

Submission for the New Zealand Universal Periodic Review

Religious Instruction and Observances in State Schools

Secular Education Network (SEN)

Facebook: Secular Education Network (NZ)

Website: www.religioninschools.co.nz

Media & Central Auckland Group: David Hines – media@sen.org.nz

Alternative email: christchurch@sen.org.nz

Humanist Society of New Zealand

P.O. Box 3372

Wellington, 6140

New Zealand

contact@humanist.org.nz

Author: Tanya Jacob

7 June 2018



Contents:

- Page 2. Introduction (equivalent of page 1 - total of 10 pages numbered 2-11)
2. Definition of terms - religious observances
 - religious instruction
 - religious education
 - (secular)
 3. The Secular Education Network
 3. The current legal situation
 3. Hidden government review confirms that education processes are discriminatory
 4. Government reluctance to address religious instruction (RI)
 4. How does religious instruction affect our State schools?
 - how many schools run RI? Is it opt in or opt out?
 5. - features of religious instruction
 6. - what discrimination is suffered as a result of religious instruction (RI)?
 7. No oversight by the Ministry of Education
 8. Repeal of religious instruction legislation is crucial (and extending secular protection)
 9. New Zealand's cultural makeup and attitudes
 10. Would religious instruction be allowed to start in our schools today?
 10. Conclusion - coercion, exclusion, denigration, reduced access to education, Endorsement - all entirely unnecessary
 11. - Recommendations (equivalent of page 10)

Annexes:

- *Compliance with Human Rights Act 1993; Ministry of Education Legislation and Policy (Feb, 2001)*
- *Article: "Ministry report: no defence for religion in schools"*
- *Education and Science Select Committee Report: religious instruction and observances in State schools, 2005*
- *Baptist Newsletter: Education: The Bible belongs in schools (Sept, 2011)*
- *Census 2013: Quick Stats on Religious Affiliation*
- *Maori ritual and Christian indoctrination in New Zealand, by Ngaire McCarthy (Oct, 2015)*

Covenants breached that New Zealand is a signatory to:

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; Article 18; In particular 18(2) - where no one is to be subject to coercion which would impair their freedom of choice to adopt a religion or belief of his choice; and 18(3) where limitations may be put in place to protect to safety, health and fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

International Covenant on the Rights of the Child; Article 14 - where children's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion are protected insofar as they do not impinge on the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Declaration on the Elimination of all forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on religion or belief; Article 1(2) where no one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have a religion or belief of his choice; Article 2(1) no one shall be subject to discrimination by any State or institution, group of persons, or person on grounds of religion or other beliefs; Article 2(2)"intolerance or discrimination...means any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on religion or belief and having as its purpose or as its effect nullification or impairment of the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis."; Article 4(1,2) where all states should prevent and eliminate such discrimination. "All States shall make all efforts to enact or rescind legislation where necessary to prohibit any such discrimination".

1. Introduction:

2. The purpose of this submission is to bring to the attention of the UN Human Rights Committee the issue of religious discrimination due to the occurrence of single faith religious instruction in New Zealand state schools. The author did not find any previous UPR's that focussed on this issue in order to reference for progress or prior recommendations.
3. New Zealand primary and intermediate schools (which covers education Years 0-8) are legislated to be secular. However, school boards are allowed to suspend normal education time and 'close' an individual classroom or the entire school in order to allow a religious instruction session to take place. These sessions can take place in the classroom or, to accommodate a large group, in a hall. They are typically conducted by volunteers, or otherwise one of the school teachers acting in a non-teaching capacity.
4. Further, unlike primary schools, New Zealand state high schools are not deemed to be secular in either of the two functioning education acts. This results in many operating assemblies that are indistinguishable from those of a religious school due to the occurrence of bible readings, prayers and hymns.
5. The current legal situation allows coercion, mistreatment, misuse of the authority of the state, denigration of school children and those in the community who believe differently, and suspension of children's access to education based on belief.

