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Peddling political correctness

The Government's new school standards, issued in September 2014, are being used to politicise schools in England.

School inspectors are using new revised rules to grill teachers on equality issues.

A private Christian school has been told to invite leaders from other religions (e.g. Imams) to lead assemblies.

Inspectors have asked schoolgirls at Orthodox Jewish schools intrusive questions such as 'Have you got a boyfriend?' and 'Do you know two men can marry?'

The Government wants

all schools to promote so-called 'British values' in order to prepare them for "life in modern Britain".

The vague wording is being used to peddle political correctness.

The new standards are being implemented using regulations for academies, free schools and private schools. Ofsted

is enforcing the standards directly on all other schools.

The Institute is seeking a judicial review of the regulations for inadequate consultation and their harm to religious liberty.



Christian school threatened with closure

Ofsted has warned an independent Christian school in Reading that it could be closed for failing to uphold 'British values'.

An inspector told Trinity Christian School that it needed to show it "actively promoted other faiths" in the curriculum, and said that representatives of other faiths should be asked to lead assemblies and lessons.

The school was also informed that in order to comply with the new regulations it would have to "actively promote the principles of the Equality Act 2010". In practice this would mean



Trinity was warned it could face closure under the new school regulations [illustrative purposes only].

ensuring that pupils learn about "people with protected characteristics" and would also prevent staff from teaching that certain lifestyles are wrong. Ofsted said it is not enough

to promote the Christian principle that all people are equal before God and have inherent dignity as human beings.

Trinity was rated "excellent" for its provision for pupils'

spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in November 2013. However, following the inspection in October 2014 it was deemed not to be meeting the new school standards.

The governors have written to the Education Secretary, pointing out that the issue "dominated" the inspector's questions and "at no point were any questions asked about other aspects of the curriculum or the quality of teaching assessed through lesson observations".¹

¹ Letter to the Education Secretary from the Chairman of Governors of Trinity Christian School, 24 October 2014

Protecting parental freedoms to choose children's education

Christians believe that parents have a God-given responsibility for nurturing and educating their children.¹ Teachers have delegated responsibility. This accords well with UK law where parents – and not the state – make decisions about education. As well as choosing between schools, parents ultimately have the right to home educate their children.

The time spent in school can be very influential and the thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and outlook on



life formed in education can last a lifetime. Parents naturally want the values of their home to be upheld in the classroom – where teachers are acting

in loco parentis.

Under the First Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, parents have a right to ensure their

children are educated “in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions”.

By requiring all schools to conform to the Government’s idea of ‘British values’, the new school standards threaten to restrict the freedom of parents to decide how their children should be educated. This is contrary to the public policy direction in England, which for decades has increasingly allowed for parental choice.

¹ Ephesians 6:4; Deuteronomy 6:7; Psalm 78:1-6

RC school accused of ‘radicalisation’

Ofsted initially rebuked St Benedict’s Roman Catholic School in Bury St Edmunds for failing to teach about “the dangers of extremism and radicalisation”.¹ It later withdrew the inspection report after media coverage of the case.

Just last year, St Benedict’s ranked as one of the best state schools in the country for sending pupils to Oxbridge.²

¹ *Guardian Online*, 14 October 2014, see <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/oct/14/jewish-schools-complain-ofsted-inspections> as at 5 November 2014

² ‘Education and employment destination data’, see <http://tinyurl.com/kr2lv3o> as at 5 November 2014

‘Inadequacies’ of consultation criticised by Lords committee

A House of Lords committee has strongly criticised the very short consultation on the school regulations earlier this year.

The consultation on one key part of the regulations ran for just six weeks from 23 June to 4 August. This period overlapped with the school holidays – particularly for private schools, which often begin their summer break at the start of July.

In October the House of Lords scrutiny committee drew attention to the “inadequacies” of the Department for Education’s consultation process.

The committee rejected DfE claims that it had provided sufficient time for proper responses to be made.¹



Lord Goodlad chairs the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee, which criticised the consultation.

¹ Tenth Report, Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee, House of Lords, October 2014

New requirements to 'actively promote'...

...Equality Act protected characteristics

The Government's changes to the national school standards mean that all schools must now 'actively promote' the rights set out in the Equality Act.

For academies, free schools and private schools the changes are found in the Independent School Standards Regulations 2014. Ofsted has introduced the same standards for all other schools. The new standards will only be met if a school:

- (b) ensures that principles are actively promoted which—
 - ...
 - (vi) encourage respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010
 - ...

Extract from the Independent School Standards Regulations, September 2014.

