

# Ep 27: Unregistered (illegal) schools with Eve Sacks

Video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Nb4LRNtk1o>

0:00:00.640,0:00:04.880	The Hasidic community is known to be closed and secretive
What's it like to study at an ultra-orthodox Jewish school?	
0:00:04.880,0:00:08.639	0:00:46.399,0:00:49.920
What happens to British children who leave school without knowing basic	but Eve spent years working with its members to find out more about their way
0:00:08.639,0:00:12.080	0:00:49.920,0:00:52.000
English or Maths?	of life
And who should decide how children	and the pressures which keep them
0:00:12.080,0:00:17.920	0:00:52.000,0:00:54.800
should be educated:	isolated from the rest of British
their parents or the State?	society.
0:00:19.279,0:00:23.840	0:00:54.800,0:00:58.719
You're listening to the National Secular Society podcast hosted by Emma Park.	I will be talking to her about who is behind these unregistered schools,
0:00:23.840,0:00:28.240	0:00:58.719,0:01:02.480
In today's episode I'll be talking to Eve sacks about the unregistered schools	what a day in one of their classes is like and their effect on the children
0:00:28.240,0:00:33.120	0:01:02.480,0:01:05.600
that serve London's community of ultra-orthodox Hasidic Jews. Eve is an	who attend them.
0:00:33.120,0:00:36.399	0:01:05.600,0:01:08.720
accountant by profession and an activist with Nahamu, an	We will also be discussing why it is difficult to monitor them,
0:00:36.399,0:00:39.600	0:01:08.720,0:01:12.000
organisation that provides support to Jewish people in the UK	how to balance the rights of parents and children, and possible solutions for getting children back
0:00:39.600,0:00:43.280	0:01:12.000,0:01:16.400
whose civil liberties have been impinged upon by religious hardliners.	into registered schools where they can receive a more mainstream education.
0:00:43.280,0:00:46.399	0:01:16.400,0:01:20.960
	Finally I'll be joined by Alistair Litchen

to consider the NSS's perspective on these issues.  
Eve Sacks, what is the nature of these illegal schools and who goes to them? (ES): Right so first of - all the illegal schools in the UK are mainly in Hackney and Haringey and they are mainly, although not exclusively, for children over the age of 13. And they are almost exclusively for boys. So, other than you know really one or two exceptions in let's say Manchester, they're in northeast London and they're for boys over 13. And they they serve the Hasidic community so the Hasidic community is part of the Haredi community but it's a sort of subpart and it's probably the part that's the most extreme or the furthest away from the mainstream Jewish community

in terms of being the most insular part of the community.  
(EP): Now could you just explain for our listeners where exactly do you fall within the sort of the Jewish community spectrum?  
(ES): Right so I'm a member of an orthodox synagogue, at the United Synagogue which is a sort of main mainstream orthodox aynagogues. I've got my children at State faith schools which are all schools which have you know good standards, good Ofsteds and the secondary schools have got good secular results. My children will hopefully go to university with their GCSEs and A levels that they get and so I would describe myself as a traditional orthodox Jew.  
(EP): And how does your sort of area of the community say relate to the Hasidic community or what's the Hasidic community like?

(ES): Well I think first of all it's far away

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geographically. So

I live in northwest London and

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that community is mainly in northeast London so

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I think a lot of the time it's outside and out of mind.

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So I mean obviously people in the mainstream part of the community are

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aware that the ultra-orthodox part of the community

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exists but a lot of them would never have met

0:03:28.799,0:03:32.560

somebody from that part of the community. They would just be like anybody in the

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wider community. They'd read about it in the Press or

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they might be curious or interested. They might have a distant relation perhaps

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but it's not well integrated; in fact it's completely separate. And

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the mainstream part of the community really is very well integrated you know

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in terms of

most people in the mainstream part of

0:03:48.400,0:03:53.439

the community work in regular offices and have friends beyond the Jewish community.

0:03:53.439,0:03:57.120

(EP): So what goes on in the Hasidic community in these schools

0:03:57.120,0:04:01.200

and how did you go about finding out about it? (ES): Right so I started then being

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interested in this probably almost 10 years ago when I started to meet people

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who had been through these schools and I started listening

0:04:06.959,0:04:10.879

to what they felt and what their experiences were and how that impacted them

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after they left the community. And then as time goes on

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I've spoken to people who are still within the community but their children

0:04:18.000,0:04:21.600

are at these schools so I've, you know, tried to get a wider

0:04:21.600,0:04:26.320

view in terms of what goes on there. These are, we call them schools, but

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they actually don't fit into the Government's definition of schools which

0:04:29.280,0:04:32.479

is part of the problem because that's why Ofsted cannot inspect them

0:04:32.479,0:04:36.479

and the reason for that is they're not really schools as in

0:04:36.479,0:04:40.080

there's no secular education, there's nothing, there's

0:04:40.080,0:04:43.440

there's nothing that would look like a school in terms of these

0:04:43.440,0:04:49.440

boys aged 13 to 16 or 13 to 18 who are sitting in pairs and learning

0:04:49.440,0:04:52.639

all day and often with study partners and some

0:04:52.639,0:04:55.360

lectures but all the things that you'd expect in

0:04:55.360,0:04:59.120

a school you know: Maths, English, Science assemblies, PE

0:04:59.120,0:05:04.560

and that sort of thing is all missing. (EP): What do they learn? (ES): They learn

0:05:04.560,0:05:08.840

mainly they learn the Talmud and they might also learn

0:05:08.840,0:05:11.759

the Torah which is the five books of Moses, the

0:05:11.759,0:05:17.759

pentateuch, but more likely to be the Talmud than to be anything else. (EP): What

0:05:17.759,0:05:22.240

language are they taught in? (ES): So the language is interesting.

0:05:22.240,0:05:25.280

There's basically three different languages on the go

0:05:25.280,0:05:28.400

and you'll not be surprised to hear none of them is

0:05:28.400,0:05:32.160

English. So the language they speak in is Yiddish

0:05:32.160,0:05:36.240

which is a sort of German Hebrew dialect

0:05:36.240,0:05:40.160

and it's actually a very limited language, not really used for writing

0:05:40.160,0:05:42.960

and the vocabulary is actually quite limited. But that would be the language

0:05:42.960,0:05:46.479

they would talk to each other in, chat in the language they might speak at home.

