand relates to and intersects with other protected characteristics.

For more detail and evidence on our position, please contact us:

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