

# Ep 52: A new Catholic school for Peterborough

<https://www.secularism.org.uk/podcast/2021/06/ep-52>

0:00:07.200,0:00:10.080

"Children are children. They might have Catholic parents

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but that doesn't make them Catholic and I think they have a right to have a broad

0:00:15.200,0:00:20.880

education in all religions and none in order to make their decision when they're old enough."

0:00:27.280,0:00:31.360

You're listening to Episode 52 of the National Secular Society podcast produced by Emma Park(EP).

0:00:32.160,0:00:36.080

Peterborough Council has just given the go-ahead to the building of a new voluntary-aided Catholic

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primary school in the growing residential district of Hampton Water. This will be the first Catholic

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state school to have been built in England for over 10 years. It has been pushed through despite

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much opposition from local residents. In this episode my guests are Terri Haynes (TH), a teacher

0:00:50.240,0:00:54.320

and Liberal Democrat councillor and Tracy Butler (TB) who campaigned against the introduction of

0:00:54.320,0:00:59.040

the school. They talked to me about the reasons

why it has been unpopular and in particular the

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dubious claims of the Catholic Diocese of East Anglia that the school would increase diversity

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of education. We also discussed the way in which the Diocese was able to have its proposal accepted

0:01:08.480,0:01:12.960

by the Conservative majority council and the financial incentives that may have been involved.

0:01:13.760,0:01:17.760

Hampton Academies Trust had submitted their own

proposal for a non-denominational school to the

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Department for Education but the DFE rejected

it for reasons that remain obscure. I will

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then be joined by Alastair Lichten (AL) who has

coordinated the 'No More Faith Schools' campaign

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for the NSS. He will be helping to put the events in Peterborough in the national context.

0:01:36.760,0:01:37.760

(EP):

0:01:37.760,0:01:43.040

Tracy and Terri, welcome to the podcast. (TB and TH): Thank you, Hello. (EP): Let's start

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by just going back to the the origins of this school. Tracy, how did you first learn that

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a new Catholic school was going to be developed in the Hampton Water area? (TB): My daughter

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attends one of the Hampton Academy's schools and she brought home a letter informing parents of

0:02:02.960,0:02:07.280

the new school that was going to be built on Hampton Water. It was also then posted on a lot

0:02:07.280,0:02:13.120

of the social media sites in Hampton. That's when I first became aware of it. (EP): And what was the

0:02:13.120,0:02:18.600

process by which the school was eventually sort of given the green light by the council? (TB):

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So there was another school. The Hampton Academies did put a bid in for this school but that was

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rejected and we did actually get a petition up once we found out that this was a faith school

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and well, the Council just sort of ignored everything we'd done step by step. We did

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petitions, we did emails, we emailed the MPs, we met all the local councillors. We had a massive,

0:02:43.520,0:02:49.280

a lot of support for this and unfortunately the Council still approved the school. (EP): And how

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long a period of time did this all take? (TB): Oh it's probably over a year. (EP):

0:02:54.880,0:03:00.080

In terms of the local residents how strong is the opposition to having a Catholic school there?

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(TB): Oh we'd got really strong support opposing the school on lots of grounds. Lots of people

0:03:08.160,0:03:15.760

are doing it on the faith basis as well as the planning side: so having a school that's

0:03:15.760,0:03:20.160

only going to serve 20% of the catchment area is obviously going to attract a lot

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more traffic coming in and out of a small area;  
there are also the fact that Hampton Water is a

0:03:27.520,0:03:34.080

a very diverse community and there's lots of faiths and there's also non-faiths

0:03:34.640,0:03:40.640

so the majority of people felt that they were excluded from being able to attend a local school

0:03:40.640,0:03:45.040

based on what their faith was. (EP):  
Could you, just in terms of the figures,

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explain the reason why the Catholic school is only going to be able to serve 20% of the

0:03:49.040,0:03:54.800

catchment area and then why that will lead to an increase in traffic? (TB): They can do it at 50%

