

How will religion be taught in schools in the future?

Outlooks



There is a fundamental upheaval underway in Germany's religious landscape. While in 1950, more than 95 percent of the population were members of one of the two largest Christian Churches, in 2024 it was just 45 percent. In addition to this secularisation, there has been a growing religious pluralisation of society, evidenced for instance by the increasing proportion of Muslims. There has also been a clear trend towards individualisation. Against this background, it is becoming increasingly difficult to organise and justify teaching Religious Education, separated by denomination, as enshrined in the constitution.

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Religious Education

In Lower Saxony, Evangelical and Catholic Religious Education have been merged under the working title "Christian Religious Education" (CRU). But it is unlikely to stay that way. For quite some time now, Religious Education is de facto often taught not separated by denomination, which does not correspond to the model provided for in the constitution, and CRU won't change this. In the longer term I see three more likely alternatives. The first – and most radical – would be to get rid of Religious Education altogether to make way for new topics that appear more relevant. The second option would be a subject in which all pupils engage with different religions using a more descriptive and comparative approach, similar to that of religious studies. As a third alternative, I can imagine interfaith education that also allows space for normative questions, so that students can decide for themselves which beliefs they consider appropriate. Different religious communities and academic theologies could cooperate with the state to provide these lessons, leaning also on religious studies as a key reference discipline.

The result would be lessons in which pupils learn about different religions, but can also discuss faith and existential questions. Because I am convinced that religion still provides a relevant way of understanding the world alongside other approaches such as the natural sciences and economics. And schools should continue to offer this perspective in the future.