0:05:46.479,0:05:50.160

They would rarely see it. It would rarely be written. You might see posters written

0:05:50.160,0:05:52.800

in it but it's not really a language you'd sit and write an essay about

0:05:52.800,0:05:55.680

yourself in. So that's the sort of vernacular. The

0:05:55.680,0:06:00.479

next language would be biblical Hebrew. So that's the original language of them

0:06:00.479,0:06:03.600  
that the  
Bible or what wider community might call

0:06:03.600,0:06:06.800  
the Old Testament.  
Biblical Hebrew again is not really a

0:06:06.800,0:06:09.440  
spoken language and it's considered very  
holy so

0:06:09.440,0:06:12.880  
people wouldn't speak that. That's  
more for like reading sacred text

0:06:12.880,0:06:16.400  
but they would certainly  
understand that is there, (EP): Anything

0:06:16.400,0:06:20.240  
you can read or do with  
biblical Hebrew apart from read

0:06:20.240,0:06:24.400  
religious texts?  
(ES): No although I mean I think if you were,

0:06:24.400,0:06:27.759  
if you really understood biblical Hebrew  
very well and you went to Israel you

0:06:27.759,0:06:30.400  
would probably be able to converse with  
people just like if you

0:06:30.400,0:06:34.479  
like learn ancient Old English you might  
be able to

0:06:34.479,0:06:37.759  
come to modern day Britain and just  
about get by. But that might not be

0:06:37.759,0:06:40.479  
difficult.  
It might be difficult but I mean but

0:06:40.479,0:06:43.360  
modern Hebrew was based in biblical  
Hebrew so

0:06:43.360,0:06:46.720  
it's not, you know, there are lots of  
words in common.

0:06:46.720,0:06:50.240  
So the third language is Aramaic and  
that's the language of the

0:06:50.240,0:06:53.520  
Talmud so in the Talmud the way that the  
Talmud works is

0:06:53.520,0:06:56.560  
it starts off with something called a  
Mishnah which is written in biblical

0:06:56.560,0:07:00.160  
Hebrew  
or Mishnah keeper which is similar.

0:07:00.160,0:07:04.720  
And then there'll be a so that will  
be written there and then underneath

0:07:04.720,0:07:07.039  
there'll be a whole big commentary in  
Aramaic.

0:07:07.039,0:07:10.319  
So the boys will discuss and they'll  
probably be discussing it in Yiddish.

0:07:10.319,0:07:13.919  
So they'll be the three languages on the  
go. What is interesting to understand

0:07:13.919,0:07:17.520  
about these languages  
is often the boys that they'll be able

0:07:17.520,0:07:20.080  
to  
speak Yiddish and they'll be able to

0:07:20.080,0:07:24.160  
understand and the biblical Hebrew and Aramaic but they might not actually be

0:07:24.160,0:07:28.560  
able to express themselves as in write in any of the languages because the

0:07:28.560,0:07:31.280  
schools just don't focus on that; that's just not something that's seen as being

0:07:31.280,0:07:35.680  
important.  
(EP): So they don't have to write essays? (ES):  
No,

0:07:35.680,0:07:38.880  
what so they are they literally what are they doing is just reading text.

0:07:38.880,0:07:42.400  
So basically one of the difficulties with the Talmud and it's actually quite

0:07:42.400,0:07:45.120  
interesting  
if you try and learn it, is and it's

0:07:45.120,0:07:48.160  
quite difficult to follow the arguments. You couldn't just sort of read it

0:07:48.160,0:07:51.520  
and if you read it, it just doesn't really make any sense so basically they

0:07:51.520,0:07:55.039  
work in pairs called converters and they discuss it with each other,

0:07:55.039,0:07:58.240  
trying to sort of get in the minds of what the people who wrote the Talmud

0:07:58.240,0:08:00.479  
understood. So they'll go backwards and forwards and trying to

0:08:00.479,0:08:02.720  
sort of explain it and then they'll probably have a lecture which will

0:08:02.720,0:08:06.000  
clarify what the thinking of the Rabbis is and then they'll move on to the next

0:08:06.000,0:08:11.039  
thing. So a large part of the day will be around you know going through

0:08:11.039,0:08:14.479  
the Talmudic arguments and understanding them.

0:08:14.479,0:08:18.639  
(EP): So basically then they're not learning anything to do with modern life

0:08:18.639,0:08:26.560  
at all? (ES): No. (EP): And why is it just boys? (ES):  
Oh well um so basically

0:08:26.560,0:08:32.000  
the Talmud itself says that if a girl was to learn the Torah would just be -

0:08:32.000,0:08:35.519  
I think the word used is 'licentiousness' like a nonsense.

0:08:35.519,0:08:39.919  
So and they just don't believe that and boys are commanded to

0:08:39.919,0:08:44.159  
use their time to study in the important sacred texts but that's not important

0:08:44.159,0:08:46.640  
for girls.  
(EP): S what are the girls at this age in

0:08:46.640,0:08:49.760  
this community doing?

(ES): So the girls are generally in registered

0:08:49.760,0:08:55.120  
schools, generally independent  
registered schools and they

0:08:55.120,0:08:58.560  
learn and they work towards not A levels  
probably because that would give them

0:08:58.560,0:09:01.760  
too many options later on but they work  
towards GCSEs

0:09:01.760,0:09:06.959  
in a limited range of subjects. So  
I sort of laugh at this because actually

0:09:06.959,0:09:10.640  
the State's  
heritage schools are basically forced by

0:09:10.640,0:09:14.080  
the Government to teach them Maths,  
English, Science you know sort of EBAC

0:09:14.080,0:09:18.240  
type subjects. But obviously in independent  
schools the standards are much

0:09:18.240,0:09:22.320  
laxer so they'll choose there's much  
less need to redact

0:09:22.320,0:09:26.000  
because they'll definitely choose the  
GCSEs

0:09:26.000,0:09:29.760  
and even GSCEs that are the least  
problematic

0:09:29.760,0:09:34.160  
so for example Maths would be a good one  
or English language rather than English

0:09:34.160,0:09:37.200  
Literature would be a good one.