0:03:54.800,0:04:02.160

but they are sticking at having 80% faith and 20% of other faiths and non-faiths which means

0:04:03.600,0:04:09.600

that it is going to bring a lot more children from out of the area so they will naturally travel by

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car, possibly bus. Looking at the planning there's lots of bus route ideas put into there, there's

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lots of park and ride type ideas and obviously cycle routes so they are putting all that into

0:04:25.040,0:04:31.600

planning which is naturally sort of saying as well that there is going to be an influx of traffic. We

0:04:31.600,0:04:38.480

also attended the Diocese consultation and one resident did ask the question that if she was

0:04:38.480,0:04:46.160

Catholic and lived out of the area (we gave an area that was probably 40 minutes away)

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would we get a place? And they said 'Yes'. So naturally they are offering places to children

0:04:52.400,0:04:56.880

from the wider area other than Peterborough as well. (EP): And what's the other provision

0:04:56.880,0:05:02.960

for primary school children in this area? Is it sufficient to meet the demand? (TB): Yes Hampton's

0:05:03.600,0:05:09.840

still growing whereas Hampton East is going to be possibly 3,000 houses when that's developed.

0:05:11.040,0:05:17.280

There are already primary schools in Hampton. They are oversubscribed, they're very popular. Lots

0:05:17.280,0:05:25.120

of people that move into the area are travelling quite a way out to get their children to school.

0:05:26.160,0:05:30.080

If they travel more than, I believe it's three

miles, then the local authority have to provide

0:05:30.080,0:05:36.160

transport so again that's another financial impact for the council. (EP): So basically this school is

0:05:36.160,0:05:40.960

just going to make most people in the area just have to commute further to send their children to

0:05:40.960,0:05:45.680

school? (TB): Yes you're going to have children that can't get into the school leaving the area

0:05:45.680,0:05:49.760

and then you're going to have children from out of the area that don't need to live on the doorstep

0:05:49.760,0:05:54.280

of the school because they will be guaranteed a place on their faith traveling in. (EP):

0:05:54.880,0:06:01.360

Terri, what was your involvement in the campaign against this new faith school? (TH): Well I was

0:06:01.360,0:06:09.840

elected in May 2019 and I sit on the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee so we meet regularly

0:06:09.840,0:06:14.800

to scrutinise the Council's work involving children and education. And it was brought

0:06:14.800,0:06:20.720

up in one of the meetings that this school was being planned or the application was being made

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and it was mentioned that it was going to be a controversial issue. So I started discussing it

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with a fellow Green councillor on the Committee and looking at a Facebook group that had been set

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up around the school. And I just felt that it was a really emotive subject. There were an awful lot

0:06:38.400,0:06:43.920

of local people feeling like they were already being ignored, even at the very early stages of

0:06:43.920,0:06:51.840

the process. There was also a lot of confusion, as is often the case with Council-based issues

0:06:51.840,0:06:58.480

between the language used by the Council, and kind of official definitions, and the lived experience

0:06:58.480,0:07:04.880

of residents. So Tracy has said you know Hampton schools are full and you can go on Facebook and

0:07:04.880,0:07:08.640

find at any time that Hampton schools' parents have trouble getting their children to the

0:07:08.640,0:07:14.880  
school of their choice. But by official definition  
'It's fine, the situation's okay.' Many residents

0:07:14.880,0:07:20.560  
were complaining about the school's admissions policy, but technically it's an over-subscription

0:07:20.560,0:07:26.800  
criteria policy. And so it just seemed like they were being left to fend for themselves,

0:07:26.800,0:07:30.560  
not really quite understanding what was going on, not getting support from the Council.

0:07:30.560,0:07:36.880  
So I kind of stepped in and, along with a fellow Lib Dem Councillor and the Green Councillor,

0:07:36.880,0:07:42.720  
Councillor Nicola Day, we put in a 'call-in' to try and say that the process of the Council had

0:07:42.720,0:07:48.560  
been following to allow the school to be built hadn't been done properly and we tried to get

0:07:48.560,0:07:53.440  
the decision reversed in that way. (EP): And just to be clear: this is a Conservative controlled

0:07:53.440,0:08:01.200  
Council isn't it? (TH): Yes. (EP): And in terms of how the Council took the process forward now,

0:08:01.200,0:08:06.560

there was this other school, one of the Hampton Academies was trying to put in their own bid.

