

Strong support for teaching of Christianity in schools



Almost two-thirds of adults say they support the teaching of Christianity in schools, according to a survey by Oxford University.

In the poll of 1,800 people, two-fifths said teaching about the faith needed more attention in religious education lessons.

People were asked whether they want the majority religion taught in schools, and the outcome shows that the majority, 64 per cent, support teaching Christianity to pupils to help them understand English history.

The survey was part of Oxford's department of education's new project seeking to support teachers in the presentation of Britain's principal religion in religious education lessons.

While 43 per cent of those surveyed said more attention should be given to teaching about Christianity in religious lessons, 37 per cent said many religious education teachers do not know enough about Christianity to be able to teach it effectively.

Asked which topics of Christianity children should be taught about, 58 per cent said history of Christianity, 56 per cent said knowledge about major festivals such as Easter and Christmas, and 51 per cent said the Christian way of telling right from wrong.

What's more, over a third, 38 per cent, said the Bible should be taught in school, and 30 per cent said pupils should be taught the Lord's Prayer.

Religious education is compulsory in state schools for pupils aged five to 16.

The Department of Education said inspectors have raised concerns about how religious education is taught in schools. "One problem identified in research literature is that teachers are sometimes nervous about tackling issues related to Christianity because they are worried that it could be considered as evangelising."

John Keast, chairman of the Religious Education Council of England and Wales, also said inspection reports show that the teaching of Christianity is too weak. "Research and training are key to improving the teaching of all aspects of RE [religious education], but with opportunities for teachers of RE to access good quality training now being so cut back, this initiative is a welcome step forward," The Telegraph quoted him as saying.

The survey results show that while the government shies away from the country's Christian roots and has been overcautious that it must not be seen as "cultural imperialist", people are being deprived of the Christian education they are looking for.

Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, the first Muslim woman to serve in the Cabinet, recently said Britain should become a country where people are not ashamed of saying they are Christians.

"We need to create a country in which people can be unashamedly proud of their faith – where they don't feel that they have to leave religion at the door," Baroness Warsi said in an article in Daily Telegraph. "That means being proud of Christianity, not downgrading it."

Clerical Whispers