

RELIGION IN PUBLIC EDUCATION – UNITED KINGDOM

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Any account of public education in the UK has to take account of its composite (or quasi-federal) nature. Education in England is now the responsibility of the Department for Education. In Wales, where the schools system is broadly similar, education is a devolved responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government. Different systems are to be found in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

Facts and figures

Demography

As at January 2007, the latest date for which statistics are available for the whole country,¹ the number of pupils in each part of the UK was as follows:

England	8,149,176
Wales	489,069
Scotland	723,196
Northern Ireland	329,619

In each case there has been a slight decline, in line with the overall population trend.

Systems of schools provision

The types of schools found in each part of the UK reflect historical differences.

In England and Wales the Church of England² was for many centuries the main provider of education. The Elementary Education Act 1870 made the first provision for the establishment of state schools provided by local schools boards in those areas, principally large conurbations, where existing Church provision was inadequate. Most schools are now ‘maintained schools’ funded in whole or part by the 172 local education authorities (LEAs), usually the elected County or District Council, and required to follow the national curriculum. They fall into 4 categories:

‘community schools’ owned and managed by the LEA;

¹ The English statistics are from *The Composition of Schools in England* (Department for Children, Schools and Families Statistical Bulletin, June 2008); those for Wales from *Schools in Wales: General Statistics 2009* (Welsh Assembly Government); for Scotland from the website of the Scottish Government; for Northern Ireland from that of the Department of Education, Northern Ireland.

² There is now a distinct (Anglican) Church in Wales but until 1920 its dioceses were part of the Church of England.

‘voluntary controlled schools’ almost always church schools, with the church owning the property but the LEA employing the staff and controlling admissions;

‘voluntary aided schools’, again usually church schools, where there is some financial contribution to the capital costs of the school by the church, which appoints a majority of the governors who employ the staff and control admissions;

‘foundation schools’, rather similar but here the capital costs are fully funded by the state and the church or other charitable body has only a minority of governors.

There are some other types of maintained schools, notably ‘special schools’ catering for children with disabilities or learning difficulties.

There is at present a small number of ‘academies’ which are free from LEA control and are funded directly by central Government. The first Academies opened in 2002 and there are currently 203 of which 53 have a faith designation. The Government elected in May 2010 has introduced legislation (the Academies Act 2010) which enables almost all schools to apply to become academies.

The table shows the numbers of the main types of schools in England. All three and four year olds are entitled to 12.5 hours of free early education for 38 weeks of the year; this entitlement may be used at one of the 448 maintained nursery schools or at a school or pre-school in the private sector.

	Comm'ty	Found'n	Vol aided	Vol control'd	Total maintained	Independent
Primary (5-11)	10,726	362	3,731	2,542	17,361	(all types)
Secondary (11-18)	2,112	564	554	113	3,343	2,284
Special	Detail not available				1,006	

Church of England schools, mainly in the primary sector, account for 2,100 voluntary aided schools and 2,500 voluntary controlled schools. There are about 2,000 Roman Catholic schools, almost all voluntary aided; of these some 350 are secondary schools, where the Church of England has rather fewer.

In *Scotland*, the Church of Scotland was the main provider until the Education (Scotland) Act 1872 which placed its schools under local school boards which also built additional schools. Roman Catholic schools remained outside the state system until 1918 but are now publicly funded in the same way as other schools. There are (2010) 2,692 public schools in Scotland, 418 being Catholic schools, and 159 independent schools.

The pattern in *Northern Ireland* is of ‘controlled schools’ in which the staff are appointed by one of the five Education and Library Boards in the Province, and a roughly equal number of ‘maintained schools’ in which the staff are employed by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.

The National Curriculum

All maintained schools in England must follow the National Curriculum. The new Government has announced that it intends to loosen the requirements to allow teachers more freedom, but what follows states the position as at June 2010. The Curriculum is organised in 4 'Key Stages', two for the primary years (5-11) and two for the secondary years (11-18). It includes attainment targets, outline programmes of study and (controversially) assessment arrangements. For the first, second and third key stages, the National Curriculum has three 'core' subjects', mathematics, English, and science, and additional 'foundation' subjects, design and technology, information and communication technology, physical education, history, geography, art and design, music, and in relation to the third key stage citizenship and a modern foreign language.³ The primary stages of the National Curriculum also include non-statutory material on Personal, Social and Health Education. There are fewer prescribed foundation subjects for Key Stage 4.