Apparently the Science says Chemistry is

0:09:37.200,0:09:40.880  
the best because there's no  
reproduction or evolution or big

0:09:40.880,0:09:44.480  
bangs in chemistry.  
And Art is another one that girls

0:09:44.480,0:09:47.680  
might study  
so basically that the parents who

0:09:47.680,0:09:52.800  
send their boys and girls to these  
schools. The boys to the

0:09:52.800,0:09:56.320  
specific religious schools and the girls  
to the limited independence schools.

0:09:56.320,0:10:00.399  
(EP): What does what do the parents  
want out of this?

0:10:00.399,0:10:04.000  
(ES): Right so I can't get in the mindset of  
every single

0:10:04.000,0:10:09.040  
parent so all I can do is um ask people  
what the feeling is and also speak to

0:10:09.040,0:10:11.279  
the people who are unhappy because  
generally it's the people who are

0:10:11.279,0:10:14.560  
unhappy who are prepared to talk to me.  
(EP): And what's your impression? (ES): So my

0:10:14.560,0:10:19.200  
impression is there are some parents who  
are completely on board with this and they

0:10:19.200,0:10:21.360  
want their children to have a religious

life

0:10:21.360,0:10:25.440

and the boys to be tourist scholars and the girls to be good wives and mothers

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and um they're educating the way that they always have and they're very happy

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with that and there's certainly a reasonably large

0:10:31.279,0:10:34.560

percentage of the community would fall within that mindset.

0:10:34.560,0:10:38.000

(EP): What about the ones who are unhappy?  
(ES): Right so I think you can probably

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split them into different categories. There's some who are probably very

0:10:42.000,0:10:44.399

unhappy and they just wish they could send their

0:10:44.399,0:10:48.240

children to the sort of schools that my children are at. (EP): Why do they feel they

0:10:48.240,0:10:51.760

can't? (ES):  
Oh right so okay so I'll go to cover the

0:10:51.760,0:10:53.440

middle category first which is the people

0:10:53.440,0:10:58.079

who um are just moderately unhappy and would prefer that the schools are

0:10:58.079,0:11:01.680

basically um Hasidic but with better

education.

0:11:01.680,0:11:04.880

And then so there's the category of people who are very unhappy and wish

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they could send their children to um Orthodox Jewish State schools where they

0:11:08.800,0:11:13.360

would get a really good education and because there would be a stigma that

0:11:13.360,0:11:16.240

would be shunning. It would, just life would be made very

0:11:16.240,0:11:19.680

uncomfortable. So I've spoken to people who have moved out of northeast London

0:11:19.680,0:11:21.600

because they want to send their children to

0:11:21.600,0:11:26.640

Orthodox single gender and State faith schools you know and that

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might seem you might not like that from a sort of secularist point of view for

0:11:30.079,0:11:32.800

them. But that was a massive jump and these are schools with really good secular

0:11:32.800,0:11:35.680

education where their children will have options in life but

0:11:35.680,0:11:38.240

you know if you're then excluded from your synagogue and none of your

0:11:38.240,0:11:41.279

relations talk to you

and then everybody gossips about you

0:11:41.279,0:11:43.360

when you're in the street and it's, you know, that

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would be very uncomfortable and you might not want to stay there anymore.

0:11:47.279,0:11:52.079

So the communities in a way are doing the policing of individual parents

0:11:52.079,0:11:55.440

and their children. Yes so we've seen that - I don't know if you remember a few

0:11:55.440,0:11:58.720

years ago. It came to light that one of the

0:11:58.720,0:12:02.399

schools (it was actually uh it was a registered boys' primary school)

0:12:02.399,0:12:04.480

was saying that women aren't allowed to drive.

0:12:04.480,0:12:07.839

Right so I mean the whole the whole was a whole stink and it went

0:12:07.839,0:12:11.040

up to the Secretary of State for Education at that time was Nicky Morgan

0:12:11.040,0:12:15.040

and of course like she said well obviously you know schools can't do that

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but of course it's still happening. Because all that happens is they're just

0:12:18.079,0:12:21.360

slightly more careful now. They don't put it in writing but everybody knows that's

0:12:21.360,0:12:25.920

still the rules.

(EP): So how far is the the Hasidic community

0:12:25.920,0:12:31.120

um isolated from the rest of say London and even the wider Jewish

0:12:31.120,0:12:34.720

community? (ES): How far right so the way that

it's been described to me by people who

0:12:34.720,0:12:37.920

have left and have managed to leave - it is difficult to even the numbers leaving

0:12:37.920,0:12:40.800

are relatively small - is that it's like being an immigrant

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even though it's the country you've been brought up in

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because imagine if you've never had any access to culture

0:12:46.480,0:12:49.760

or just what it's, you know you've never seen TV,

0:12:49.760,0:12:53.279

you've never spoken to people outside your community, you've

0:12:53.279,0:12:56.880

not been to school in the normal sense and learned the curriculum,

0:12:56.880,0:12:59.040

you just don't know how to talk to people you don't know how to form

0:12:59.040,0:13:02.560

relationships.

You know it's very difficult so it's

0:13:02.560,0:13:04.560

just a completely world within a world  
in

0:13:04.560,0:13:07.680

Northeast London. (EP): Sure so it's hard for  
them to leave and

0:13:07.680,0:13:11.839

I mean talking about the difficulty of  
leaving what is the effect

0:13:11.839,0:13:15.519

on these boys of going to these  
religious schools?

0:13:15.519,0:13:18.959

(ES): So I think you can look at sort of the  
effect in two different ways.

0:13:18.959,0:13:23.040

So the first effect is what I've sort of  
mentioned already so things like not

0:13:23.040,0:13:27.040

having GCSEs, not having A levels,  
not being able to function, feeling like

0:13:27.040,0:13:31.680

an immigrant and  
not having literacy or numeracy.

0:13:31.680,0:13:35.279

So somebody said you know  
what it's like to be 18 and go to the

0:13:35.279,0:13:38.480

dentist and realise you can't explain  
you've got pain in your tooth for

0:13:38.480,0:13:43.680

example. (EP): Is it that bad?  
(ES): Yeah it can be that bad. I mean look

0:13:43.680,0:13:45.360

obviously different families are

different.

0:13:45.360,0:13:48.880

Some families will speak a little bit of  
English at home and some won't. I mean

0:13:48.880,0:13:51.839

you can't say it's that bad for every  
single person because that you know that

0:13:51.839,0:13:55.199

would be stretching it but in some cases  
yes it's like that.

