

'Atheists' handbook' sent to every secondary school



An 'Atheists' Handbook' is being sent to every secondary school in England and Wales to be placed in their library, amid a continued furore over the role of religion in educational establishments.

The book, by science teacher Alom Shaha, tells the story of his upbringing in a Bangladeshi Muslim community in south east London, how he overcame his inner conflict about atheism and the secular moral principles he uses in his life.

"Nationally, most young people have non-religious beliefs and values. However, in a large number of schools, pupils only have access to a number of religious perspectives on life's bigger questions, and not to the humanist ones that most non-religious people in Britain share," BHA head of education Sara Passmore said.

"Alom's book will help schools to be places where pupils can encounter the broad range of religious and non-religious world views in modern Britain."

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The book has been praised by secular and religious commentators as a thoughtful meditation on spirituality and morality, but it comes during a heightened period of debate about the role of religion in school.

Exam regulator Ofqual imposed the ban on redacting exam questions last month after it emerged that a Jewish state school had been blacking out GCSE science questions on evolution.

State primary schools in England will soon have evolution added to the new national curriculum.

The National Association of Orthodox Jewish Schools has warned that the changes could lead some of its schools to seek safety in the private sector so they can keep on teaching creationism outside of religious studies.

Earlier this year, Alice Roberts, president of the Association for Science Education, suggested restrictions on creationism should be expanded to the private sector.

The drive toward getting the atheists' handbook into schools is part of a larger campaign by humanist groups to maintain schools as places to explore faith, rather than instruct pupils in the beliefs of those running the establishment.

Ian Dunt - Politics - uk