

Pupils to be taught Judaism as ‘second religion’



THE CATHOLIC Education Service (CES) has defended its decision to advise church schools to teach Judaism rather than Islam as a second religion at GCSE. Its comments came in the same week that a group of parents sued the government because the reformed curriculum excludes humanism.

Reforms to GCSE RS mean that schools are now required to teach two religions for the exam rather than just one, a measure intended to prevent extremist teaching in the wake of the “Trojan Horse” plot, in which some staff and governors were found to have introduced fundamentalist Islamic principles at Muslim schools in Birmingham.

A spokesman for the CES said that ultimately the choice of second religion was at the discretion of the local bishop, but added that it expected most would choose Judaism “because that is the most compatible with the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales RE curriculum directory.”

“At the moment nearly all Catholic schools teach 100 per cent Catholic Christianity, and this is changing to 75 per cent Catholic Christianity and 25 per cent one other religion,” said the spokesman.

Sir Iqbal Sacranie, former secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain, criticised the decision not to teach Islam as a second faith, despite its being the second largest faith in the UK. He said the decision undermined Pope Francis’ message of greater tolerance between the faiths. But Paul Barber, director of the CES, said that children at Catholic schools would still learn about Islam.

“Just because our pupils are not being examined on faiths other than Christianity and Judaism, it doesn’t mean they’re not learning about them,” he said.

“It is because our pupils have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith that they are able to be more accepting of others with different faiths.”

Many Catholic schools have a significant number of children from an Islamic background: one, the Rosary Catholic Primary in Birmingham, has more than 90 per cent Muslim pupils.

Three parents this week launched a judicial review of the government’s decision to exclude humanism

from the RS curriculum. David Wolfe QC, acting for the families, told Mr Justice Warby at the High Court on Tuesday that the curriculum was being “skewed”.

Lawyers for the Education Secretary Nicky Morgan argued that neither statutory provisions, nor the European Convention on Human Rights, require equal consideration to be given to religious and non-religious views in the curriculum.

Judgment was reserved.

Paul Wilkinson - The Tablet