



Cumbria Humanist Group

Paul Pettinger on the BHA Anti-Faith Schools Campaign

**Meeting at Morton Community Centre, Wigton Road, Carlisle
on Wednesday, 16 September 2009 at 7.30 pm**

Controversy about faith-based schools and the teaching of religion has been rife over recent years. Although the established Church of England has been heavily involved in both the provision of schools and the training of teachers since the 1870 Education Act, the burgeoning of fundamentalist religion of all hues including Christianity, the emergence of faith-based privately funded academies, teaching creationism as fact, have all led many to believe that religion and education should be separated. The British Humanist Association has been a leader of this campaign, and Paul Pettinger of the BHA spoke to Cumbria Humanist Group on 16 September at Morton Community Centre about its progress.

Around a third of all state-funded schools are schools with a religious character or 'faith' schools, and this number is growing, with some minority religions and Christian denominations running new schools, or taking control of increasing numbers of schools in the state sector, or of academies. Faith schools are exclusive and divisive: despite claims of inclusiveness, many have control of their own admissions, creating school populations that are far from representative of their local populations in religious or socio-economic terms.

Many also discriminate in their recruitment and employment on religious grounds. Applicants can be rejected and teachers barred from promotion because they are not of the 'right' religion, or of no religion, or because of their sexual orientation. Teachers can also have their contracts terminated while in post if their conduct is deemed incompatible with the tenets of the school's religion. In addition, many faith schools teach their own RE syllabus which does not have to include learning about other religions or about humanism.

The campaign aims to end the proliferation of maintained faith schools and to see discrimination in admissions and employment in faith schools outlawed. It also seeks a comprehensive curriculum across all subjects, including beliefs and values, sex and relationships and citizenship, to be taught objectively in all schools. Ultimately all faith schools should be absorbed back into the secular schools sector, becoming inclusive community schools, where children and young people of all different backgrounds and beliefs can learn from and with each other.

In September 2008 BHA became a founding member of Accord, a new campaigning coalition for reform of faith schools, bringing together religious and non-religious supporters of change as well as teachers' unions and high profile supporters.

The next meeting of the Cumbria Humanist Group will be on 21 October, 7.30 p.m. at the Eden Rural Foyer, Penrith, when Iain Paterson, Chair of Cumbria Humanist Group, Trustee of the British Humanist Association and recently retired HM Inspector of Schools will talk about "School Inspections: Are They Fit for Purpose?"

If you are interested in Humanism, visit our website at www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk or telephone 01228 810592 or 01768 881245 for more information.

(463 words)

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