RELIGION AS A SUBJECT OF INSTRUCTION AND ITS SUBSTITUTES

England and Wales

It will be seen that religious education is not part of the National Curriculum. That is, however, merely because the curriculum for that subject is prescribed locally and not nationally. Every maintained school in England must follow a 'basic curriculum' which includes the subjects of the National Curriculum, provision for religious education for all registered pupils at the school and in the case of a secondary school, provision for sex education for all registered pupils at the school.⁴

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 imposes a duty on the local education authority, the governing body of the school and its head teacher to secure that religious education is provided.⁵ The nature of the religious education depends on whether or not the school is designated as having 'a religious character'.⁶ A school must be so designated on application if (a) at least one member of the governing body of the school is a person appointed as a foundation governor to represent the interests of one or more religions or religious denominations; or (b) the premises provided for the school when first established were so provided on trust so that, in the event of the discontinuance of the school, the property concerned was to be held for, or sold and the proceeds of sale applied for, the benefit of one or more religions or religious denominations; or (c) the premises provided for the school when first established were so provided on trust in connection with the provision of education, or the conduct of an educational institution, in accordance with the tenets of one or more religions or religious denominations.⁷

Where the school does *not* have a religious character, the religious education follows the local 'agreed syllabus'. The local syllabus for religious education is agreed under a procedure

³ Education Act 2002, s 84 as amended.

⁴ Education Act 2002, s 80. There are similar arrangements in Wales, with minor variations.

⁵ School Standards and Framework Act 1998, s 69.

⁶ School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Sch 19.

⁷ Religious Character of Schools (Designation Procedure) Regulations 1998, SI 1998/2535, reg 5.

now set out in the Education Act 1996 though the system dates from 1944. Every agreed syllabus must

‘reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain’.⁸

Each local education authority has a standing advisory council on religious education (SACRE).⁹ Apart from some co-opted and non-voting members, the council consists of four representative groups: a group of persons to represent the Church of England; a group of persons ‘to represent such [other] Christian denominations and other religions and denominations of such religions as, in the opinion of the authority, will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area’; a group of persons to represent teachers’ associations; and a group of persons to represent the authority. Each group has one vote, which means that three of the four groups must be in favour of any proposal. The council advises the authority on religious education matters and also advises the authority on religious worship in community schools or in foundation schools other than those which ‘have a religious character’. If the local agreed syllabus is to be reviewed a ‘conference’ is convened, with the same groups as are represented on the council; to adopt the syllabus a unanimous decision is required, so that (for example) the Church of England representatives must assent.¹⁰

Where the school *does* have a religious character, the religious education will in practice be in accordance with the tenets of the relevant religion or religious denomination. In the case of voluntary aided schools, this is the case unless the parents of children at the school ask for the local ‘agreed syllabus’. In other schools that syllabus is to be used unless the parents ask (as they usually will) for education in accordance with the tenets of the religion, which means the syllabus set by the church or faith concerned, and such education must be provided but for not more than two periods in each week.¹¹

Non-statutory guidance published by the relevant Government department makes these points:

The study of religion should be based on the legal requirements and provide an appropriate balance between and within Christianity, other principal religions, and, where appropriate other religious traditions and worldviews, making appropriate links with other parts of the curriculum.

Not all religions need to be studied at the same depth or in each key stage, but all that are studied should be studied in a way that is coherent and promotes progression.

Pupils should have the opportunity to learn that there are those who do not hold religious beliefs and have their own philosophical perspectives.

The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) published in June 2010 a report *Transforming Religious Education: Religious Education in Schools 2006–9*. Some of its findings were:

⁸ Education Act 1996, s 375(3).

⁹ See Education Act 1996, s 390ff.

¹⁰ Education Act 1996, Sch 31.

¹¹ The Education Act 2005 contains provisions applying to schools designated as having a religious character requiring the inspection of any denominational education given to pupils, and the content of the school's collective worship: Education Act 2005, s 47ff.