0:13:55.199,0:13:58.880

And so there's this sort of what i would  
call it the practical problems.

0:13:58.880,0:14:02.320

And then there's all this  
sort of emotional type issues.

0:14:02.320,0:14:05.279

(EP): So I don't know and if you've been  
following the Independent Enquiry into Child

0:14:05.279,0:14:08.320

Sexual Abuse.  
So interestingly Amanda Spielman who was

0:14:08.320,0:14:11.279

interviewed this week  
and she brought a pamphlet which was

0:14:11.279,0:14:16.320

about corporal punishment  
and about how that's used basically to

0:14:16.320,0:14:20.480

discipline the children and basically  
to humiliate them to behave and be

0:14:20.480,0:14:23.920

submissive so you've got to sort of look.  
The other thing to look at is

0:14:23.920,0:14:27.519

what would be the impact of being a boy

in that school

0:14:27.519,0:14:32.000

and sitting for let's say 12 hours a day  
five and a half days a week

0:14:32.000,0:14:35.839

and studying these texts? You've got to  
think as well you know

0:14:35.839,0:14:39.600

'one size fits all' in these schools. Now  
we know from

0:14:39.600,0:14:42.880

modern educational methods that one size  
doesn't fit all. That some children are

0:14:42.880,0:14:47.120

just less academic and are less able  
to sit and study for hours on end but

0:14:47.120,0:14:50.000

you know that's the path that  
everybody's pushed into

0:14:50.000,0:14:54.000

and imagine you know  
what the emotional impact will be

0:14:54.000,0:14:57.760

by you know imagine you've got  
borderline ADHD or any

0:14:57.760,0:15:01.519

anything else of having to sit still and  
lack movement and be

0:15:01.519,0:15:05.920

hit or disciplined if you can't do that  
which is effectively child abuse.

0:15:05.920,0:15:10.240

(ES): Yes yes I mean obviously some people  
will feel better than others. They'll be

0:15:10.240,0:15:14.800

you know the very academic model child

who has no problem behaving

0:15:14.800,0:15:18.720

and will never be disciplined and  
understands everything very quickly and

0:15:18.720,0:15:23.440

you know but you know he'll be the top  
of the class and he's

0:15:23.440,0:15:26.720

much less likely to feel that it was  
child abuse than somebody with a

0:15:26.720,0:15:28.880

different profile.  
(EP): But I mean if they're actually

0:15:28.880,0:15:30.880

undergoing corporal punishment is what I  
meant.

0:15:30.880,0:15:33.920

(ES): Yeah but the corporal punishment would  
be the one that would be happening to

0:15:33.920,0:15:36.959

the ones who are not behaving.  
Sure i think it's awful but you know

0:15:36.959,0:15:40.720

it's probably not going to  
be for every single boy you mentioned

0:15:40.720,0:15:44.399

that Ofsted can't inspect them.  
(EP): What's the legal loophole that's being

0:15:44.399,0:15:48.639

exploited here?  
(ES): Right so offhand and my understanding is

0:15:48.639,0:15:51.120

that when you look at what the  
definition of a school is

0:15:51.120,0:15:55.360

it comes down to a school as something

suitable for a child of school age

0:15:55.360,0:15:59.040

um but these are not because they don't provide any secular education. What's

0:15:59.040,0:16:01.360

interesting actually is I've emailed the DFE

0:16:01.360,0:16:04.800

a few times because um i'm not sure if you're aware

0:16:04.800,0:16:08.800

there's been quite a few primary schools which have been shut down

0:16:08.800,0:16:11.759

recently.

Yeah yep so what's happened is in their

0:16:11.759,0:16:15.680

places

in their place unregistered schools

0:16:15.680,0:16:19.040

have popped up.

So I've tried to email the DFE to say

0:16:19.040,0:16:21.279

I've heard of this school, a part of this school,

0:16:21.279,0:16:24.959

but actually generally in the registered primary schools even though the

0:16:24.959,0:16:28.800

education was dire they were providing a little bit of secular education each day

0:16:28.800,0:16:32.959

like reluctantly i guess but once they turn into an unregistered school the

0:16:32.959,0:16:35.199

loophole

is that there's no secular education.

0:16:35.199,0:16:38.560

Because once you provide any secular education you fall foul of the

0:16:38.560,0:16:40.800

loophole. (EP):

Isn't it the case though that these

0:16:40.800,0:16:45.839

schools are effectively in practice stopping boys from going to proper

0:16:45.839,0:16:48.320

secular schools which they should be doing?

0:16:48.320,0:16:52.560

(ES): No I think that's not the right way of looking at it. I think these families,

0:16:52.560,0:16:55.600

even the ones who are the most open-minded, would never

0:16:55.600,0:17:00.399

ever send their child to a regular secular school under any circumstances.

0:17:00.399,0:17:04.240

Yes there will be a certain percentage who'd be happy to send to

0:17:04.240,0:17:08.799

an Orthodox single gender State school like the ones I've mentioned,

0:17:08.799,0:17:12.640

(EP) Yeah I mean I guess what ilmeant was

0:17:12.640,0:17:17.839

if these children aren't getting a secular education at the

0:17:17.839,0:17:20.319

school they aren't getting any sort of

formal education.

0:17:20.319,0:17:24.559

(ES): Right exactly so this is a where the legislation falls down so obviously

0:17:24.559,0:17:28.720

yeah child under 16 has to receive an education so and he's not receiving any

0:17:28.720,0:17:31.679

at all. (EP): Right I'm not receiving at all that the onus falls on the parents to

0:17:31.679,0:17:34.960

homeschool them.

