

NSS event to explore future of inclusive education in N Ireland

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A National Secular Society organised online conference will bring together reformers, politicians and academics to set out a secularist vision for education in Northern Ireland.

The NSS has organised the free online event in light of recent measures aiming to tackle barriers to inclusive education in NI.

Over 90% of pupils in NI attend schools which are effectively segregated along religious lines. There are either no Catholic or no Protestant pupils in about 30% of schools.

This year an independent review of education in NI is taking place, with a focus on quality, equity and sustainability of the system. The NSS is [engaging](#) with the review as an opportunity to promote greater integration in NI schools. The NSS is also supporting [two bills](#) in the NI assembly that would make education in NI more inclusive.

One of the bills, the integrated education bill, was [passed](#) in the assembly yesterday. The bill places a statutory duty on the Department of Education to provide further support to the integrated schools sector. It was introduced by Kellie Armstrong MLA, who will be speaking at the conference.

[The free online conference will take place on Saturday 21 May, 10.00-12.00](#)

Each of the panelists will speak on priority areas of reform for education, followed by an audience Q&A.

- **Kellie Armstrong**, an Alliance Party MLA and sponsor of multiple Integrated Education Bills, will speak about progress and barriers to a more integrated system.
- **Darragh Mackin**, a human rights lawyer described as "a rising star on the international legal scene", will speak about his experiences challenging the Christian bias mandated in religious education and collective worship. He was recently [interviewed](#) for the NSS podcast on this topic.
- **Megan Turner** from sexual health advice charity Common Youth will speak about the need for inclusive, accurate and rights-based relationships and sex education in schools.
- **Dr Matthew Milliken**, from the UNESCO Centre in Ulster University's School of Education, will speak about barriers to integration and the lack of equality protection for teachers.

Read a recent blog by Dr Matthew Milliken on integrated education [here](#).

NSS head of education Alastair Lichten said the event was an "ideal opportunity to find out about efforts to reform Northern Ireland's education system – and the barriers to it".

"We're looking forward to hearing from these diverse experts, and setting out our own vision is for a truly integrated, secular and inclusive education system, where pupils from all backgrounds are educated together and able to fulfil their potential."

[Note 27-04-2022: This story has been updated to reflect that the event has moved online.](#)

Towards inclusive education in Northern Ireland

This free online event will bring together reformers, politicians and academics to set out a secularist vision for education in NI – a vision that aims to end sectarianism and make NI a more inclusive society for people of all religions and beliefs.

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