Pupils' achievement in RE in primary schools was good or outstanding in 40% of schools and was inadequate in only 10%. Students' achievement in RE in the secondary schools showed a very mixed picture. It was good or outstanding in 45% but was inadequate in 16%. Most of the secondary schools in the survey with sixth forms did not fully meet the statutory requirement to provide core RE for all students beyond the age of 16.

RE made a positive contribution to key aspects of pupils' personal development, most notably in relation to the understanding and appreciation of the diverse nature of British society. However, the subject's contribution to promoting pupils' spiritual development was often limited.

There is uncertainty among many teachers of RE about what they are trying to achieve in the subject resulting in a lack of well-structured and sequenced teaching and learning, substantial weaknesses in the quality of assessment and a limited use of higher order thinking skills to promote greater challenge.

There were a number of specific weaknesses in the teaching about Christianity. Many primary and secondary schools visited did not pay sufficient attention to the progressive and systematic investigation of the core beliefs of Christianity. There were significant inconsistencies in the way humanism and other non-religious beliefs were taught, and some uncertainties about the relationship between fostering respect for pupils' beliefs and encouraging open, critical, investigative learning in RE.

The effectiveness of specialist staff training in RE was inadequate in 40% of the schools visited. They were not giving sufficient time and resources to support teachers' professional development in the subject. The effectiveness of local arrangements to support RE varied too much and many local authorities did not ensure that their Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education had sufficient capacity to fulfil their responsibilities effectively.

Scotland

There is no statutory curriculum in Scotland. A Government-sponsored *Curriculum for Excellence* project provides recent guidance including material on 'religious and moral education'.

Northern Ireland

Legislation for Northern Ireland in effect applies the English provisions.¹²

RELIGIOUSLY MOTIVATED BEHAVIOUR

Religion within the working conditions of teachers and other staff

England

There are rules in England as to the appointment and dismissal of certain 'reserved' teachers at foundation or voluntary controlled schools which have a religious character. Where the number of teachers is more than two, the teachers must include persons who are selected for their fitness and competence to give religious education in accordance with the school's trust deed or with the tenets of the school's specified religion or religious denomination, and are specifically appointed to do so. The number of reserved teachers must not exceed one-fifth of the total number of teachers. The appointment of reserved teachers requires the approval of the foundation governors. If the foundation governors of such a school consider that a reserved teacher has failed to give the required religious education efficiently and suitably, they can secure his or her dismissal.¹³ In connection with the appointment of a person to be head teacher

¹² Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006.

¹³ School Standards and Framework Act 1998, s 58.

of the school, where the head teacher is not to be a reserved teacher, regard may be had to that person's ability and fitness to preserve and develop the religious character of the school.¹⁴

Other teachers and staff (teachers in schools of a religious character who are *not* reserved teachers, and all teachers and other staff at other schools) are protected by anti-discrimination provisions. No-one may be disqualified by reason of his or her religious opinions,¹⁵ or of attending or omitting to attend religious worship, from being a teacher, or from being employed or engaged for the purposes of the school otherwise than as a teacher. No teacher may be required to give religious education. No teacher may receive any less remuneration or be deprived of, or disqualified for, any promotion or other advantage by reason of the fact that he or she does or does not give religious education, or by reason of his or her religious opinions or of attending or omitting to attend religious worship.¹⁶

A very different régime applies in the case of a voluntary aided school. There, preference may be given, in connection with the appointment, remuneration and promotion of teachers at the school, to persons

- (a) whose religious opinions are in accordance with the tenets of the relevant religion or religious denomination, or
- (b) who attend religious worship in accordance with those tenets, or who give, or are willing to give, religious education at the school in accordance with those tenets.

What is more, regard may be had, in connection with the termination of the employment of any teacher at such a school, to any conduct on his or her part which is incompatible with the precepts, or with the upholding of the tenets, of that religion or religious denomination.¹⁷

Scotland

In Scotland, legislation dating from 1918 but now in section 21(1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 makes special provision for 'denominational schools'. Section 21(2A) provides that

A teacher appointed to any post on the staff of any such school by the education authority shall satisfy the Secretary of State as to qualification, and shall be required to be approved as regards his religious belief and character by representatives of the church or denominational body in whose interest the school has been conducted.