0:08:07.440,0:08:13.120  
How did the Council decide to choose the Catholic Diocese bid rather than the Hampton

0:08:13.120,0:08:20.240  
Academy's bid? (TH): The Diocese school was what was presented to the Council. The Hampton,

0:08:20.240,0:08:28.720  
the other Hampton Academy school did not pass the DFE criteria in that wave so that school was not a

0:08:28.720,0:08:34.480  
possibility as far as the Council were concerned. It was this Diocese school that was what was in

0:08:34.480,0:08:41.120  
front of them and in the 'call-in' procedure they talked about all the other alternatives

0:08:41.120,0:08:48.480  
if they refused the Diocese school and they all involved more time, no guarantee that the Hampton

0:08:48.480,0:08:52.720  
Academy school would be put forward, and it would cost them more money as well and they'd

0:08:52.720,0:08:57.360  
lose funding. (EP): So basically they were really in a hurry to get this school through? (TH): They

0:08:57.360,0:09:02.240

were yes, and I think the financial implications of not accepting this school also

0:09:02.240,0:09:07.200  
potentially played a big part. (EP): Would the Council benefit financially from having this

0:09:07.200,0:09:14.560  
school in place? (TH): At the meeting it was said that the Council would lose what's called 'basic

0:09:14.560,0:09:20.720  
needs funding'. Now I'm not an expert on this but my understanding of this is that the Government

0:09:20.720,0:09:27.200  
give the local authority extra money every year to allow the Council to go to schools and to increase

0:09:27.200,0:09:31.760  
the capacity within those schools so there's enough places for children living in the city.

0:09:32.720,0:09:38.400  
What was said in the meeting was that if this voluntary-aided school is built we don't lose that

0:09:39.280,0:09:45.680  
'basic needs funding' and if we do get another type of school built we can lose that funding.

0:09:45.680,0:09:51.040  
Also the funding for the voluntary aided school: 90% comes from the Department for Education

0:09:51.040,0:09:56.320  
whereas some of these other types of schools the

local authority would have to fund it. So that's

0:09:56.320,0:10:01.440  
sort of a summary of the situation as I understand it. (EP): So again it's very much in the financial

0:10:01.440,0:10:07.760  
interests of the Council to prefer a Catholic faith school rather than a non-denominational

0:10:07.760,0:10:13.360  
school? (TH): Yes and it seems, I mean if as I say a basic understanding of the situation,

0:10:13.360,0:10:18.960  
it seems to me if what I've been told is true that the whole voluntary-aided faith school is

0:10:18.960,0:10:25.680  
being supported by the Government and through the DFE, because if this financial situation is true

0:10:26.800,0:10:30.960  
any local authority is going to want one of these schools because it means they don't lose funding

0:10:30.960,0:10:37.040  
in other areas. So it seems that almost local authorities you know would be silly to refuse

0:10:37.040,0:10:42.640  
to build these schools if the funding situation is as I've represented it. (EP): Did the Department

0:10:42.640,0:10:48.720  
for Education give any reasons for its rejection of the Hampton Academy's proposal? (TH): I do not

0:10:48.720,0:10:53.040  
recall being told and my impression is the local authority don't get told; I believe that's what

0:10:53.040,0:11:01.760  
they said. (EP): So Tracy, from your perspective: so traffic is one issue for why this school is

0:11:01.760,0:11:06.880  
potentially a real problem and the fact that you know there's this whole extra movement of people

0:11:06.880,0:11:11.600  
coming to the school and then residents taking their children out of the area. What about in

0:11:11.600,0:11:16.960  
terms of principle? What are your objections and then the people who oppose the school, why do they

0:11:16.960,0:11:22.720  
have a real problem with having a new Catholic school in the area? (TB): So Hampton Water is a

0:11:22.720,0:11:30.160  
very diverse community. We have lots of different faiths. We also have residents of no faith at all,

0:11:31.600,0:11:37.200  
and lots of people moved here because we knew there was going to be a school. So residents

0:11:37.200,0:11:42.320  
moved in hoping that their children would all be

able to go to school together, so be able to walk

0:11:42.320,0:11:48.880  
to school and walk home. Parents would be able to meet after school, build up those relationships.