(ES): Yeah but um the legislation, and that's

0:17:34.960,0:17:38.559

been woefully inadequate as well, there has been a consultation but

0:17:38.559,0:17:43.679

what's happening with that is if anybody so we actually heard of somebody who

0:17:43.679,0:17:48.320

um was interviewed by Hackney or I think it was Haringey after

0:17:48.320,0:17:52.480

and the Council suspected their child had been in an unregistered school

0:17:52.480,0:17:55.919

and the mother was able to spin together a whole yarn about how she was

0:17:55.919,0:17:58.720

homeschooling him teaching in Business Studies and this is a boy who just

0:17:58.720,0:18:01.840

doesn't speak any English but because they didn't interview the

0:18:01.840,0:18:05.520

child and the mother's

the mother was completely fluent in

0:18:05.520,0:18:09.120

English and she was able to cover for him cover for the Rabbi's,

0:18:09.120,0:18:11.440

cover for everybody so it's very difficult

0:18:11.440,0:18:16.320

often to find, to sort of deal with this situation. (EP): What do you

0:18:16.320,0:18:21.039

think is the solution

um to these unregistered schools or

0:18:21.039,0:18:23.120

to

to these children? (ES): Right so the first

0:18:23.120,0:18:26.400

thing that needs to happen is you need to change the legislation to shut down

0:18:26.400,0:18:29.600

the unregistered schools. And there's going to be a lot. It's going to

0:18:29.600,0:18:32.000

be very difficult to do this. You're going to

0:18:32.000,0:18:36.080

you know have a lot of people as i said before a lot of people have bought

0:18:36.080,0:18:39.200

into the whole narrative and are really going to be very upset and almost see it

0:18:39.200,0:18:42.559

as a sort of anti-semitic act perhaps. And the police

0:18:42.559,0:18:46.000

and the DFE or whoever it is

will have to be very firm and just shut

0:18:46.000,0:18:48.320

down and shut down the unregistered schools.

0:18:48.320,0:18:51.600

(EP): The question then is what you do with the children? (ES): So

0:18:51.600,0:18:55.520

as far as I can see there's basically two options:

0:18:55.520,0:18:58.400

either you can get the well I guess three options. Either you can get them

0:18:58.400,0:19:03.200

into independent registered schools

0:19:03.200,0:19:06.799

or you can set up state funded

0:19:06.799,0:19:10.320

faith schools for them. Because really the last thing you want is them being

0:19:10.320,0:19:13.679

educated at home because then the odds of them becoming literate and

0:19:13.679,0:19:17.679

numerate are very low. (EP): Sure and that will have a knock-on impact their whole life.

0:19:17.679,0:19:22.160

(ES): So basically some sort of compromise where they are at a registered school

0:19:22.160,0:19:26.000

but it is sort of more towards somewhere closer on

0:19:26.000,0:19:29.280

the other well

I think unless the chance to get seven

0:19:29.280,0:19:33.200

or eight GCSEs and three A levels then you know they're being let down by

0:19:33.200,0:19:36.080

everybody, by the government you know, by society.

0:19:36.080,0:19:39.760

Because if they can't go on to further education and pursue whatever career

0:19:39.760,0:19:42.880

they would be interested in pursuing they've not the same opportunities as

0:19:42.880,0:19:48.080

every other child in this country. So you know the question then is okay

0:19:48.080,0:19:51.280

whether it's preferable for it to be an independent school or state school and

0:19:51.280,0:19:54.480

you can make arguments you know for either. My

0:19:54.480,0:19:58.400

personal view is I prefer State schools because generally these

0:19:58.400,0:20:02.640

others often they don't see a viable secular education so they won't put the

0:20:02.640,0:20:05.679

funding in to make sure the children get a very high quality secular education whereas a

0:20:05.679,0:20:07.679

State school you know the government's paying

0:20:07.679,0:20:10.400

for the secular education and then the children will actually come out

0:20:10.400,0:20:13.760

with them, good skills that will help them going through their lives.

0:20:13.760,0:20:17.919

But either way they have to be in proper schools where they're getting proper

0:20:17.919,0:20:21.440

education.

(EP): Yes absolutely. Now you mentioned this

0:20:21.440,0:20:25.520

sort of potential argument that

0:20:25.520,0:20:28.880

they might make -

that it's anti-semitic or that you

0:20:28.880,0:20:33.760

know parents have a right to educate their children according to their

0:20:33.760,0:20:37.039

philosophy or beliefs.

How far do you think that argument goes

0:20:37.039,0:20:40.720

or what's the response to that?

(ES): Well I don't think there's any argument

0:20:40.720,0:20:44.400

with the government being anti-semitic here because I think that

0:20:44.400,0:20:47.679

once you start going down that line you sort of end up in a bigotry of

0:20:47.679,0:20:50.880

low expectations; that you're letting these children achieve

0:20:50.880,0:20:54.240

less in terms of their secular education

than any other child in the country and

0:20:54.240,0:20:57.520

that's almost

is that not anti-semitic in itself? That

0:20:57.520,0:21:01.360

everybody's entitled to get GCSEs unless you're a Haredi Jew?

0:21:01.360,0:21:06.559

Yeah um so I've

quite limited sympathy for the

0:21:06.559,0:21:10.080

anti-semitism argument

and I suppose I'm an Orthodox Jew

0:21:10.080,0:21:15.280

myself. I mean I have like a tiny bit of sympathy

0:21:15.280,0:21:18.000

for when you start going down the lines of when there's things that they don't

0:21:18.000,0:21:22.559

want their children to know -

so for example if I was um saying like

0:21:22.559,0:21:25.840

"what sort of compromises do I think might be possible?" I'd much rather

0:21:25.840,0:21:28.960

they come out with three levels which are in let's just say

0:21:28.960,0:21:33.200

economics, computer science, and Maths which are non-problematic subjects

0:21:33.200,0:21:36.960

than you force them to study biology. Sure now obviously if you don't study

0:21:36.960,0:21:40.559

biology your career options are limited

so that is difficult but you can still

0:21:40.559,0:21:44.159

have a reasonably good career  
with economics, computer science let's

0:21:44.159,0:21:48.159

say at Math A level so  
you know I think there's that there

0:21:48.159,0:21:52.240

might be trade-offs that you  
that you're prepared to make perhaps.

0:21:52.240,0:21:57.120

But ultimately my big concern  
is that basically children growing up

0:21:57.120,0:22:00.320

without  
getting you know skills for employment

0:22:00.320,0:22:03.200

without getting skills for  
their careers without being able to

0:22:03.200,0:22:07.600

support themselves  
and that are not having a lifelong

0:22:07.600,0:22:10.640

impact on them.  
(EP): That's really interesting. You've

0:22:10.640,0:22:15.360

just one very final question which is  
in terms of these religious schools.

