

NSS criticise Church plan to open 125 new free schools

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The Church of England is planning to bid for control of more than one quarter of the new free schools [announced](#) by the Government.

A paper distributed at the Church's General Synod said the chance of controlling more than a quarter of all new schools in England was a "unique opportunity".

500 free schools are due to open by 2020.

The Church already controls the education of approximately 1 million children.

Stephen Evans, the campaigns director of the National Secular Society, called the plans "alarming".

"The significant changes we're seeing in the country's religion and belief landscape means the Church's role in state education needs to be diminished not expanded," he said.

"In an increasingly secularised society in which church attendances continue to fall, the Church of England knows that running schools is the most effective way, if not the only way, for it to reach children and their families with its message. One has to wonder to what extent the Church's keen interest in running schools is motivated by their need for self-preservation.

"Handing over vast swathes of publicly funded education to religious organisations may serve the Church, but it's hard to see how it serves families who aren't interested in religion yet are finding it increasingly difficult to secure a secular education for their children.

"The Government also needs to question just how sustainable it is to hand over large sections of our education system to a Church seemingly in terminal decline.

"In a religiously diverse and secularised society it makes little sense to organise education along religious lines. The additional school places needed should be created in secular and inclusive schools equally welcoming to all pupils, irrespective of their faith backgrounds."

In the past senior Anglicans had voiced criticism of the free schools programme but Church officials now view free schools as "the only show in town", the [Telegraph](#) reported.

In a paper for the Synod, the Church of England Education Office wrote that the "God of all creation is concerned with everything related to education."

They promised an "explicitly" "Christian foundation" "across the curriculum" for all Church of England faith schools and said they were "committed" to offering pupils "an encounter with Jesus Christ".

But in addition to their plans for their own schools, the Church said that a Christian "vision for education can still be expressed and promoted" in non-faith schools as well.

The National Secular Society is frequently contacted by parents who are concerned about the imposition of religion in schools, [including non-religious schools](#), and the Church is making [extensive use of academisation to take control](#) of non-religious schools by incorporating them into explicitly religious multi-academy trusts.

It is also using academisation to [foist a more religious ethos on voluntary controlled schools](#), which are generally less explicitly religious than voluntary aided ones – in many cases against the wishes of teachers and the schools' own church-appointed governors.

In the Synod paper, the Church's Education Office said their "vision for education reaches beyond Church of England schools".

They said it would be "unbiblical" to separate "the Church from involvement in education" and that their goal of "Christian participation" in non-faith schools was "already being achieved".

There can be no neutrality in education, the Church claimed.

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