0:11:49.440,0:11:55.120  
It's quite a vital time in a parent's life really to meet other Mums and Dads.

0:11:56.880,0:12:03.200  
And then they realise that this is probably not going to happen now. So you've got one faith

0:12:03.200,0:12:07.040  
living next door to somebody who have another faith whose children will not attend school

0:12:07.040,0:12:12.160  
together. (EP): So there's basically a huge missed opportunity for integration? (TB): Oh

0:12:12.160,0:12:17.840  
absolutely. I've had residents message me just to say that they they want their child to go to

0:12:17.840,0:12:23.840  
school and learn about faiths and mix with other faiths so they would just naturally talk about

0:12:24.480,0:12:29.040  
their celebrations and what they're doing in the playground or out of school and that's

0:12:29.040,0:12:35.200  
one way they will learn about that. (EP): The Diocese, in its proposal for this new school,

0:12:35.200,0:12:41.200  
said that having a Catholic school in the area would increase diversity of the school provision.

0:12:41.200,0:12:46.960

Do you agree with that? (TB): No I can't, I can't really see how that's possible. There's

0:12:46.960,0:12:53.040

already been a lot of hostility from the Diocese towards the community as we've sort of gone on

0:12:53.040,0:12:57.760

this journey. (EP): In what sort of ways, could you give some examples? (TB): They are seeing it

0:12:57.760,0:13:03.600

more as residents being anti-Catholic and that is definitely not the case. If anything, it's

0:13:03.600,0:13:08.960

about inclusion. It's about including all faiths and not just singling out one faith. (EP): What

0:13:08.960,0:13:15.680

about in terms of what the Catholic school will actually teach? Have you had any thoughts from

0:13:15.680,0:13:22.000

parents on that about the difficulties of going to a school which advocates the Catholic ethos? (TB):

0:13:22.000,0:13:27.280

Oh yes definitely and it is already in the part of their admissions criteria. It does say that they

0:13:27.280,0:13:34.560

would they expect the children and the families to

follow the Catholic ethos and part of the building

0:13:35.360,0:13:40.640

which we didn't actually realise until recently is possibly going to be used as a school chapel,

0:13:41.200,0:13:44.800

Which, if it is the case, that will also, if that's going to be used on a Sunday for

0:13:44.800,0:13:48.640

instance, it's a possibility of even more traffic coming in and out of an area on a

0:13:49.200,0:13:53.440

what should be a nice quiet day. (EP): Has the diocese tried to engage with the residents to

0:13:53.440,0:13:58.640

try and persuade them of the benefits of this new school? (TB): No, not at all. They did say that

0:13:58.640,0:14:03.360

they would have a meeting at some stage but I think it's difficult because of Covid but

0:14:04.640,0:14:12.480

there has been no communication from them. (EP):

Terri, in terms of the process so, after the

0:14:13.440,0:14:16.800

Council said it was going to be this Catholic school or nothing,

0:14:17.840,0:14:22.480

how was the process moved forward by the Council?