Apart from three Anglican schools and one Jewish school, this applies to the Catholic schools and in effect gives the bishop of the relevant Catholic diocese control over the appointment of teachers.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland there is no equivalent legislation and so no requirement of episcopal approval of appointments in Catholic schools.

¹⁴ School Standards and Framework Act 1998, s 60(4).

¹⁵ See *Ahmad v Inner London Education Authority* [1978] QB 36, CA (under earlier legislation: the appellant teacher was not allowed to absent himself to attend Friday prayers at the mosque; he resigned and claimed unfair dismissal; held that he was not entitled to attend religious worship during school hours and that the employers had acted reasonably).

¹⁶ School Standards and Framework Act 1998, s 59.

¹⁷ School Standards and Framework Act 1998, s 60(5).

Religious garments

There have been several cases about the wearing of 'religious' items by school girls.

*R (Begum) v Headteacher and Governors of Denbigh High School*¹⁸ concerned the *jilbab* which the claimant wished to wear. The school allowed Muslim, Hindu and Sikh girls to wear the *Shalwar Kameeze* and the claimant had formerly done so. She now claimed that only a long coat-like garment, referred to in the judgment as the *jilbab*, would satisfy her religious beliefs. Her claim failed on the ground that she had never been 'excluded' from school in the sense of the relevant legislation but Bennett J also rejected an argument based on art 9 of the ECHR as what was in issue was the girl's refusal to respect the school uniform policy rather than her religious beliefs as such.

A rather similar result was reached in a case about the wearing of the *niqab* veil, *R (X) v Y School*.¹⁹ There were 120 Muslim girls in the school; none wore the *niqab*, although X's older sisters had done so when they were in the school some years before. Again the art 9 issue was side-stepped, as X could easily have moved to an equally good school nearby where the *niqab* was allowed.

Article 9 was considered again in *R (Playfoot) v Governing Body of Millais School*.²⁰ The claimant started to wear a 'purity' ring in breach of the school's uniform policy. She argued that she was a committed Christian with a genuine belief that she should remain sexually abstinent before marriage and that the ring was a sign of that belief. The court held that the act of wearing a ring was not intimately linked to the belief in chastity before marriage, so as to show that the wearing of the ring was a manifestation of the religious belief. Accordingly, art 9 was not engaged.

In *R (Watkins-Singh) v Governing Body of Aberdare Girls' High School*²¹ the article in question was the *kara*, a small plain steel bangle worn by Sikhs as a visible sign of their identity and faith. The applicant, a girl in a Welsh school, was refused permission to wear the *kara*, on the grounds that it contravened the school's policy forbidding jewellery. She succeeded, not on the basis of art 9 but under the UK's anti-discrimination legislation: there was held to be indirect discrimination on the ground of race under the Race Relations Act 1976 and on the ground of religion under the Equality Act 2006. Silber J went out of his way to describe his judgment as 'fact-sensitive' and not laying down any more general rule about the *kara*.

Religious worship in schools

It is quite common for schools to make use of the local parish church (Church of England or as appropriate) for an annual carol service in the weeks before Christmas, and some schools attend on other occasions during the year. England and Wales are probably unusual in having legal requirements as to worship in schools.

¹⁸ [2006] UKHL 15, [2007] 1 AC 100.

¹⁹ [2007] EWHC 298 (Admin), [2008] 1 All ER 249.

²⁰ [2007] EWHC 1698 (Admin), [2007] 3 FCR 754.

²¹ [2008] EWHC 1865 (Admin), [2008] 3 FCR 203.

Section 70(1) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 lays down the general rule that each pupil in attendance at a community, foundation or voluntary school must on each school day take part in an act of collective worship. However, a parent, or in the case of a sixth-form pupil the pupil, may ask to be excused from attendance at religious worship at the school, and the request must be complied with.²² The act of collective worship may consist of a single act of worship for all pupils or separate acts of worship for pupils in different age groups or in different school groups.²³

As regards the nature of the worship, it must be ‘wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character’, which means that it must reflect the broad traditions of Christian belief without being distinctive of any particular Christian denomination. Not every act of collective worship need comply with this ‘broadly Christian’ requirement, provided that, taking any school term as a whole, most such acts which take place in the school do comply.²⁴ In the case of a foundation school which has a religious character or a voluntary school, the required collective worship must be in accordance with the tenets and practices of the relevant religion or religious denomination.²⁵ Local clergy are often involved in taking ‘school assemblies’.

