

Evangelism in our schools versus celebrating diversity

Our state schools were set up as “free, compulsory and secular”, but their secularity has always been contested by missionary groups. A legal loophole was formalised in the 60’s to allow religious instruction. Since then, though, NZ has changed. We are now a religiously diverse, multicultural nation.



Nevertheless, roughly 40% of our state primary and intermediate schools still run religious instruction - almost exclusively Christian.

Children are separated in their own classrooms by their family’s faith so that the school can be used as a church during the normal school day.

Those who don’t attend can face harassment for their apparent non-belief, and many parents leave their child in for fear of the social consequences of opting out, or in preference to revealing their beliefs.

When a school board decides on a religion for their school, access to education is interrupted. Families rights and wishes to their own beliefs are not respected. Even Christian families are not being treated fairly as there is no “one size fits all” approach just as there is not just one type of church.

With our schools “self-governing” parents are often misled about what religious instruction is, or even kept in the dark that school closes once a week for believers to come and have influence on their child. We wouldn’t leave our children with door-knocking evangelists, yet there is no practical difference.



WATCH IT SPREAD

Use a large sheet of paper or the whiteboard to illustrate how a message would spread if each person told the message to two others.

Count how many people would have heard the message after seven lines have been completed.

For example:

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0
0 0
00 00
00 00 00 00
and so on.
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Challenge your students to tell two others, and keep the pattern going!

(From Bible in Schools “Connect”, A2, p147)

No Limit - No Oversight

Whilst involving children in bible stories and games can be done in a fun way, anything can be taught in religious instruction, including contempt for non-believers, as shown in the example below. Parents have also reported their children learning intolerance of diversity as they come home parroting that un-married parents and non-church goers will go to hell. Even the existence of dinosaurs has been questioned.



“Some of the seeds fell in a place where there were thorn bushes...”

Students mime ‘growing’ then being ‘choked’...

The seed that fell on the road reminds us of people who hear God’s message but they don’t..believe what they are told.”

From Bible in Schools syllabus “Connect” A2, pgs 26,27

Expert Reviews of Common RI courses:

“Parents and trustees are assured that the teaching is appropriate for a multicultural and multi-religious context ... but a review of the texts and teachers’ manuals makes it clear that this is not so.”

“... it is my considered and professional conclusion that collective Christian prayer to God and Jesus is inappropriate and likely objectionable to secular, non-Christian, and non-evangelical, conservative Christian parents and students.”

Paul Morris, Professor of Religious Studies
UNESCO Chair in Inter-religious Understanding and Relations in New Zealand and the Pacific



Who are the

Secular Education Network?

We are a group of mostly parents, but also grandparents, teachers and so on. We include a number of religious people both Christian and from minority faiths. What we all have in common is that:

*we object to the State promoting a particular religion

*we object to classes being divided into believers and non-believers

*and we don’t want our children to be captive audiences for evangelists whilst at school

We want all children to feel equally welcome at school regardless of faith, and for education about religion to be unbiased, un-pressured, and left to qualified teachers.