



Education Equality is a parent-led voluntary human rights group seeking to end religious discrimination in primary schools. We are campaigning for equal respect for children and for teachers in Irish taxpayer-funded primary schools. Currently in Ireland religious bodies run 95% of our state-funded primary schools. In those schools, religious indoctrination – the teaching of a single faith as fact – permeates the whole school day and the wider curriculum, such as in history and English.

CHILDREN

Children have a constitutional right to attend school without religious instruction (a 30-minute lesson every day plus prayer time, with more in second and sixth classes).

Schools are legally required to include details of arrangements for children opted out of religious instruction in their admissions policy, however an overwhelming majority do not. In practice, the right not to attend is not facilitated by schools and children are routinely forced to remain in the classroom absorbing religious lessons, made to accompany their classmates to religious worship and to be present for prayers and other religious activities.

When a child opts out of religious instruction, an equality issue arises, because often they are not receiving the same number of taught hours as students who attend religious instruction. Over the course of the school year, many of those students receive at least 100 fewer hours of education. They can also experience loneliness and isolation from their peers.

Education Equality is calling for religious faith formation, including sacramental preparation, to be moved to a class outside core school hours on an opt-in basis.

TEACHERS

Teachers in 95% of religious-run Irish primary schools are required to uphold and promote the ethos of the school, which includes teaching the religious curriculum, where one faith is taught as fact. In practice, this means teachers are required to teach and uphold the religious curriculum even where they are not of the same faith or any faith.

Current equality legislation allows for discrimination against teachers on religious grounds, meaning a teacher can legally be dismissed where he/she undermines the religious ethos of the school. As a result, many teachers feel they need to hide their marital status or sexuality in staff rooms.

In almost 90% of primary schools (under Catholic patronage), teachers are required to hold the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies which qualifies them to evangelise children into the Catholic faith. This is a barrier to both young people entering the profession and a barrier to current employment, noteworthy at the present time due to the teacher shortage crisis.

Education Equality is calling for the amendment of legislation to prohibit discrimination against teachers on religious grounds.

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