

Latest religious takeover will see two community schools run by the Church

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Two community schools in Kent are to be folded into an academy trust under Church control, in the latest Church takeover of community schools, a trend warned of by the National Secular Society last year.

Under the plans an existing partnership between four schools, including two community schools and two Church schools, will become the Unitas multi-academy trust (MAT).

Despite the two Church schools in the partnership having only 105 and 125 pupils each, compared with the community schools which have 270 and 400 pupils each, the trust which governs Unitas will have three of its five members appointed by the Church of England.

Unitas promises a "shared moral purpose" for its schools and describes the Diocese of Canterbury as a "core partner".

It pledges that no school's "individual identity and ethos will be changed in any way", but this assurance does nothing to stop the school from converting to become a faith school at a later date once it is part of the Unitas MAT. This has happened with other schools entering mixed multi-academy trusts.

One parent concerned about the plans wrote to the NSS after seeing the Society's [work on this issue](#).

He said he had "grave concerns regarding the proposed Unitas Multi-Academy Trust."

He described it as a "clear attempt by the Church of England to recruit new church-goers and enforce their religious views via the school curriculum. It is against the wishes of the parents of Swale, like myself, who wish to send their children to a secular, non-religious school."

Another former parent at the school told the NSS "I don't like this at all - it's a step in the wrong direction. Appointing a majority church controlled board means more christian influence - and I sent my son to a non-faith school for a reason."

In July 2016 the NSS [warned](#) that informal partnership arrangements were being used by some dioceses to gain influence in non-religious schools.

NSS campaigns officer Alastair Lichten said, "We have little confidence that a community school's ethos will be protected in these circumstances.

"The loss of secular school provision is particularly acute in rural areas, where a faith school may already be the only option for parents.

"The growing religiosity of our education system sets up a conflict between our increasingly non-religious population, with parents and pupils among the most secular cohorts of our society, and a Church which is intent on using schools to stop its seemingly terminal decline.

"In recent months headteachers, church-appointed faith school governors and parents have all [spoken out](#) against growing religious influence over our education system. The process of converting a school into an academy provides many opportunities for religious groups to exert more influence and control over the education system."

An [online consultation](#) on the proposals runs till Tuesday 10 February 2017.

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