0:22:15.360,0:22:18.880

Who's behind them? Who are the leaders of  
the community? Who are most

0:22:18.880,0:22:23.919

in favour of these religious schools.  
(ES): Oh that's a very difficult question to

0:22:23.919,0:22:27.039

answer because as I said before

the

0:22:27.039,0:22:30.960

Haredi community there's lots of  
different parts of the Haredi community

0:22:30.960,0:22:33.919

and then they would all have different  
Rabbis that they would answer to in

0:22:33.919,0:22:38.799

their synagogues perhaps Rabbis abroad  
um so i don't think you can sort of put

0:22:38.799,0:22:43.679

your finger on any one person and say  
it's that person who wants it and it's

0:22:43.679,0:22:46.880

more that people are brought  
in the Hasidic community people are

0:22:46.880,0:22:51.039

brought up into specific Hasidic sects and  
that Hasidic sect of a leader

0:22:51.039,0:22:54.640

and that Hasidic sect of girls school and  
boys schools in yeshivas

0:22:54.640,0:22:59.440

and the the leader would be a Rabbi  
but he might not be in the UK,

0:22:59.440,0:23:02.720

okay so it might be in Israel or  
somewhere else or in America or

0:23:02.720,0:23:06.400

Canada. (EP): Yes, well Eve Sacks, thank you  
very much. That was a

0:23:06.400,0:23:10.400

really fascinating interview and has  
given us lots of material for discussion.

0:23:10.400,0:23:15.450

Thank you.

0:23:18.960,0:23:22.400

I'm now joined by Alistair Lichten,  
Head of Education at the National

0:23:22.400,0:23:26.960

Secular Society,  
to discuss his response to Eve's points

0:23:26.960,0:23:31.360

and what the NSS's position  
is. So Alastair what's the National

0:23:31.360,0:23:34.960

Secular Society's  
position about these unregistered

0:23:34.960,0:23:38.240

schools and what work is it doing at the  
moment in this area?

0:23:38.240,0:23:42.000

(AL): Well thanks Emma and thanks to  
Eve for her

0:23:42.000,0:23:46.320

insight on this issue. So the National  
Secular Society, our

0:23:46.320,0:23:49.360

main focus has always been on  
state-funded

0:23:49.360,0:23:53.039

faith schools and issues within the  
state funded sector because it's just

0:23:53.039,0:23:56.159

the biggest area from a secularist  
perspective.

0:23:56.159,0:23:59.840

It's the most egregious because it's  
state funded.

0:23:59.840,0:24:04.720

Though over the last almost 10 years  
we've been doing increasing work

0:24:04.720,0:24:10.159

looking at the independent sector  
both the registered regulated

0:24:10.159,0:24:16.559

independent sector and the unregistered  
potentially unlawful independent sector.

0:24:16.559,0:24:23.360

Our position is that when a school is  
independent and it's not funded by the state

0:24:23.360,0:24:26.960

then it's  
pretty clear and fair that it has a lot

0:24:26.960,0:24:31.600

more freedom  
and to operate and

0:24:31.600,0:24:36.559

to promote a religious  
or other ethos. But that

0:24:36.559,0:24:42.480

even within an independent system  
there are still children's independent

0:24:42.480,0:24:46.240

rights  
that have to be protected separate to

0:24:46.240,0:24:49.679

often  
the family and the independent

0:24:49.679,0:24:54.480

school's rights itself.  
So we've always supported there being

0:24:54.480,0:24:59.120

better regulation which is over the last  
few years begun to come in

0:24:59.120,0:25:03.600

to ensure there is at least a  
minimum basic standard within the

0:25:03.600,0:25:08.720

independent sector  
and with the issue of unregistered

0:25:08.720,0:25:15.520

often illegal faith schools.  
Because that's just completely

0:25:15.520,0:25:19.840

escaping any regulation, any oversight.  
We've been one of the leading

0:25:19.840,0:25:24.240

organisations calling for this issue to  
be taken seriously ,for these

0:25:24.240,0:25:30.559

schools to be identified and  
to be brought into line with the law.

0:25:30.559,0:25:35.120

(EP): Well one of the difficulties with  
with these unregistered schools is that

0:25:35.120,0:25:39.039

Ofsted doesn't seem to be able to  
catch them because of this

0:25:39.039,0:25:42.799

this strange provision about  
homeschooling. I mean

0:25:42.799,0:25:45.919

what do you think is the answer to  
that?

0:25:45.919,0:25:52.880

(AL): Yes so often when a child is attending  
an unregistered school parents will

0:25:52.880,0:25:59.360

say the child is being homeschooled.  
Parents also often supplementing legitimate

0:25:59.360,0:26:02.000

homeschooling  
so they actually are educating the child

0:26:02.000,0:26:04.799

at home but they then supplement that  
with

0:26:04.799,0:26:09.760

potentially part-time attendance at an  
unregistered school.

0:26:09.760,0:26:13.760

It's difficult to tackle this issue  
because

0:26:13.760,0:26:17.440

of the lack of definition of what  
actually a school is now.

0:26:17.440,0:26:20.799

I think we can all look at a dictionary  
definition and we all sort of know what

0:26:20.799,0:26:24.240

is meant by a school  
but there are settings which provide

0:26:24.240,0:26:26.960

some form of education which aren't  
schools

0:26:26.960,0:26:30.880

so there can sometimes be a legitimate

0:26:30.880,0:26:34.799

lack of clarity over whether or not an  
institution should be registered. Not

0:26:34.799,0:26:36.960

every  
institution does need to be registered

0:26:36.960,0:26:41.760

but if it's operating as  
a school then it should be registered.

0:26:41.760,0:26:46.720

The Government is thankfully  
moving towards a position which we've

0:26:46.720,0:26:48.960  
endorsed  
in our response to the latest

0:26:48.960,0:26:54.000  
consultation on this issue  
of defining what a school is and what a

0:26:54.000,0:26:58.000  
full-time  
school is and that's going to be based

0:26:58.000,0:27:00.880  
on  
an idea and we might quibble the exact

0:27:00.880,0:27:03.679  
definition  
but based on the idea of if there's an

0:27:03.679,0:27:08.080  
institution which is, basically walks  
like a school quacks like a school

0:27:08.080,0:27:11.600  
then it should be treated as a school. It  
should be registered. It should be held

0:27:11.600,0:27:13.919  
accountable.  
(EP): And what was the state of that

0:27:13.919,0:27:18.080  
legislation at the moment?  
(AL): So the Government, the Department of

0:27:18.080,0:27:22.480  
Education, is currently  
consulting on bringing in a proper

