

Correspondence between the BHA and DfE concerning creationist nurseries receiving state funds

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From: **Richy Thompson** <richy@humanism.org.uk>

Date: 8 March 2013 14:23

Subject: Government funding for places at creationist nurseries

To: PCU.CORRESPONDENCE@education.gsi.gov.uk

To whom it may concern,

I was alarmed to have a recent Ofsted inspection of Camel Christian School in Bristol brought to my attention because it says that state funding is going to creationist nurseries.

The inspection is the most recent one at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/132774>

This says that "Currently there are 17 boys and 23 girls on roll; **this number includes 17 children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, all of whom receive government funding.** Twelve of these children attend part time. The school is run on Christian principles and provides a curriculum with a significant emphasis on Bible teaching. The curriculum is taught through Packets of Accelerated Christian Education (PACEs)." (emphasis added)

Accelerated Christian Education schools are private creationist schools which were recently covered in the TES at <http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6259996>

The recent release by the DfE of a list of all groups which applied to set up Free Schools in the first three waves revealed that 9 Accelerated Christian Education proposals had been submitted for Free Schools (including a "Christian Education Europe Ltd" entry - i.e. multiple applications grouped as one). Thankfully, the DfE rejected all of these proposals, because of their creationist beliefs.

For this reason we are particularly concerned to see that Government funding is going to these same groups at nursery stage. I was wondering therefore if you could explain to me what the Government's policy is on which groups can receive these funds, and what its policy is on state funds supporting creationist nurseries.

I would also appreciate it if you could explain to me the routes through which such funds reach providers. Am I right in thinking that most of it goes via local authorities but some goes via parents? In addition, what powers does the Government have to prevent the funds going to certain groups - be they creationist, extremist Muslim or Charedi Jewish?

Best wishes,

Richy Thompson

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From: <Unmonitored.ACCOUNT@education.gsi.gov.uk>

Date: 5 April 2013 08:02

Subject: Department for Education response: Case Reference 2013/0016632

To: richy@humanism.org.uk

Dear Mr Thompson

Thank you for your email of 8 March, regarding Carmel Christian School in Bristol and the Government's policy in relation to the teaching of Creationism in funded education settings.

The Government's general policy on the teaching of creationism in independent schools is that the matter involves important philosophical issues about the right of parents to bring up their children as they see fit. Provided it is clear to parents, independent schools are free to teach creationism and other types religious teachings. The content and manner of such teaching must comply with the independent school standards, including the standard on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils, which requires schools to promote, amongst other things, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs, and must not breach any other applicable laws, e.g. by inciting hatred or discriminating against certain groups in society.

You have raised particular concerns about Carmel Christian School and the delivery of Government funded early education places to 17 children in the early years. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is the statutory framework that sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. The EYFS ensures that children are taught a broad range of knowledge and skills that provide a good foundation for future success at school and through life. You will note that Carmel Christian School teaches the EYFS and is considered by Ofsted to be rated 'good', with 'outstanding' aspects in respect of its early years provision.

Funded early education providers must be fully compliant with the EYFS – as set out in regulations made under section 7 of the Childcare Act 2006. This places a duty on local authorities to secure sufficient early education places for all children aged three and four years of age in England. Early education providers receive funding to deliver places directly from their local authority and no money is channelled through parents. Central Government encourages local authorities to prioritise this funding to the highest quality early education provision available and to support maximum parental choice by funding all eligible providers that meet the quality requirements.

Carmel Christian School is a registered independent school, which complies fully with the EYFS; as evidenced by its recent Ofsted inspection judgement. On this basis, the local authority has decided that it is eligible to receive Government funding to deliver early education places.

If the Department became aware of any evidence that the early education being delivered in any provider was detrimental to the wellbeing of the children enrolled, the Secretary of State has the

power to ask Ofsted to undertake an inspection and Ofsted would take regulatory action if the school is failing to meet the EYFS. No such evidence has been brought to the Secretary of State's attention is the case of the Carmel Christian School.

Thank you for taking the time to write to me on this matter.

Your correspondence has been allocated reference number 2013/0016632. If you need to respond to us, please visit: www.education.gov.uk/contactus and quote your reference number.

As part of our commitment to improving the service we provide to our customers, we are interested in hearing your views and would welcome your comments via our website

at: www.education.gov.uk/pcusurvey

Yours sincerely

Ministerial and Public Communications Division

www.education.gov.uk



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