6. Definition of Terms:

7. For the purposes of clear discussion I am using the NZ Human Rights Commission's definition of religious instruction, as distinct from religious education and religious observances, from their 2009 publication "*Religion in NZ Schools: Questions and Concerns*".
8. Religious observance involves reciting prayers, singing hymns or participating in other aspects of religious practice. Religious observance is not neutral, as it either assumes or encourages adherence to a belief. An example is if prayers are said in a school assembly.
9. Religious instruction means teaching aspects of a faith in its own right. Religious instruction carries an implicit or explicit endorsement of a particular faith and/or encourages students to engage with and make decisions about accepting it on a personal level. An example is optional classes run by voluntary groups.
10. Religious education, also commonly called religious studies, refers to teaching about religion(s) as part of a broader context. An example is the role religion has played in politics, culture, art, history or literature. Religious education does not require students to engage with the religions being studied at a personal level or make choices about accepting those beliefs. Religious education can take place as part of the school curriculum. "
11. It is also worth defining "secular". By this I am referring to the principle of separation of church and state, where there is no imposition or endorsement of a particular religion by state institutions. This is seen as a prerequisite for freedom of belief to be a practical reality. A person may be atheist and secular, supporting the right to belief whilst also supporting the separation of church and state. Likewise a person may be religious and secular, supporting others' rights to their own beliefs and not the imposition of any one person's faith upon another's.

12. The Secular Education Network:

13. The Secular Education Network, established in 2012, is a social media group on Facebook defined by the common interest in removing religious instruction and religious discrimination from our state schools. It is above all a support network. It's members are of multiple faiths, including what might be termed moderate or liberal Christians, as well as those without a religious affiliation.

14. The current legal situation:

15. Religious instruction by “volunteers” is legal in NZ state primary schools, years 0-8, under **section 78 of the Education Act (EA), 1964**.
16. This gives rise to **section 79, EA 1964** which allows parents to opt their child out of religious instruction.
17. The requirement to be secular is outlined earlier in **section 77, EA 1964** which is why schools must be “closed” for this single faith religious instruction to take place.
18. As may be noted in the definition of terms, religious instruction is from the viewpoint of the believer and does not address the religion in a neutral manner. It may also be noted that the religious instruction provided throughout the country is almost exclusively Christian. The regular classroom teacher can, theoretically, already teach about religion in an unbiased, educational way, for example in social studies, but this is not what happens in religious instruction.
19. In state high schools **Section 25A, EA 1989**, allows students in years 9-13 to be opted out of religious observances, typically conducted in assemblies, by their parents or caregiver. Once a student is 16 they may opt themselves out in writing, though this is subject to approval by the Principal.
20. There is no secularity clause that applies to high schools. The ability to opt out addresses the possibility that there may be “tuition” that is objected to on the basis of belief, but this clause seemingly only accidentally provides a mechanism for avoiding religious observances. Students have reported bible readings, prayers and hymns in assembly, as well as sessions run by the evangelical group Gideons, where it is reported that bibles can be pressed upon students as they exit. No attempt at advising students or parents at high schools of their right to opt out has ever been reported to the Secular Education Network.

21. Hidden government review confirms that education processes are discriminatory:

22. “Consistency 2000” was an effort by our government departments to bring all their legislation and practices in line with Human Rights Act, 1993. Under an Official Information Act request I obtained a document from the Ministry of Education from that review. It singled out the sections of the Education Act on religious instruction in primary schools (sections 78 and 79) and on opting out of religious observances at high schools (section 25A) as “..discriminat(ory) on the grounds of religious belief” (see attached “Compliance with Human Rights Act 1993; Ministry of Education Legislation and Policy” points 7,12-18,29d,ii,iii).

Under “*Remaining inconsistencies in legislation*” it was discussed that the sections on religious instruction in primary schools were expected to lead to legal challenge at some point and future legislative reviews should reconsider the continued retention of religious instruction despite the recommendation at the time to keep it.

23. The most recent review of education legislation took place in 2016, but neglected to include a review of the religious instruction sections. Among those who were in favour of a review of section 78 on religious instruction was the Human Rights Commission. Their submission to the Education and Science Committee on the Education (update) Amendment Bill 2016 contained on its first page “*..the Commission notes that the Bill could have provided an opportunity to review the provisions of the Education Act 1964 concerning religious instruction in state primary schools. This is an issue of some contention within the community and has recently been subject to legal proceedings concerning the consistency of those provisions with human rights standards. It therefore might be timely for the Committee to consider and review the legal framework governing this area.*”