0:27:22.480,0:27:26.559  
definition  
of a school and full-time

0:27:26.559,0:27:29.039  
settings.  
That consultation I believe has been

0:27:29.039,0:27:32.559  
suspended  
and that's as a result of the current

0:27:32.559,0:27:36.799  
Covid 19 crisis  
but we expect that there

0:27:36.799,0:27:41.039  
will be progress on that  
and that we will have a better system of

0:27:41.039,0:27:45.679  
registration  
and that we will continue hopefully

0:27:45.679,0:27:51.360  
the trend of doing a much better job as  
we as it has been done over the last

0:27:51.360,0:27:54.559  
several years of holding independent  
schools

0:27:54.559,0:27:58.240  
accountable to the standards which they  
are expected

0:27:58.240,0:28:02.080  
to follow. Hopefully that process  
continues

0:28:02.080,0:28:07.200  
but unfortunately as there has been an  
effort to hold schools accountable

0:28:07.200,0:28:12.320  
these schools who most vigorously  
object to these standards

0:28:12.320,0:28:16.399  
have pushed back and you know equally we  
could see

0:28:16.399,0:28:20.640  
the Government begin to weaken their  
approach and go back to a situation

0:28:20.640,0:28:26.080  
which we had just a few years ago  
of these issues which were going on but

0:28:26.080,0:28:28.960  
they weren't being pointed out by  
Inspectors. There was a reluctance to

0:28:28.960,0:28:31.279  
deal with it because it was just sort of  
like oh

0:28:31.279,0:28:36.960  
put it in the too difficult box.  
But I mean that that's where, when these

0:28:36.960,0:28:40.159  
schools are  
acknowledged as schools there's often

0:28:40.159,0:28:45.919  
just a lack of communication so  
you can have a situation where it is

0:28:45.919,0:28:49.200  
known  
in the community that a certain setting

0:28:49.200,0:28:53.520  
is an unregistered school.  
There may be an organisation which is

0:28:53.520,0:28:56.880  
registered with the  
with the Charities Commission and has

0:28:56.880,0:29:00.640  
the charitable purpose  
of providing education and therefore

0:29:00.640,0:29:03.440  
that's a way of knowing that they are  
running unregistered schools where that

0:29:03.440,0:29:08.240  
information isn't filtering through.  
Ofsted can have you know a very good

0:29:08.240,0:29:10.960  
idea  
that that a certain setting is an

0:29:10.960,0:29:14.799  
unregistered school  
but not be able then to gather the

0:29:14.799,0:29:18.960  
evidence, may not be able to get to  
being inspecting in it. I've also

0:29:18.960,0:29:25.039  
used the phrase 'settings' but that can be  
unclear so if you've got a

0:29:25.039,0:29:29.039  
an organisation operating from multiple  
addresses potentially moving around

0:29:29.039,0:29:33.200  
potentially  
you might have operating at two

0:29:33.200,0:29:35.360  
addresses  
and operating at one address in the

0:29:35.360,0:29:38.799  
morning and the other in the afternoon  
and then saying oh no these are two

0:29:38.799,0:29:42.480  
separate things and this one is only  
four hours here and this one's only four

0:29:42.480,0:29:48.240  
hours there so it's not full-time.  
These are complicated areas. It does need

0:29:48.240,0:29:51.840  
resources but  
fundamentally it needs to

0:29:51.840,0:29:58.320  
have a seriousness, it needs to have  
the prioritisation of tackling these

0:29:58.320,0:30:01.200

'settings'  
because you know at the end it's

0:30:01.200,0:30:04.320

children's rights, it shows rights to a  
basic education

0:30:04.320,0:30:08.720

which are on the line.(EP):And to let's  
just talk about that briefly:

0:30:08.720,0:30:11.919

because you mentioned even in an  
independent school say

0:30:11.919,0:30:16.320

there is a basic standard of education  
which children should expect.

0:30:16.320,0:30:20.080

For you what would be included in that  
what should all children have to know

0:30:20.080,0:30:24.240

about  
regardless of their faith background?

0:30:24.240,0:30:27.760

(AL):Well I mean that can be difficult  
difficult to find out.

0:30:27.760,0:30:31.679

Obviously we're not an educational  
organisation, we're not experts on

0:30:31.679,0:30:37.279

on this sort of detail.  
Independent schools should be able

0:30:37.279,0:30:39.520

to  
have their own approach. It seems

0:30:39.520,0:30:42.880

reasonable and that approach might be  
very difficult ,different

0:30:42.880,0:30:47.679

to that within within State schools so  
I don't know for example if they should

0:30:47.679,0:30:52.480

necessarily be having to be teaching  
certain qualifications

0:30:52.480,0:30:55.279

but the key thing is the broad principle  
of

0:30:55.279,0:30:59.919

- are they receiving an education which  
gives them opportunities in life

0:30:59.919,0:31:03.200

or are they receiving an education which  
is designed

0:31:03.200,0:31:06.880

just to force them into a very narrow  
role?

0:31:06.880,0:31:10.559

So it's for you it's about  
opportunities.

