

NSS asks DfE to clarify Oasis schools' faith status

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The National Secular Society has asked the Government to "clear up the confusion" over a group of academies with a religious ethos which are not officially classified as faith schools.

In a [letter](#) to Sir Theodore Agnew, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the School System, the NSS said the current classifications of Oasis Academies on the Department for Education (DfE)'s register for schools was "misleading".

NSS research has found that every Oasis Academy website makes a direct reference to the Christian ethos of the schools. But the DfE's register currently says just 23% of Oasis Academies have a Christian 'religious character' or 'religious ethos'. For the rest, the sections say 'none' or 'does not apply'.

The NSS has asked the DfE to "address the inconsistencies" between its records and the statements on Oasis's websites.

There are currently 48 Oasis Academies in England, all run by Oasis Community Learning Multi-Academy Trust. Oasis Community Learning [has a Christian ethos](#), "inspired by the life, message and example of Jesus Christ".

The NSS found that this is repeated on every Oasis Academy website, as is the statement "The academies are 'schools of religious character'" on each website's FAQ page. Its research was prompted by a report by investigative journalist Warwick Mansell on ['faith schools by stealth'](#).

Other references to the schools' Christian ethos can be found in other details on the sites. Many of the sites include an 'Education Charter', in which the word 'Christ' appears 16 times. This Charter includes the following passage:

"The following statements represent a few examples of Oasis' core beliefs:

- Each individual is made in the image of the God who created all of us, making us all equal and different.
- God is love. Love is not simply one of God's attributes, but rather the very essence of his nature. This love pervades the universe and is unconditional rather than earned.
- God became human in the person of Jesus Christ. He came to where we are. He shared our experience of life. He felt joy and pain. He engages with us and understands us.
- Jesus served others rather than expecting to be served and willingly sacrificed his life through the cross.
- Jesus rose from the dead. Death is not the end. There is resurrection and hope."

A number of Oasis Academy websites mention the school's link with local churches, including Christian assemblies delivered by members of the church. Several had posted specifications for a [chaplaincy role](#) in the school, which said there is an occupational requirement for applicants to "actively embrace the Christian ethos and values of Oasis".

The importance of the Christian ethos was also stated in a number of other job specifications for Oasis Academies, from teaching staff to receptionists, including a [specification for volunteers](#) which required applicants to respond to the question: "As an organisation motivated by our Christian faith, our ethos and values are important to us. Do you feel happy to agree to demonstrate these in your work?"

In the letter, NSS campaigns director Stephen Evans wrote: "As every Oasis Academy is clearly and openly Christian in its ethos, to classify them as 'none' or 'does not apply' rather than 'Christian' under 'religious character' or 'religious ethos' in the DfE's register is misleading.

"This inconsistency is detrimental to the rights of parents to choose a non-religious school for their children, as they are not receiving the accurate information they need to make an informed choice. Additionally, it results in inaccurate statistics regarding the number of faith-ethos schools in England, and the diversity of school choice within specific areas."

The NSS has also raised concerns over the [admissions policy](#) of Oasis Academy Skinner Street in Medway. The policy states that the school welcomes applications from "Christian families, and those of other faiths or none". The NSS questioned why the policy appeared to contain a hierarchy of preference in an ostensibly secular school.

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