24. Government reluctance to address religious instruction (RI):

25. A media article covering the release of the above (non-)compliance with human rights document and notes the difficulties in obtaining it. It took approximately two years and required the intervention of the Office of the Ombudsman to get the unredacted document. Prior to that the Ministry of Education had hidden for 15 years that it had legal advice religious instruction is discriminatory (see attached).
26. Legislation could have been repealed or provision of RI could have been monitored, or the complaints by numerous parents and even teachers could have been followed up with an inquiry. My research via Official Information Act requests has revealed a significant and ongoing history of complaints, almost without exception rebuffed by the Ministry back to the schools concerned. *"They've turned parents asking for help back to the very school boards that have been biased against them and their children in the first place. Children have had to endure religious bullying, some even changing schools to escape it. None of this needed to happen."* (see Herald article attached)

27. How does religious instruction affect our State schools?:

28. Firstly it must be noted that prior to the advent of social media and the formation of the Secular Education Network (SEN) on Facebook in 2012 there was no data collected about religious instruction or religious practices in state schools in NZ. All information has been reported by parents, teachers etc or obtained by diligent research through surveys and Official Information Act requests.

29. How many schools run religious instruction? Is it opt in or opt out?:

30. In 2012 around 40% were providing religious instruction classes¹. Nearly all of them were doing so by default inclusion. This is legal under section 79 of the EA 1964 which allows for opting out (but does not specify that parents must be informed about the course).
31. In 2016 provisional results appear to show approximately 33% run religious instruction currently.²
32. There are currently more schools using “opt in” rather than “opt out”. This change can probably be attributed to the issue of religious instruction receiving media attention on numerous occasions in the intervening time as well as the willingness of parents to discuss their family’s experiences on social media, namely the Secular Education Network. Teachers and grandparents are part of the discussion too, as well as adults recounting their own experiences with religious instruction when they were at school. Many of the latter group are surprised that it still goes on. Many people new to the issue are surprised and horrified that it goes on as well. Of course, it is a polarising issue and there are those staunchly in favour of Christian instruction of all NZ children at school. They usually cite doctrinal reasons for this, or contend that such instruction will protect or better society in some way, the premise being that Christian values are superior to those of other religion’s or secular values.
33. Depth of feeling on both sides of the issue works to disadvantage those in the minority, perceived or actual, from fair processes to address the topic.
34. When a school is “closed” for RI an adult assumes the position of the teacher at the front of the class (it may even be the teacher who temporarily becomes a “volunteer” while the school is “closed”). Children as young as 5 and up to 13 (years 0-8) are then led through a Sunday School-style course which may vary in tone and content.
- 35. Features of religious instruction:**
36. > memorisation of bible passages such as *“Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples”*³,
37. > bible stories,
38. > bible-based craft activities,
39. > songs such as *“This is a commandment”* and *“I want to follow Jesus”*⁴.
40. > frequent use of lollies as rewards for attendance and “correct” answers eg. candy canes become “Jesus sticks”.
41. > *“Lesson outcomes”* may include evangelical aims eg *“Students will learn about: how trusting Jesus and following his teaching is the best way to respond”*.⁵
42. It may be noted that parents report their young children citing lollies as a powerful motivation to attend religious instruction against their family’s beliefs/conscience. The lollies and “fun activities” are cited by parents as putting them in a difficult position with their child if they keep them out of the classes,

¹ Survey conducted by Secular Education Network member David Hines.

² Survey again conducted by David Hines with a current return rate of ~50%.

³ From the “Connect, A2, Infants” syllabus.

⁴ As used in the Connect syllabuses and Christian Religious Education (CRE) syllabuses.

⁵ From “Connect, A2, Infants” syllabus, page 24.

and this is made harder if school staff question the decision in front of the child. Religious instruction is unique in incentivising attendance whereas those who don't attend are very often given "make-work" or detention-like activities/conditions.