The Bible clearly teaches that everyone is made in the image of God (Genesis 1) and so Christians must respect and love others, whatever their background. But the phrase "paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act" transforms the duty completely and could be used to suppress free speech. For example, it is often claimed that disagreeing with same-sex marriage shows disrespect for homosexuals.

The June 2014 consultation document also talks about a "failure to address homophobia" as being a ground for the Government to intervene in a school. The major religions teach that the family is based on man-woman marriage and that all sex outside marriage is wrong. Yet this is routinely labelled 'homophobia'. The new criteria mean that the Secretary of State would not need to go to court to close a school which fails to 'actively promote' equality.



Karl Schultz

...“fundamental British values”

The new rules also require all schools to 'actively promote' "fundamental British values" – but what does this mean in practice? The Department for Education says that:

...schools must actively promote the specified principles, including furthering tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions and encouraging respect for democracy. **A minimum approach, for example putting up posters on a notice board and organising an occasional visit to places of worship would fall short of 'actively promoting'.** Schools will be expected to focus on, and be able to show how their work with pupils is effective in embedding fundamental British values. **'Actively promote' also means challenging pupils, staff or parents expressing opinions contrary to fundamental British values.**

Extract from DfE consultation document on the Proposed New Independent School Standards [emphasis added].

Here the Government is even saying that schools should challenge parents who contradict its approach. Why should church schools be compelled to take pupils on tours of mosques at all? Where do these multi-faith requirements leave a teacher in a Christian school explaining the biblical belief that salvation is found in Christ alone? Everyone recognises that we live in a democracy and that there are many non-Christian religions in modern day Britain. But these different religions have different truth claims and cannot be all lumped together in a multi-faith mishmash. In particular, Christian schools, such as Trinity in Reading, must not be compelled to have acts of worship led by people who reject the Christian faith.



Glen Scott

Christians are not extremists

The Government says that the controversial school standards are needed to prevent 'extremism', but they have a far broader impact.

The public obviously supports government efforts to combat terrorism and the ideologies which support it. In December 2013 the Prime Minister's task force published *Tackling extremism in the UK*, aimed at "extremist

activity" which leads individuals "on a pathway towards terrorism". Among many recommendations, it called for pupils to be protected from "extremist material" and for action to stop schools being run by 'extremists'. However, David Cameron's task force cautioned that "Islamist extremism... is a distinct ideology which should not be confused with

traditional religious practice".¹

Yet the Department for Education's vague and sweeping new school standards fail to make this crucial distinction. The new criteria confuse the millions of socially conservative people in the country with Islamist extremists. An approach which places biblical beliefs on a par with those seeking to impose a global



David Cameron's task force published the report *Tackling extremism in the UK* in 2013.

Islamic state is not only offensive to Christians, but a direct threat to Britain's historic religious freedom.

¹ *Tackling extremism in the UK*, Report from the Prime Minister's Task Force on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism, December 2013, pages 1 and 5

Promoting secularism and intolerance



Colin Hart, Director

“ The new standards are causing alarm and confusion. Ministers have sometimes claimed the demands are merely to respect people's inherent dignity, which Christians would readily endorse. But in practice schools with a religious ethos have been ordered to promote beliefs and lifestyles contrary to their trust deed.

The Sunday Times has reported that: "Nicky Morgan, the education secretary, is to take on Britain's faith schools by ordering them to teach pupils to be tolerant of other religions and respect lesbian, gay and transgender relationships."¹

Evidence of what has already happened to Orthodox Jewish schools shows that the new rules are being used to compel religious believers to actively promote beliefs and lifestyles with which they profoundly disagree. There is vast scope for school inspectors to hassle individual schools, including any state or

private school with a Christian ethos.

The Government claims the changes are in response to the 'Trojan Horse' allegations in Birmingham. But it has now become clear that these school standards were in the pipeline in 2013 – long before the situation in Birmingham was uncovered in 2014.

The new rules are divisive and are a powerful tool to promote secularism. The sad irony is that they are promoting intolerance and disrespect for people with traditional religious beliefs.

¹ *The Sunday Times*, 2 November 2014



Nicky Morgan is to "take on Britain's faith schools".

New standards create conflict of laws

The new school standards, which apply to all schools in England, have created a conflict of laws. The recent invasive rules clash with the good legal framework laid down over many years.

The Equality Act 2010 stops schools from discriminating

against pupils in the provision of education but until now governments have carefully excluded the content of the school curriculum. The regulations break the seal around the curriculum for the first time.

