

16 June 2020

**Teach,
not preach.**
Secular Education Network (NZ)

Parliamentary committee sanctions religious discrimination in primary schools

The Education and Workforce Committee's report to the House of Parliament last week on the Education and Training Bill shows that they have failed to listen to much of the feedback they received from the public about the discriminatory practice of allowing religious instruction in schools. The report sanctions bible classes for primary school children in state primary schools, even though the new bill, like previous laws, states that schools must be secular.

In response, the Secular Education Network has launched a Teach, Not Preach petition appealing for the absurd Section 54 of the Education and Training Bill, which allows for religious instruction in schools, to be deleted before it reaches its second reading in the House of Parliament.

The Secular Education Network is also taking the Attorney General, representing the Ministry of Education, to court in October, arguing that provision of religious instruction in state schools is discriminatory.

More than 30% of New Zealand secular, state primary schools, with no religious affiliation, close for up to an hour a week, or 20 hours a year, so that church volunteers can preach non-syllabus, non-Ministry of Education approved Christianity classes to young children.

Secular Education Network's spokesperson, Mark Honeychurch, says that this discriminatory and outdated law must be changed.

"Schools are for teaching, not preaching. They must be welcoming to children of all backgrounds. What are we saying to the children of non-Christian families when they are taken out of their classrooms and sent to the library for an hour each week, so that their classmates can sing songs and learn about worship?"

The proposed Education and Training Bill makes a minor change to the 1964 Education Act's provisions regarding religious instruction, which is not a part of the New Zealand curriculum. Currently, an opt-out approach applies. The proposed opt-in approach is meant to help ensure that attendance at religious instruction only occurs with parental consent, but Mark Honeychurch says that the proposed Bill does not go far enough.

"Religious instruction will still take place in New Zealand's secular schools – this makes a mockery of the term 'secular', and particularly in 2020 New Zealand, where more than half of New Zealanders are not Christian. This new bill is the perfect opportunity for the government to fix an ongoing problem that has been causing division in our schools. It seems silly of them to not make a simple change to the bill that would bring the teaching of our kids in line with the overarching aim of the law, which is to offer a secular education to our children in New Zealand's public schools.

"Schools should be a place where children are safe from targeting by religious groups trying to spread their faith," he says.

“We have churches for this, and families are welcome to take their children there on Sundays or any other time outside of school hours.” he adds.

The Secular Education Network has established a petition [here](#) calling on Minister Chris Hipkins to delete Section 54 of the Education and Training Bill, which allows religious instruction in State primary and intermediate schools, before the whole house debates the Education and Training Bill.

ENDS

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