

Ep 27: Unregistered (illegal) schools with Eve Sacks

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

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|--|---|
| 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

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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

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

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

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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

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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

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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

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

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

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

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

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

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all day and often with study partners and some

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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

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

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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

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

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There's basically three different languages on the go

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

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English. So the language they speak in is Yiddish

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which is a sort of German Hebrew dialect

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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

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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

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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.

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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

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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

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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

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sort of explain it and then they'll probably have a lecture which will

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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

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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.

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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

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because they'll definitely choose the
GCSEs

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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

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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?

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(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

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percentage of the community would fall within that mindset.

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(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

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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

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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.

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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

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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

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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

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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.

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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

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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)

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was saying that women aren't allowed to drive.

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

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

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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

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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

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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

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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.

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

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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

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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

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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

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

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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

0:31:36.000,0:31:40.120
learn English
because otherwise it's incredibly

0:31:40.120,0:31:44.720
marginalizing
and alienating experience to grow

0:31:44.720,0:31:48.399
up in a country
and be denied the ability to learn the

0:31:48.399,0:31:52.480
language which would allow you to
interact with people in that country.

0:31:52.480,0:31:55.840
(EP): Absolutely and
now also in terms of these children's

0:31:55.840,0:31:58.799
rights so we're saying that it's about
their flourishing but we don't

0:31:58.799,0:32:03.360
necessarily you know
want to name the specifics but what

0:32:03.360,0:32:07.919
would the NSS's response be to
to this claim by parents that they want

0:32:07.919,0:32:10.240
to have the right to educate their
children

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

0:32:13.200,0:32:16.960
know she said
these these parents may not

0:32:16.960,0:32:19.440
necessarily be
the best thing for their children. (AL): If

0:32:19.440,0:32:23.919
they want to hinder them, well
this is an area where I think we need to

0:32:23.919,0:32:29.200
do a better job of educating people
about human rights so people will often

0:32:29.200,0:32:33.120
say
I have the right to raise my child how I

0:32:33.120,0:32:35.919
want and
that's largely true but that's not an

0:32:35.919,0:32:38.880
unlimited right
so if we look at the right to education

0:32:38.880,0:32:43.760
enshrined in the Human Rights Act
that does contain a provision about

0:32:43.760,0:32:47.840
raising children,
having education in accordance with your

0:32:47.840,0:32:50.480
religious or philosophical
convictions

0:32:50.480,0:32:55.279
but that right is not unlimited so that
right is there to prevent

0:32:55.279,0:32:58.799
the state indoctrinating your children
into a particular religious

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
why not become a member of the NSS? Full
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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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