

Monday 31 August 2020

## Bible in schools opt-in clause spells the end of schoolroom evangelism

This month's introduction of an opt-in clause for religious instruction in state schools is a significant step forward, and will accelerate the decline of church-led evangelism in schools, says the Secular Education Network (SEN).

Spokesperson Mark Honeychurch says that SEN is relieved the government has finally ensured that parents and caregivers should be made aware of any church-led religious instruction their child is receiving – although whether this happens in practice is up to individual schools.

“The August 2020 update to the Education and Training Act requires schools to enforce an ‘opt-in’ process for religious instruction. For this reason, SEN member Tanya Jacob will not be proceeding with her planned High Court case against the Attorney General in October,” he says.

“The case was to argue that the Education Act be updated to be appropriate for today's less religious, more diverse and multicultural New Zealand. The opt-in clause means that a significant amount of this change has now happened, although substantial religious influence remains. SEN will continue to lobby for religious instruction to be fully removed from state schools,” he says.

This court case, along with persistent media attention and Human Rights complaints, motivated a change to religious instruction in the August 2020 Education and Training Bill, and the new opt-in clause for religious instruction is now law.

Nearly 10,000 people have already signed the Secular Education Network's [petition](#) calling on Education Minister Chris Hipkins to entirely remove religious instruction in State primary and intermediate schools.

“School time should be reserved for professionally taught education. We encourage the teaching of facts about all major religions, rather than the teaching of one religion as though it is fact. Our petition represents the views of New Zealanders advocating for this important change.”

“The content of the church-led religious instruction ‘classes’ is not curriculum based, but young children are incapable of recognising the difference. To children, what is taught at school is fact. It is up to us responsible adults in their lives to ensure that evangelism doesn't take place in class time.”

Nearly 25% of New Zealand secular, state primary schools - schools that have no religious affiliation - still 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.

### ENDS

For more information, please contact Mark Honeychurch: 021 885 216

Petition: [Say no to bible classes in school time](#)

Website: [www.TeachNotPreach.org.nz](http://www.TeachNotPreach.org.nz) Facebook page: [TeachNotPreach NZ](#)