

NSS: government must support schools which promote LGBT equality

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The National Secular Society has urged the government to support a primary school in Birmingham which is under pressure to stop teaching lessons on LGBT equality.

The NSS [wrote](#) to schools minister Nick Gibb on Tuesday to seek assurances that the Department for Education (DfE) was "providing unequivocal support" to Parkfield Community School and a teacher facing a personal campaign of abuse.

The school has faced large-scale protests from predominantly Muslim parents and mass withdrawals of children over the programme, which teaches children about diversity. Parents have particularly objected to the fact it teaches children about the existence of LGBT people.

An estimated 600 pupils – around 80% of the school roll – were [withdrawn](#) from school last week in protest against the programme.

And in recent weeks Andrew Moffatt, an assistant headteacher at the school, has been personally abused and [threatened](#) over his role in pioneering the lessons.

In a [letter](#) to parents last week the trust which runs Parkfield said it would hold a discussion on how to deliver No Outsiders with "the school community" during a pre-planned break in the lessons. It said the school did not have No Outsiders lessons scheduled over the next half term, as the relevant periods had already been set aside for religious education.

The letter led to reports that the lessons had been shelved. But on Tuesday the school [denied](#) that it had undertaken a U-turn and [said](#) the No Outsiders programme would return as planned after Easter.

In the NSS's letter chief executive Stephen Evans said the DfE should provide "unequivocal support to Andrew Moffat and the school" and continue to do so "throughout the consultation process".

"Whilst we appreciate that schools will be mindful of the backgrounds of their pupils, taking parents' religious views into account should not mean shielding pupils from knowledge or teaching them differently on account of their parents' religious outlook."

He said the evidence suggested No Outsiders was "carefully crafted" and "teaches pupils about tolerance, difference and British values in an age-appropriate manner".

He also noted the intolerance being promoted by some leading campaigners behind the protests. Last month the NSS [highlighted](#) the fact that Dr Kate Godfrey-Faussett, a key figure in the Stop RSE campaign, has said Muslim parents should adopt a "psychological" or "mental health" response to same-sex attraction.

Mr Evans wrote: "These kinds of opinions should be robustly challenged, not respected, regardless of whether they are religious or not."

He also asked for assurances that the department would "support other schools which face similar pressure to dilute their teaching in the face of religious intolerance".

"Any concessions in this situation will set a dangerous precedent for other schools facing similar pressure to change the way they teach in order to conform to parents' beliefs. That will undermine LGBT rights, children's right to a decent education and teachers' ability to do their jobs."

The letter highlighted the case of St Stephen's Primary School in east London, which was [forced](#) to reverse restrictions it placed on the hijab and fasting amid a campaign of intimidation last year.

Explaining the decision to write the letter, Mr Evans said: "Children at Parkfield, like those at every other school, have a right to a comprehensive and decent education. That includes giving them an age appropriate understanding of the range of relationships and different people they will meet in their lives.

"Teachers shouldn't fear pointing out that LGBT people exist and have rights. Society shouldn't apologise for raising future citizens to tolerate each other. Reasonable parents who don't wish to see their children's schools pander to fundamentalist demands shouldn't be ignored.

"And the government should be aware of what this case could mean beyond the gates of one school in Birmingham. Unless we support schools teaching RSE, stand by teachers who are standing up for equality and challenge the mythology and fearmongering behind anti-RSE campaigns, such tactics will be bought to bear on many other schools."

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