

Knights of Saint Columba

Accrington Council 188

Bulletin No.2- F25

Source Christian Institute

The Christian Institute has written to Education Secretary Damian Hinds warning about the potential for misuse of a 'kitemark' scheme for grading youth groups.

Official plans to allow Ofsted to inspect education in out-of-schools settings, such as church youth groups and sports clubs, were abandoned after overwhelming opposition.

The Department for Education (DfE) is instead considering a voluntary code of conduct for groups to sign up to.

'Subjectivity'

The DfE is also piloting a 'kitemark' scheme, which would give powers to local authorities to 'grade' groups with a gold, silver or bronze rating.

In a letter to Mr Hinds, the Institute's Deputy Director for Public Affairs Simon Calvert said: "there is room for a great deal of subjectivity about what makes a "gold" standard out-of-school setting.

"Anecdotal evidence suggests that some church groups could be denied a top-level kitemark by the local authority because of their orthodox religious views (for example on marriage)."

"The proposed scheme presents unsympathetic authorities with an opportunity to pressure religious groups to adopt positions at variance with their faith in order to get a kitemark."

Withholding funding

The letter continues: "Indeed, there is a risk that the scheme will legitimise what would otherwise be flagrant discrimination.

"It could become a tool, a proxy, for withholding funding or services because the council doesn't agree with their beliefs.

It went on to cite a church whose local authority would only provide funding if it agreed not to rely upon the religious exemptions afforded to it by the Equality Act 2010.

"The defence that the guidance is 'voluntary' is not a sufficient reassurance if failure to have a kitemark is used by local authorities as a reason to refuse to rent premises, or provide grant funding or rate relief."

'Innate distrust'

Mr Calvert said references to 'extremism' in the code of conduct suggest this is "a repackaged attempt to inspect against so-called British values".

There is no definition in the guidance, but Mr Calvert said activists "routinely use the word to denigrate traditional religious beliefs on, for example, marriage and the sanctity of human life from conception".

He concluded: "I am concerned this suggests an innate distrust towards Christians and those of other faiths."

Bernard Holden MBE JP

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