In certain cases, the requirement for Christian collective worship is waived. This requires a decision by the local standing advisory council on religious education after a process which involves the head teacher and the governing body of the school and a consultation exercise with the parents. The council is to have regard to any circumstances relating to the family backgrounds of the pupils at the school, or of the pupils of the particular class or description in question, which are relevant for determining the character of the collective worship appropriate in their case.²⁶

The position in *Scotland* is broadly similar. A Scottish Executive circular in 2005 said:

In recognition of Scotland's Christian heritage, schools are encouraged to use the rich resources of this tradition when planning religious observance.

Many school communities contain pupils and staff from faiths other than Christianity or with no faith commitment. This should be taken fully into account in supporting spiritual development. It is of central importance that all pupils and staff can participate with integrity in forms of religious observance without compromise to their personal faith stances.

Religious tests for admission

Church schools of all types are popular with parents and often receive more applications for admission than there are places available. It is often said that parents will attend church solely to enhance their children's chances of admission to a popular Church school.

²² School Standards and Framework Act 1998, s 71.

²³ School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Sch 20, para 2(2).

²⁴ School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Sch 20, para 3.

²⁵ School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Sch 20, para 5.

²⁶ Education Act 1996, s 394.

A case illustrating aspects of the law dealing with this situation was decided in 2004.²⁷ The London Oratory School is a distinguished school expecting its pupils to be fully committed and practising members of the Roman Catholic Church. It had always used interviews as part of the selection process but a Code of Practice Relating to School Admissions issued in February 2003 by the Secretary of State for Education provided that church schools could not interview parents and/or prospective pupils for the purpose of ‘assessing religious or denominational commitment where this is provided for in their admission arrangements’. Under section 84 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, the governors of the school were required to ‘have regard to’ the Code. For admission in 2005, the governors decided to retain the interview system to test the religious practice and commitment of parents and pupils. This decision was challenged by a primary school and quashed by the ‘Schools Adjudicator’. Her decision was reversed by the High Court.

That court noted that ‘have regard to’ did not make the Code strictly binding on the school. The adjudicator’s view that the inclusion of questions about the Ten Commandments and Scriptures were inappropriate topics for discussion in an interview to determine catholicity was rejected as unreasonable. On the other hand an attempt to base an argument on behalf of the parents in the case on Article 2 of Protocol 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights failed: the parents all had a right to secure education for their children at schools which conformed with their Catholic faith, but this could not be elevated to a right to be educated at the Oratory School.

A case, which attracted much public attention, concerned admission to another over-subscribed school known as JFS, derived from its earlier name the Jewish Free School.²⁸ It was the policy of the school to give preference to those whose status as Jews was recognised by the Office of the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregation of the Commonwealth. The child whose parents sought admission had a Jewish father and his mother, by origin an Italian Roman Catholic, had converted to Judaism but not via an Orthodox synagogue. Under Jewish law as applied by the Chief Rabbi, the child was not Jewish and was refused admission. He claimed unlawful race discrimination, contrary to the Race Relations Act 1976. By a majority, the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom upheld his claim, finding direct discrimination on grounds of ethnic origins. The minority held that the exclusion had been based on religious and not racial grounds, but Lord Hope and Lord Walker found indirect discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin.

Corporal punishment

Corporal punishment is prohibited in schools in England.²⁹ A group of Christian parents sought judicial review of this provision. They argued that a belief in this form of discipline was part of their religious belief and to prevent them using it (in an independent school)

²⁷ *Governing Body of the London Oratory School v The Schools Adjudicator* [2004] EWHC 3014 (Admin); [2005] ELR 162.

²⁸ *R (on the application of E) (respondent) v Governing Body of JFS* [2009] UKSC 15. It attracted interventions by the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the British Humanist Association, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families.

