

# Hardline evangelicals seek funding for free school

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A controversial evangelical church has announced plans to open a free school in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Jesmond Parish Church is seeking Government funding to open a 700-pupil school with a 'Christian ethos' that will be, according to its website, "accepting and respecting students whatever their background, whether of any faith or none".

The church however has a close relationship with the fundamentalist [Christian Institute](#) whose national headquarters are also in Newcastle. Reverend David Holloway, minister of Jesmond Parish Church, is also a Director of the Christian Institute. Both organisations take a strong stance against homosexual practice.

Pat Beesley, a local resident who has contacted his local councillor over the proposals, said "the organisation is known to be overtly homophobic and to take a fundamentalist approach to Christianity. It is appalling that taxpayers' money should go towards funding a school whose aim will be to instil such retrograde values into its students."

Rev Holloway maintains that the Church must be clear on theological absolutes and is well known to gay rights campaigners for his obsessive intolerance of homosexuality on grounds that it is incompatible with the Bible's teachings.

He is also an opponent of Darwin's theory of evolution. In 2002 he [told](#) the BBC Radio 4 *Today* programme "what Genesis teaches and mainstream Christians believe is that God caused the world, the world did not cause God."

"There are a range of creationist views, not just one", he added, "but all are united in saying no to atheistic doctrinaire macro-evolutionism, which is the standard fare in many schools."

In a recent [article](#) attacking so called 'militant' secularism, Holloway said: "We need overtly Christian head-teachers and teachers in State Schools working for a new liberalism and trying to initiate children into a heritage of Christian sentiments, beliefs, imaginings, understandings and activities in a truly liberal way."

Jonathan Pryke, Executive Minister of Jesmond Parish Church and a trustee of the Jesmond Trust, said "We've had a vision for Christian education for a long time and the coalition Government want more choice in education." Mr Pryke said the Trust is yet to secure funding for the project, but confirmed it had made an application to the Department for Education for funding that is likely to run into the millions.

Stephen Evans, Campaigns Manager at the National Secular society, said: "[Research](#) already suggests that bullying of gay pupils rises significantly in faith schools. A free school with a 'Christian ethos' as extreme as that of the Jesmond Parish Church could take this to a whole new level. We sincerely hope the Government will refuse to hand over public money to groups with such an

extreme religio-political agenda, and would certainly expect them to do so. However, at a time when the Government has positioned itself as guardians of Christianity, such action cannot be taken for granted."

Earlier this year, the Government amended the model funding agreement (which provides the framework within which free schools operate) to ensure views contrary to established scientific and/or historical evidence are not taught in science lessons.

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