0:31:10.559,0:31:13.679

i mean that's also something Eve was  
talking about, the idea that

0:31:13.679,0:31:17.200

they should be able to participate in  
civil society

0:31:17.200,0:31:23.360

and have jobs and  
the standards are built around that

0:31:23.360,0:31:26.399

idea. For example  
there's not a requirement to teach in

0:31:26.399,0:31:31.840

English at an independent school. It  
can teach in another language but it has

0:31:31.840,0:31:36.000 a responsibility to ensure that the children at that school still	0:32:16.960,0:32:19.440 necessarily be the best thing for their children. (AL): If
0:31:36.000,0:31:40.120 learn English because otherwise it's incredibly	0:32:19.440,0:32:23.919 they want to hinder them, well this is an area where I think we need to
0:31:40.120,0:31:44.720 marginalizing and alienating experience to grow	0:32:23.919,0:32:29.200 do a better job of educating people about human rights so people will often
0:31:44.720,0:31:48.399 up in a country and be denied the ability to learn the	0:32:29.200,0:32:33.120 say I have the right to raise my child how I
0:31:48.399,0:31:52.480 language which would allow you to interact with people in that country.	0:32:33.120,0:32:35.919 want and that's largely true but that's not an
0:31:52.480,0:31:55.840 (EP): Absolutely and now also in terms of these children's	0:32:35.919,0:32:38.880 unlimited right so if we look at the right to education
0:31:55.840,0:31:58.799 rights so we're saying that it's about their flourishing but we don't	0:32:38.880,0:32:43.760 enshrined in the Human Rights Act that does contain a provision about
0:31:58.799,0:32:03.360 necessarily you know want to name the specifics but what	0:32:43.760,0:32:47.840 raising children, having education in accordance with your
0:32:03.360,0:32:07.919 would the NSS's response be to to this claim by parents that they want	0:32:47.840,0:32:50.480 religious or philosophical convictions
0:32:07.919,0:32:10.240 to have the right to educate their children	0:32:50.480,0:32:55.279 but that right is not unlimited so that right is there to prevent
0:32:10.240,0:32:13.200 the way they want to because I think Eve made quite a good point about that you	0:32:55.279,0:32:58.799 the state indoctrinating your children into a particular religious
0:32:13.200,0:32:16.960 know she said these these parents may not	0:32:58.799,0:33:02.159 or non-religious worldview that is not there to

0:33:02.159,0:33:06.320  
protect your unlimited right because you don't have an unlimited right

0:33:06.320,0:33:11.039  
to raise your child within a particular narrow world view, that's not a right

0:33:11.039,0:33:17.440  
to demand schools of a certain religious ethos. Parents all

0:33:17.440,0:33:20.799  
parents have the right to raise and inculcate their

0:33:20.799,0:33:24.880  
children within their world view whether that is religious

0:33:24.880,0:33:28.559  
or non-religious but that is not unlimited.

0:33:28.559,0:33:34.240  
The children also have their own independent rights. Now you might wish to

0:33:34.240,0:33:37.519  
raise your child within a worldview within a community

0:33:37.519,0:33:43.679  
that is radically different to mainstream society and

0:33:43.679,0:33:50.159  
the law protects your right to do that but it doesn't give you the right to

0:33:50.159,0:33:54.159  
enlist other organisations, it doesn't mean that

0:33:54.159,0:33:58.080  
the State cannot require that certain institutions

0:33:58.080,0:34:03.840  
obey certain standards. (EP): What about Eve's idea that part of the solution to these

0:34:03.840,0:34:08.159  
unregistered schools might be to have State-funded faith schools as a

0:34:08.159,0:34:12.960  
sort of halfway house compromise. (AL): Well so obviously the National

0:34:12.960,0:34:17.119  
Secular Society you know one of our most central longest running

0:34:17.119,0:34:21.919  
important campaigns is against State-funded faith schools

0:34:21.919,0:34:25.200  
but that's the position we want to get to.

0:34:25.200,0:34:28.879  
We want to get to an entirely community ethos

0:34:28.879,0:34:35.679  
state education system. You also have issues though about harm reduction and

0:34:35.679,0:34:41.679  
for a campaigning organisation um harm reduction issues can be a bit

0:34:41.679,0:34:47.280  
difficult because how far do you allow your efforts to

0:34:47.280,0:34:51.679  
reduce immediate harm to quell your ambitions

0:34:51.679,0:34:56.320  
for a better end position now.

0:34:56.320,0:34:59.599

I think the thing that has to be said is that

0:34:59.599,0:35:04.560

Eve's argument there is more of a nuanced argument and

0:35:04.560,0:35:09.440

deserves potentially more reflection from secularists

0:35:09.440,0:35:14.960

than the typical just sort of terrible arguments that we hear from many sources

0:35:14.960,0:35:18.960

for faith schools. I do feel though that there's

0:35:18.960,0:35:25.280

within that a lack of ambition, the sort of acceptance that if a community

0:35:25.280,0:35:29.599

says or not if a community says if some people in the community say

0:35:29.599,0:35:35.839

no we will not accept this . That you're stuck with that and you can't try

0:35:35.839,0:35:39.680

and build consensus and you can't ultimately

0:35:39.680,0:35:44.160

if there's a lack of consent if you can't build that consensus still

0:35:44.160,0:35:48.079

actually take robust action when necessary.

0:35:48.079,0:35:53.359

We are always clear that different faith, that not all faith

0:35:53.359,0:35:58.000

schools are the same and not all faith schools are as bad as each other,

0:35:58.000,0:36:01.760

and when we talk about some of the terrible practices going on in faith

0:36:01.760,0:36:04.560

schools we don't suggest that's happening

0:36:04.560,0:36:10.240

in every single one. If we would like to at the National Secular Society

0:36:10.240,0:36:15.839

move towards an inclusive community ethos education system and that is the

0:36:15.839,0:36:19.839

default and that is how all schools operate how you get there is

0:36:19.839,0:36:25.040

still going to be a process. It's still going to be this stage

0:36:25.040,0:36:29.119

what sort of consensus can we get in the next stage what sort of

0:36:29.119,0:36:31.599

consensus can we get the next stage there's a lot of

0:36:31.599,0:36:35.920

opposition at this stage but how can we overcome

0:36:35.920,0:36:40.000

that opposition. There will still be even if we get rid

0:36:40.000,0:36:42.240

of discriminatory school admissions and we make

0:36:42.240,0:36:45.839  
all schools community ethos each school  
will still have

0:36:45.839,0:36:50.960  
a different makeup of pupils and because  
of the way that demographics work in the

0:36:50.960,0:36:54.640  
country  
you will still have schools that have a

0:36:54.640,0:36:58.880  
majority or a larger proportion  
of pupils from certain backgrounds and

0:36:58.880,0:37:04.079  
that will still influence  
the culture of the school but

0:37:04.079,0:37:08.960  
the idea is that of moving towards a  
community ethos system.

0:37:08.960,0:37:16.480  
(EP): Alastair Lichten, thank you very much  
(AL): Thanks so much.

0:37:16.480,0:37:20.480  
That was Episode 27 of the National  
Secular Society podcast

0:37:20.480,0:37:25.680  
hosted by Emma Park. My guest speakers  
were Eve Sacks and Alastair Lichten.

0:37:25.680,0:37:29.280  
If you would like to help us challenge  
unfair religious privilege and support

0:37:29.280,0:37:31.920  
freedom of and from religion in Britain  
today

0:37:31.920,0:37:36.440  
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0:37:36.440,0:37:39.760  
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0:37:39.760,0:37:43.359  
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