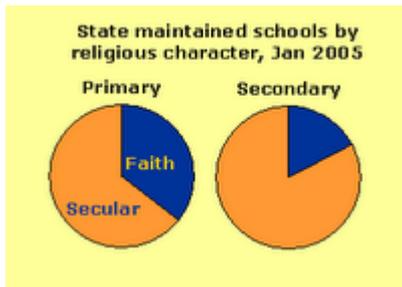


Faith no more



I'm just reading [The God Delusion](#) by Richard Dawkins ([Guardian review](#)). For those of us that spent our school days making intense, and supposedly clinching, arguments to religious friends of the type: "if God made the world, then what made God?", Dawkins' polemic offers an unvarnished orgy of smugness - the simple joy of having what you have long held to be certain read back to you with great erudition and scholarship. One of his best and angriest propositions relates to the indoctrination of children with religious ideas.

"I want everybody to flinch when they hear a phrase such as 'Catholic child' or 'Muslim child'. Speak of a 'child of Catholic parents' if you like, but if you hear anybody speak of a 'Catholic child', stop them and point out that children are too young to know where they stand on such issues, just as they are too young to know where they stand on economics or politics."

On the same note, I really can't bear the idea of 'faith schools'. And there are a lot of them (6276 primary and 588 secondary - [see chart above & DFES stats for England](#)). A dictionary definition of 'faith' is ['complete trust or confidence'](#). But the essence of good education is curiosity, scepticism and open-mindedness - the antithesis of faith. A range of arguments is advanced for these institutions, such as better performance etc ([see discussion here](#)). I don't think they add up to much and certainly not enough to justify contaminating an education with a predefined belief system granted immunity from scrutiny and challenge.

Despite so much religious madness in the United States, the founding fathers were wise enough to keep religion and government apart. The '[Establishment Clause](#)' of the [First Amendment](#) of the American constitution both provides for religious freedom, but requires [separation of church and state](#) - a principle regularly upheld by the Supreme Court. I really wish we had a simple constitutional separation like this... There is nothing to stop children indulging in



folklore and fantasy outside school, if their parents can make them.