Schools with a

religious ethos, e.g. church schools, are legally permitted to discriminate on grounds of religion or belief in order to maintain their ethos.¹ The law sets out the freedom they have to employ staff who share the ethos of the school.²

Such schools are expected to advance education in accordance with their trust deed or founding document. Church of England schools are expected to teach in accordance with C of E doctrine.

The new rules also clash with two sets of guidance issued in 2014. The Department for Education said in May: "No school, or individual teacher, is under a duty to support, promote or endorse marriage of same sex couples."

The Equality and Human Rights Commission says: "Teachers, other school staff, governors, parents and pupils are all free to hold whatever personal



views they choose on marriage of same sex couples, including a view that marriage should only be between a man and a woman."

¹ Equality Act 2010, Schedule 11(5)

² For example, School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Sections 58, 60, 124A and 124AA, and Equality Act 2010, Schedule 22(4)



PGCAP Programme

Christianity's vital influence on education

Christianity has formed the bedrock and basis of our nation's culture for centuries and has profoundly influenced much of what is 'British'. Our law, democratic process, institutions, architecture, literature and art cannot be properly understood without a knowledge of Christianity.

Christian churches were the first to provide mass education and have played a leading role in shaping our education system both prior to, and now alongside, involvement of the state.

The 1870 and 1944

Education Acts brought church schools into partnership with the state, but a central condition of the arrangement was that they retained control over their staffing and ethos.¹

Church schools are major providers of education in the school system. Today, almost one third of maintained schools in England have a religious character.²

Church schools are hugely popular with parents. Such schools should have the freedom to maintain a distinctively Christian ethos, promote the

relevance of Christianity to contemporary life and equip pupils for active engagement in society.

The new school standards threaten the freedom of schools with a religious ethos, whether state-funded or privately-funded, to uphold and promote their beliefs.

They are being used to foist a secular humanistic outlook on all schools.

¹ Dennis, N, *The Uncertain Trumpet*, Civitas, 2001

² 'Maintained faith schools', see <http://tinyurl.com/pfrnw7p> as at 5 November 2014



Darrin Henry

Jewish schoolgirls 'traumatised' by Ofsted questions on gay marriage

Jewish school pupils were left "traumatised" after being questioned by Ofsted, a school association has said.

The National Association of Orthodox Jewish Schools (NAJOS) said it was "appalled" by questions asked during surprise inspections at several Orthodox Jewish schools since the start of September. Inspectors asked pupils "hugely inappropriate" and "anti-religious" questions which left the students and staff "traumatised".¹

Girls in one secondary school were asked if they had boyfriends and whether they were aware that a man could marry another man. At an Orthodox primary school, one girl aged nine was asked if she



understood how babies were made and whether she knew any gay people.

One of the schools – Beis Yaakov High School for girls – has been placed into special measures and rebuked by Ofsted for failing to promote 'British values'.²

In a letter to the Education Secretary, NAJOS wrote that Jewish values and ethos are being questioned by inspectors in a climate of hostility

designed to unsettle the pupils at member schools.

The letter continued: "Our experience is that Ofsted are specifically trying to catch our pupils out and somehow prove that Jewish schools are non-inclusive. We fear that this is prompted by recent statements from DfE about faith schools and the associated media hype fuelled by the Accord Coalition and British Humanist Association who appear to have significant influence over government policy."

¹ Letter to the Education Secretary from NAJOS, 24 September 2014; *Jewish News*, 14 October 2014, see <http://www.jewishnews.co.uk/ofsted-bullying/> as at 16 October 2014

² Beis Yaakov High School, Ofsted school report, October 2014

Free speech

The Association of School and College Leaders has warned about the damaging implications for freedom of expression in schools.

It said teachers could become reluctant to discuss controversial topics, even if there were "no intention of stifling such discussion".

The regulations risk becoming "an intrusive burden" on schools, it argued, due to the vague definition of key terms.¹

¹ ASCL Response to consultation on Proposed New Independent School Standards, July 2014

Politicising the curriculum

Distinguished lawyer John Bowers QC has advised that the new regulations create "a danger that the curriculum becomes politicised".

The curriculum has previously been exempt from equality law so that people cannot sue over the content of lessons.¹ However, the regulations break this seal.

John Bowers QC points out that the new rules now impose duties to actively promote equality and may "affect the freedom of speech of teachers".

The standards radically transform school inspections. Rather than assessing "rigour and quality of education", he says that inspectors are drawn



John Bowers QC

into "policing" the promotion of equality law concepts.²

¹ Equality Act 2010, Section 89

² *Advice on the effect of proposed new independent school standards*, John Bowers QC, September 2014