43. What discrimination is suffered as a result of religious instruction (RI)?:

44. > Opt out used, where children are included in RI by default
45. > Parents frequently not informed that their school has an RI programme
46. > Inadequate/misleading information provided to parents about the nature of RI
47. > Families forced to make a public statement as to their religious position in relation to the RI provided
48. > Children are repeatedly placed in RI classes against the wishes of their parents who have asked that they be opted out
49. > Families required to opt out in writing each year/term, and sometimes each week
50. > Opted out children put within view and hearing of RI
51. > Coercion to attend so that children are not singled out (embarrassment/desire to "fit in"/fear of bullying)
52. > Children who have been opted out are forced to do detention-like activities eg picking up rubbish, sit in a corridor, or wash staffroom dishes
53. > School staff bullying children and parents for not attending RI
54. > Opted out children lose access to education for the duration of RI⁶
55. > RI segregates children along religious lines, it fosters an in-group/out-group mindset, from which has occurred bullying of children who have been opted out
56. > RI classes promulgate negative attitudes towards children of other faiths and non-believers, eg by casting them as the villains or unwise people in Bible stories.
57. > Children and their families are made to feel unwelcome at the school if they do not subscribe to the endorsed religion.
58. > Parents who opt their children out and privately oppose RI can be reluctant to advocate for their children out of fear of a backlash.
59. > This "backlash" has led to blackmail threats to parent's work and privacy.
60. > Refugee families who have different attitudes to authority can suffer added pressure to send their children to RI sessions.
61. > Families in rural communities are disproportionately disadvantaged by bullying from families that are pro-RI and supported by the school.
62. > RI is conflated with values education (which is taught under the curriculum anyway) which serves to mislead parents and boost attendance.
63. > Those from a non-traditional background (eg unmarried parents) or who do not identify with gender norms can be marginalised by conservative RI programmes
64. > Complaints are often trivialised by schools and parents who complain are ostracised.
65. > Curriculum goals for subjects such as natural history and health can be directly undermined in the classroom through assertions from doctrine

66. To illustrate the promulgation of divisive attitudes, one syllabus using a farming parable instructs 5-7 year olds to **mime growing strong and tall as a**

⁶ 20 hours (or 4 school days) per year, of typically prime morning learning time.

Christian, and mime choking, wilting and dying on the floor as a non-believer.

67. It is not surprising with young, impressionable children that in-group rewards and stories vilifying the outgroup combined with obvious separation of those who do not attend RI leads to bullying and/or attempts at conversion.
68. Very often “*there is more notification of a sausage sizzle (than religious instruction)*” to quote a Secular Education Network parent. This means that much of the ill effects of RI are happening before parents are even aware of the programme at their child’s school.
69. Often prospective parents cannot find out about religious instruction at a school through the school’s website or prospectus as it is usually not mentioned, and it is rare that there is even a short line about it at the end of enrolment materials.

70. No oversight by the Ministry of Education:

71. Our state schools operate single faith religious instruction without any Ministry of Education oversight, or guidelines. Attempts have been made to produce guidelines to mitigate some of the effects of religious instruction, and another attempt is currently underway. However, it is hard to see how guidelines for the practice of segregating children by faith in a state school for the promotion of single faith religious instruction (as opposed to education about religion) could ever adequately deal with discrimination.
72. The *Education and Science Select Committee* with their Report: “*Religious instruction and observances in state schools, 2005*” (see attached) proposed guidelines for religious instruction, however the process was scrapped (because of religious lobbying) before it could be implemented.. The proposed guidelines stated that “*Truly voluntary participation... should avoid ... all direct and indirect pressure to participate in RI and observances.*” With school Boards ostensibly “closing” the school with all children present for church representatives to temporarily take over from registered teachers, the idea that there wouldn’t be coercion seems nonsensical. Similarly when a state high school holds an assembly and the principal leads the school in prayer, and the head students are instructed to conduct a bible reading, guidelines would seem inadequate. The character of the school is prominently displayed as not only religious, but Christian. Those students and families who do not adhere to those particular beliefs are not on an equal basis as those who do, and are either suppressed, coerced or excluded.
73. The Ministry of Education does not approve the content of religious instruction teaching materials, and does not monitor or record RI in any way - except retaining complaints from parents and even teachers.
74. Religious education (as opposed to instruction - refer terms) is possible under current legislation and within the curriculum but happens haphazardly and also without monitoring. It is therefore not known whether bias is an issue.
75. As a result of this “self-governing” school model and religious instruction legislation my children’s first school was therefore able to “close” with all the

children present in the classrooms and teach that there is a powerful (Christian) god that wants them and everybody else to live a certain way.