Was it transparent? Were people, were councillors

0:14:23.040,0:14:28.880

and other people in the area given the opportunity

to make representations? (TH): So the call-in



0:14:28.880,0:14:35.040  
process is me or me and my colleagues saying we think that there's been something wrong with this

0:14:35.040,0:14:42.400  
process with this decision. We based that on the lack of them proving that there was a local need,

0:14:42.400,0:14:47.920  
a local desire for this school, we said that the consultation didn't prove that people in Hampton

0:14:47.920,0:14:55.760  
Water wanted a faith school. But ultimately the process the local authority are asked to follow

0:14:56.400,0:14:59.920  
kind of has no standards. I mean I got the impression that they could have gone and asked

0:14:59.920,0:15:02.800  
someone in a car park: "Do you agree with this school being built?" and that would have been

0:15:02.800,0:15:10.080  
good enough. So you know the consultation went out to Peterborough City so obviously a lot of the

0:15:10.720,0:15:16.240  
responses came back that were in support because we believe that they were passed

0:15:16.240,0:15:20.400  
to church members, you know members of the

Catholic diocese, so we couldn't actually

0:15:20.400,0:15:27.840  
pinpoint from the data that there was a need in Hampton Water for this type of school. However

0:15:28.400,0:15:37.040  
the Council have to look at a variety of different aspects. That wasn't one that they absolutely had

0:15:37.040,0:15:43.840  
to prove. They had to pay attention to it; they had to do a consultation. They did a consultation

0:15:43.840,0:15:49.040  
but even if the results clearly showed that people in Hampton water were 100% against it,

0:15:49.680,0:15:53.840  
that doesn't matter. There's all these other aspects that they have to look at which they did.

0:15:54.640,0:16:01.040  
And so there was no fault in the process. And I think that's frustrating for people to understand

0:16:01.040,0:16:06.800  
how Councils work. I mean it's been an eye opener for me since getting elected. And so the decision

0:16:06.800,0:16:12.320  
had to be made based on a process rather than the ethics and what you believe is right and wrong,

0:16:12.320,0:16:18.560

and which is ultimately why we weren't able to prove our case because yes the process was done.

0:16:18.560,0:16:23.600

And it was good enough. (EP): I mean, so did the Council ever really consider the ethics of having

0:16:23.600,0:16:28.640

a selective Catholic school? (TH): That wasn't really no. I seem to recall at the call-in it

0:16:28.640,0:16:34.640

was very much that we weren't supposed to be discussing the ethics. I believe we were told

0:16:34.640,0:16:41.280

"That does not come into it", in fact I mean I was pulled up by another member of the committee,

0:16:41.280,0:16:46.480

a member of the Scrutiny Committee, (who) is part of the Roman Catholic diocese and he

0:16:46.480,0:16:50.960

commented before the meeting that he felt the language I'd used in the calling document was very

0:16:50.960,0:16:56.000

emotive. Which I hadn't done on purpose; that's just kind of me. I'm a bit over dramatic sometimes

0:16:56.640,0:16:59.440

and I didn't really, it was read by other councillors, no one had flagged it,

0:16:59.440,0:17:05.200

so I didn't mean any offence by it but it was the

religious issue was 'off the table'. You were not

0:17:05.200,0:17:09.520

allowed to discuss the ethics of the school. It was all about the process and the procedure.

0:17:09.520,0:17:14.560

(EP): Which might seem strange given that it is a faith school. (TH): Yeah it does

0:17:14.560,0:17:18.640

seem very strange but yes that's the way Councils and decisions are made. (EP): Now

0:17:19.760,0:17:24.480

Tracy, do you have anything to add to that, I mean in terms of your experience of the process.

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(TB): No we did attend; the diocese did have a consultation meeting that I don't feel was

0:17:33.120,0:17:40.080

very successful. We were met at the end by a lady who was really quite homophobic and quite

0:17:41.200,0:17:47.040

she was quite verbal about that towards us and she was actually part of the, well she was part

0:17:47.040,0:17:51.920

of the diocese and she was there with them so that wasn't a very good first impression. (EP): Did you

0:17:51.920,0:17:58.320

meet any of the religious leaders, the priests or the local bishop or anything like that? (TB):

0:17:58.320,0:18:06.960

No she was part of the congregation at one of the local Catholic churches, but no there wasn't,

0:18:06.960,0:18:13.120  
they weren't there at all. (EP): And Terri was the diocese represented at all,