²⁹ Education Act 1996, s 548(1).

breached their rights under art 9 of the European Convention.³⁰ The House of Lords recognised that art 9 was engaged, but held that the legislation pursued a legitimate aim in that children were vulnerable and the aim of the legislation was to protect them and promote their wellbeing. The means chosen to achieve that aim were appropriate and not disproportionate.

OPTING OUT OF SCHOOL OBLIGATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS REASONS

Religious holidays

In England, section 444 of the Education Act 1996 provides that a child is not to be taken to have failed to attend regularly at the school by reason of his absence from the school on any day exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which his parent belongs. There are no modern cases on this provision, but in *Marshall v Graham*³¹ it was held that Ascension Day was a day exclusively set apart for religious observance by the Church of England. It was immaterial that the only observance would be attendance at one service. In practice, there are some cities with large non-Christian populations where schools are allowed to close on certain days, usually Guru Nanak's birthday, the first day of Eid-ul-Fitr and Diwali. Schools will seek to accommodate other types of case, eg where the Orthodox dates for Christmas or Easter fall in the school term.

Opting out of religious instruction

If the parent of a pupil at a community, foundation or voluntary school requests that the pupil may be wholly or partly excused from receiving religious education in accordance with the school's basic curriculum, the pupil must be so excused.³² If the parent of such a pupil desires the pupil to receive religious education of a kind which is not provided in the school, then on certain conditions the pupil may be withdrawn from the school to receive that alternative religious education.³³

Opting out of physical education etc

The Muslim Council of Britain has asked that Muslim schoolchildren be given separate changing rooms for sports and swimming and single-sex classes for sex education but these requests have not been met. In one area, Ealing in London, the local standing advisory council on religious education has recommended a specially-designed swimming costume for Muslim girls which consists of a tunic and long trousers, but this attracted some derision in the national press.

Opting out of biology and sex education

There is a limited provision in section 405 of the Education Act 1996 that if the parent of any pupil in attendance at a maintained school requests that the pupil be wholly or partly excused from receiving sex education at the school, the pupil must, except so far as such education is

³⁰ *R (on the application of Williamson and others) v Secretary of State for Education and Employment* [2005] UKHL 15, [2005] 2 All ER 1.

³¹ [1907] 2 KB 112, DC (decided under earlier legislation dating from 1870).

³² Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998, s 71(1).

³³ Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998, s 71(3).

comprised in the National Curriculum, be so excused accordingly until the request is withdrawn. Some 0.04% of parents choose to exercise this right. In fact sex and relationship education is not a compulsory part of the National Curriculum; schools have to provide sex education but its content is not prescribed. In 2009, the then Government announced that 'sex and relationships education' would come within the National Curriculum with a prescribed content, and the opt-out would only apply in respect of children until their 15th birthday. It was also proposed that schools having a religious character, while obliged to deal with such issues as same-sex relationships and contraception, would still be able to ensure that the classes reflected the religious ethos of the school. These proposals were heavily criticised (from all sides) and were abandoned in order to get other aspects of the legislation approved before the dissolution of Parliament in April 2010. The new Government is reviewing the National Curriculum and has not made detailed announcements on this topic.

Government guidance is that creationism should not be taught in schools science lessons. This does not prevent private schools teaching creationism and Sir Peter Vardy established in 1990 the Emmanuel Schools Foundation which has opened four academies in the northeast of England said to have this practice.

Home-schooling

The law requires parents to ensure their children receive full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude, but this obligation can be met by the parents, or tutors employed by them, instead of sending the child to a school. This does not seem to be discouraged; indeed an official website (directgov) points out that 'you do not need to be a qualified teacher to educate your child at home; your child is not obliged to follow the National Curriculum or take national tests; you do not need special permission from a school or local authority to educate your child at home, but you do need to notify the school in writing if you're taking your child out of school; you do not need to observe school hours, days or terms; you do not need to have a fixed timetable, nor give formal lessons; and some local authorities provide guidance for parents, including free National Curriculum materials'. A proposal that education at home would have to be approved and registered by the local authority was made by the then Government in 2009 but did not become law. Although some parents opt for home-schooling for religious reasons, it is not possible to quantify this; other reasons, such as bullying of a child or general dissatisfaction with the school provision may be more important.