

Scottish government 'committed to Catholic education tradition'

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The National Secular Society has criticised the Scottish government's "failure to stand up for children's interests" after a minister gave an "absolute assurance" of its commitment to providing Catholic education.

In remarks [reported](#) on Friday by the *Scottish Catholic Observer*, Scotland's deputy first minister recently praised "the Catholic education tradition" in a speech to the Catholic Headteachers Association Scotland (CHAS) conference.

John Swinney, who is also the cabinet secretary for education, said: "The Catholic tradition gives young people the foundations, the values and the attitudes to help work out what on earth five years in the future is going to look like and how they can relate to it based on deeply set personal and Christian values.

"I'm here to give you the absolute assurance of the commitment of the government to maintain the Catholic education tradition in the years to come."

The CHAS conference brings together the headteachers of Scotland's Catholic schools, church education agencies and senior figures in the clergy. At this year's gathering the archbishop of Glasgow, Philip Tartaglia, told secondary headteachers to "prioritise the Catholic mission of your school over other considerations".

And Michael McMahon, a church representative who advises Catholic schools on sex education, said: "If the [sexual] act is not ordered towards creation, then it is not procreative and therefore it is not a legitimate expression of sexuality, as far as we are concerned."

Swinney indicated that the first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, will also praise Catholic education when she delivers the rescheduled [Cardinal Winning speech](#) at the University of Glasgow on 2 June. He said Sturgeon would say more about "the significance that we attach to the Catholic education system and the protection of that system within Scottish education".

The Winning lecture was originally created by Scotland's Catholic Church to honour Cardinal Thomas Winning, who called homosexual sex "[perverted](#)", campaigned against the repeal of Section 28 and was an outspoken critic of reproductive freedom.

NSS education and schools officer Alastair Lichten said: "John Swinney's remarks suggest the Scottish government is failing to stand up for children's interests because it is too keen to cultivate a cosy relationship with the Catholic Church.

"At this conference church officials made alarmingly uncompromising declarations on how 'their' schools should be run and the intolerant messages they should promote in sex education. Instead of calling this out ministers seem keen to indulge them.

"Organised religion already has far too much control in Scotland's schools. The government should be rolling it back, not reinforcing it."

A number of events will take place this year to mark the 100th anniversary of state-funded Catholic education in Scotland. Swinney said these would allow the government "to recognise publicly and openly the significant and valued contribution that Catholic education has made to the fabric of Scottish society".

After the speech Philip Tartaglia, the archbishop of Glasgow, said the church was "very gratified" by Swinney's "supportive and appreciative comments".

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