0:18:13.120,0:18:18.720  
apart from through this Council you mentioned, were they in any of the call-in meetings? (TH):

0:18:18.720,0:18:24.400  
They had representatives there who spoke on their behalf, I believe the Head from one of the other

0:18:24.400,0:18:31.600  
Catholic schools in Peterborough spoke on behalf as well, in support. I mean at the consultations

0:18:31.600,0:18:36.640  
that Tracy is referring to they actually held three across the city. Two of them were at

0:18:36.640,0:18:42.000  
their own, at other Catholic schools, which were not attended by anyone. I was at that

0:18:42.000,0:18:47.920  
consultation with Tracy that was in the area where the school is to be built. And you could tell that

0:18:47.920,0:18:53.520  
the local residents weren't happy and it did end up a little bit hostile between the residents

0:18:53.520,0:18:59.520  
and the diocese that were there. (EP): But there

was no sort of interest by the diocese in sort of

0:18:59.520,0:19:04.560  
recognising the hostility of the local residents? (TH): I think that they feel that their change

0:19:04.560,0:19:09.920  
to their own subscription criteria was an acknowledgement I believe that was put forward as:

0:19:09.920,0:19:14.960  
"Well we've listened to the consultation so we're going to reserve 20% of places

0:19:15.600,0:19:20.640  
in the first year for local residents". So that was their olive branch so to speak. (EP): So

0:19:20.640,0:19:24.240  
originally they were actually planning to have no spaces for local residents that weren't Catholic

0:19:24.240,0:19:28.480  
at all? (TH): Not if they were oversubscribed I believe, that was yes the original proposal.

0:19:29.520,0:19:33.760  
(EP): And Terri from your perspective, I mean in terms of the principle, what

0:19:33.760,0:19:38.000  
for you are the fundamental problems with having a Catholic faith school? (TH): I'm in the local

0:19:38.000,0:19:43.760  
area. I just don't believe that it serves local people. I know that the people in Hampton already

0:19:43.760,0:19:49.680  
struggle to get school places. We're now asking

parents, busy parents, stressed out parents,

0:19:49.680,0:19:54.960

to make a decision. You know do you send your children to the local school that their friends

0:19:54.960,0:19:59.360

might be going to even though it's Catholic and you in essence when they're at home say:

0:19:59.360,0:20:03.840

"Look you know this isn't the way we live but when you go to school you know do as they say,

0:20:04.720,0:20:11.440

nod along" or does the parent make the principled decision not to send their child there and now

0:20:11.440,0:20:16.400

have to, you know transport their child 20 minutes, half an hour down the road

0:20:16.400,0:20:21.200

to the non-faith school that they can get their children into. It's putting parents in a really

0:20:21.200,0:20:27.760

difficult situation and I just don't believe that separating children based on religion

0:20:27.760,0:20:34.320

is a good thing. I teach in a school seeing the diversity, seeing the range of religions and how

0:20:34.320,0:20:39.600

they all get on in an ideal world. If they don't get on then the school can deal with that but we

0:20:39.600,0:20:46.480

are open and we are inclusive. The idea of having

a hierarchy of religions as well that just seems

0:20:46.480,0:20:53.040

disrespectful to me. Children are children.

They

might have Catholic parents but that doesn't make

0:20:53.040,0:21:00.000

them Catholic and I think they have a right to have a broad education in all religions and none,

0:21:00.640,0:21:04.480

in order to make their decision when they're old enough. (EP): Do you think that there's

0:21:04.480,0:21:09.680

a conflict here between say the right of Catholic parents to choose the education for their children

0:21:09.680,0:21:14.640

and the right of the children to have exposure to

different points of view? (TH): I think there is

0:21:14.640,0:21:21.120

yes. What religion people choose to practise in their homes is absolutely their business.

