

David Attenborough joins campaign against creationism in schools

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Sir David Attenborough has weighed into a campaign calling for creationism to be banned from the school science curriculum and for evolution to be taught more widely in schools.

The naturalist joined three Nobel laureates, the atheist Richard Dawkins and other leading scientists in calling on the government to tackle the “threat” of creationism.

Gordon Brown’s government issued guidance to all schools that the subject should not be taught to pupils, but neither they nor the coalition government enshrined the recommendation in law.

In a statement on a new campaign website, the 30 scientists and campaign groups including the British Science Association demanded creationism and “intelligent design” be banned outright.

Prof Colin Blakemore, the neurobiologist, Sir Paul Nurse, the President of the Royal Society, and former Royal Society director of education Rev Prof Michael Reiss were among the signatories.

Rev Prof Reiss, who has described evolution as “God’s work”, resigned from his Royal Society post in 2008 after suggesting science lessons ought to include discussion of creationism.

Speaking ahead of the launch today he said: *“Evolution is an extremely powerful idea that lies at the heart of biology.” At the same time, it’s a sufficiently simple concept that there’s no good reason why it should be left out of the primary curriculum. If creationism is discussed, it should be made clear to pupils that it is not accepted by the scientific community.*

Last year the campaign group, led by the British Humanist Association (BHA) and comprising many of the same members, called for evolution to be taught in all primary schools.

Prof Dawkins said: *“We need to stop calling evolution a theory. In the ordinary language sense of the word it is a fact. It is as solidly demonstrated as any fact in science.”*

Most schools in England teach evolution, the idea popularised by Charles Darwin that all living things developed from primitive organisms through a process of natural selection.

But the arguments of creationists, who believe God built the world in six days in line with the story of Genesis, and of devout Muslims have become steadily more popular in recent years.

Andrew Copson, chief executive of the BHA, said: *“Evolution is probably the most important idea underlying biological science and we support the view of many experts that it should be introduced right from primary level in all state-maintained schools.” At the same time, the threat of creationism and ‘intelligent design’ being taught as science is real and ongoing, particularly as more and more schools are opened up to be run by religious fundamentalists.*

“It has never been more urgent for concrete steps to be taken to ensure that all state schools teach evolution, and not creationism, and we urge the Government to implement the simple and sensible measures suggested in this new statement.”

Nick Collins, Science Correspondent

P.S.

* The Telegraph, 7:30AM BST 19 Sep 2011:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/8769353/David-Attenborough-joins-campaign-against-creationism-in-schools.html>