76. Repeal of religious instruction legislation is crucial (and extending secular protection):

77. Efforts to address this issue through schools has not reduced the number of complaints stemming from RI. Likewise efforts to gain the assistance of the Ministry of Education in monitoring RI, or producing guidelines, or repealing legislation have failed. Members of Parliament have also been reluctant to take on such a polarising issue.
78. Myself and co-claimant David Hines felt there was no other option but to lodge a case against the Attorney General at the Human Rights Review Tribunal, which we did in October 2016. A year and a half later we were still waiting for our initial case conference. Unfortunately, due to a backlog of cases at the Tribunal they are no longer telling claimants when to expect an initial conference, let alone a hearing, so we have applied to remove our case to the High Court.
79. We have gathered testimony from 25 witnesses including, but not limited to, parents; Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and Muslim religious leaders; and 3 religious studies experts. *“Together they’ve written 720 pages of evidence... It is a degrading story of bullying, vulnerable gay and lesbian teens committing suicide, parents and teachers afraid to give evidence in case they lose their jobs, corrupt school boards putting pressure on parents who fight the system, and a cover-up of what is actually being taught”* (from “Secular Education Update, 2018” by David Hines).
80. We have evidence going back over a decade from complaints made to the Ministry of Education. We have compelling evidence of direct discrimination against children and families throughout the country, numerous examples of which were in the possession of the Ministry of Education when their review of legislation for consistency with the Human Rights Act was conducted and found to be inconsistent.
81. I am personally aware of two children who were bullied at their first school as a direct result of religious instruction. As there were few children whose parents opted them out of religious instruction, save the occasional religious minority or atheist family, those children became highly visible as dissenters, made to stand up and leave their classrooms. The older child, in particular, was hounded by the children who attended the highly evangelical Christian religious instruction programme, and was asked several times a week why he/she didn’t believe in God. The other children wouldn’t share with him/her *“..because he/she doesn’t believe in God.”* Both the child and parent felt that certain staff were being less than entirely fair and suspected it was because their lack of Christianity had been “outed” by the necessity to take a stand in relation to the school’s religious policy. This was confirmed, in their view, when the child was taken (as a 7 year old) to wash the dishes in the staffroom during one religious instruction time. Upon confronting the school they never denied nor apologised for it.

82. My testimony centres around our experience as a family of the effect of religious instruction within a school, and that our attitude of being unconcerned about religion in the school changed dramatically after experience of its reality.
83. As a member and parent advocate for the Secular Education Network I have witnessed blackmail by a small town school of a parent group where the parents were threatened with having their names listed in the Board Minutes (and therefore being put on public record as opposing religious instruction). I have learned of opt-out children being put in a “resource cupboard”, where they were able to see and hear the religious instruction. I have witnessed working parents being told they have to keep their opted out child at home in the morning because the school is “closed” for religious instruction and doesn’t have to take those who don’t attend. Young children have been told that deceased loved ones who weren’t church goers are suffering in hell; that their unmarried parents will “go to hell”, and much more. The list of abuses is long.
84. It is the self-confessed intention of the largest single provider of religious instruction in NZ, however, to gain access to unchurched children for evangelical purposes. Our primary schools are an “..under-utilised mission field” where “*The children are right there and we don’t have to supply buildings, seating, lighting or heating*”. This is according to the Churches Education Commission’s director, David Mulholland in an interview to the Baptist Newsletter in 2011 (see attached).
85. Throughout the country rates of non-belief are consistent, but fear of anyone knowing that you are a non-believer is very real, particularly in rural communities. Our state schools are idealised as welcoming to all children, yet in practice they can actively discriminate based on religious belief simply by using the Education Act clauses described in this submission.
86. The standard response to complaints made to the Ministry of Education has been to refer parents back to the school board that they have been unable to successfully deal with already, or to propose mediation through the Human Rights Commission (HRC). This is an unpopular option since schools may refuse to cooperate, it raises concerns about more backlash as it elevates the issue to another platform, and the power dynamic disadvantages the family due to secrecy requirements.
87. Reluctance to address RI was highlighted by the previous Minister of Education, Hekia Parata, stating in an interview that parents who don’t like RI could “*find another school*”.
- 88. New Zealand’s cultural makeup and attitudes:**
89. Although New Zealand has a large proportion of non-religious people (expected to reach or exceed half the population when Census results are released later this year) it is somewhat taboo to criticise religion.
90. There is a misperception that Maori are largely Christian, however this is not born out by Census figures from 2013 (see attached) which show that nearly half professed no religious affiliation. As with other groups religiosity is skewed towards the older population.

91. Parliament sessions begin with a prayer - recently modified to be slightly more inclusive - and our National Anthem is the hymn, God Defend New Zealand. At public events and schools it is becoming more common for people to stand, but not sing, the anthem.
92. For a perspective on Maori secularism see attached paper by Ngaire McCarthy, *“Maori ritual and Christian indoctrination in New Zealand”*.
- 93. Would religious instruction be allowed to start in our schools today?**
94. A litmus test on the suitability of single faith religious instruction and observances in our State schools is whether it would be introduced into legislation today. I submit that this is unlikely due to the multicultural nature of our society and generally tolerant attitude to religious diversity.
- 95. Conclusion - coercion, exclusion, denigration, reduced access to education, endorsement - all entirely unnecessary:**
96. Whilst New Zealand is generally regarded as a tolerant, secular place to live, it is worth noting that a persistently uncritical attitude towards religious groups allows those religious groups with a particularly evangelical agenda to exploit that goodwill in our state schools to the detriment of a surprisingly large proportion of the community.
97. 33-40% of our state primary and intermediate schools run single-faith religious instruction. In the process children are split up by faith and those from non-religious, minority religion, or even Christian but non-evangelical, are treated as second class citizens, have their access to education interrupted, and are relegated to time-wasting or detention-like activities. They also have their worldview effectively classified by the school as not in line with the authority of the state.
98. The doctoral thesis *“Let’s talk about something else: Religion and Governmentality in New Zealand’s State Primary Schools”* by Helen Bradstock concludes that there is such an unwillingness to discuss religion in NZ that education about it in a neutral context in our schools suffers as much as a critical review of the place of partisan religious instruction.
99. By having children in state-provided classrooms taught to accept Christian doctrine as fact; by having children presented with material that prejudices them against those of different religious persuasions; and accounting for the fact that children are of such an age that they accept without critical reflection what they are taught; this is state-sanctioned child indoctrination. Implicit within this is discrimination, against those who believe differently, and against those who feel that it is not the place of the state school to choose a person’s faith, or promote a particular faith to our most vulnerable citizens.
100. It is hard to envisage a good enough reason to allow segregation of children by faith, denigration of parts of the school community, and lack of access to education in our state schools so that one religious group may have their beliefs promoted. Indeed churches are plentiful in towns and cities across New Zealand and enthusiastically run children’s programmes, often on weekdays as well as

at the weekend. It is plainly evident that churches are very often closely situated to schools, making them accessible to school aged children for those families keen to have their children exposed to church teachings.

101. Even the least diverse parts of NZ are still diverse in belief, and endorsing a faith in the local school *and* church creates a difficult environment for young families to navigate.
102. Due to schools' poor communication with parents about RI, and the reported tendency of parents to keep their children in RI so that they do not feel "singled out" there is thought to be a significant percentage of children attending religious instruction out of coercion. Parents either don't know it's going on, think it's something that it's not (ie education about a variety of religions, or strictly values education), or just don't want their kids picked on for not going.
103. This is backed up by the precipitous drop in attendance seen when RI is moved to before school, lunch time, or after school. Drop in attendance is often enough to halt the classes altogether, therefore change to outside class time is often resisted by proponents of RI (who may be on the school Board). However, after school can be treated as a childcare option for working parents, and lunchtime sessions that persist present many of the same problems such as coercion, splitting children up by faith and promulgation of negative views about non-believers.
104. At the end of 2012 we removed our children from their first school and enrolled them in a school without religious instruction. My children's experience of religious instruction had caused anxiety - especially on RI days - and difficulty making and maintaining friendships during an important period of their social development. Once they changed schools there was a big improvement.
105. Their previous school finally stopped "offering" religious instruction at the end of 2017. I have been told it was due to a growing awareness of the issue by parents and the (new) Board due to media coverage.
106. **Recommendations:**
107. *It is the hope of the Secular Education Network that the UN, through the process of the Universal Periodic Review, will strongly encourage the NZ government to cease the practice of single-faith religious instruction in state schools. This would be achieved by aligning our education legislation with human rights law and repealing sections 78 and 79 EA, 1964.*
108. *It is also hoped that the UN will recommend that the secularity clause is retained and extended to cover high schools, (section 77, EA, 1964). It currently only protects young children in state schools, and risks being swept away with removal of the religious instruction sections. Extended it would protect students at high school as there would then be no discriminatory religious practices to have to yield to, endure or avoid.*
109. *The Network would also like a recommendation from the UN that the NZ Ministry of Education monitor schools regarding regular teaching about religion to ensure that the subject is taught in an unbiased, secular manner and represents a variety of religious and non-religious worldviews.*

By Tanya Jacob *on behalf of the* **Secular Education Network**, and the **Humanist Society of New Zealand**. *Special thanks to David Hines, Joshua Barley, Dave Smyth &*

Sonja Farmer of SEN, and Sara Passmore, President of the Humanist Society.