0:21:21.920,0:21:27.920

I don't believe that should then have a role in any kind of public service. And yes I think

0:21:27.920,0:21:32.800

children have a right to learn about different religions, to make that choice themselves when

0:21:32.800,0:21:37.200

they're older. (EP): Tracy would you agree with that? (TB): I agree. I think really

0:21:37.760,0:21:44.080

teaching religion should just be an RE or to your own place of worship. I don't feel that it should

0:21:44.080,0:21:49.040

be brought into schools and segregate children based on what their faith is. (EP):

0:21:49.040,0:21:53.600

And I mean I guess also that at the moment faith schools are allowed

0:21:53.600,0:21:59.840

to teach in general in accordance with the tenets of their faith so that might extend to things like

0:21:59.840,0:22:05.360

relationships education as well. (TB): Oh yes definitely. (EP): So at this point I mean the

0:22:05.360,0:22:11.120

Council's given the school the green light. And Tracy from your perspective what is your next,

0:22:11.120,0:22:14.960

what are your next steps are you going to continue to resist the school in some way? (TB): Well we

0:22:14.960,0:22:22.800

have put in a Freedom of Information request to the local Council that has actually gone by its

0:22:22.800,0:22:29.280

deadline which was Friday. So we are waiting to see if there's anything interesting in that on

0:22:29.280,0:22:35.520

how the process and the decisions were made.

We will also be keeping our eye on this school

0:22:35.520,0:22:41.040

chapel because the diocese are going to be putting £250,000 of their own money towards this building

0:22:42.880,0:22:46.400

so there will be a chapel in the school hall and that will be used out of school time.

0:22:47.280,0:22:52.320

That's something that we will also be pursuing and see what the agenda is really

0:22:52.320,0:22:57.520

for that. (EP): Absolutely and Terri, what about you? Will you continue to also sort of

0:22:58.080,0:23:03.360

scrutinise what's going on there? (TH): In my role on the Scrutiny Committee if anything comes our

0:23:03.360,0:23:09.760

way we would definitely scrutinise it. I will be keeping an eye on their Facebook group and I will

0:23:09.760,0:23:15.920

offer my support. I'm sort of in touch with Tracy if they ever do need my assistance but I'm in

0:23:15.920,0:23:21.360

this kind of frustrating situation where I really feel as a Councillor I've kind of hit a dead end

0:23:21.360,0:23:26.640

there's nothing much I can do as a Councillor now to prevent this from happening. It is now

0:23:26.640,0:23:32.320

kind of the grassroots movement that has maybe got more kind of leverage which is really frustrating

0:23:32.320,0:23:35.840

but yes, so for a personal level I will support whatever actions

0:23:36.640,0:23:42.400

you know the community take to be listened to, and hopefully get what they want although I feel

0:23:42.400,0:23:48.960

that the further down this road we go I'm afraid Hampton is going to be left with this school being

0:23:48.960,0:23:53.120

built. (EP): Terri Haynes and Tracy Butler, thank you very much. (TB and TH): Thank you.

0:23:53.120,0:24:05.600

(EP): I'm joined now by Alastair Lichten (AL), Head of Education at the National

0:24:05.600,0:24:09.440

Secular Society. Alastair coordinates the 'No More Faith Schools' campaign.

0:24:09.440,0:24:15.760

Alastair hello. (AL): Hi Emma. (EP): Great to hear from Terri and Tracy wasn't it? Because

0:24:15.760,0:24:20.880

you've been involved in this campaign. (AL): Yes, it was really good to hear from both of them and

0:24:20.880,0:24:26.800

to have met them and so many other supporters when travelling up to Peterborough. Through our 'No

0:24:26.800,0:24:32.960

More Faith Schools' campaign we do try and support groups challenging new faith school proposals and

0:24:32.960,0:24:39.360

advocating for inclusive alternatives. So I did an information evening

0:24:39.360,0:24:45.200

up in Peterborough about the proposals. Seems like a very long time ago that was now. And one of

0:24:45.200,0:24:50.960

my colleagues, Megan Manson also travelled up to meet supporters and to attend a Council meeting on

0:24:52.640,0:24:59.440

the proposals. And of course have just been in email contact and social media with many of the

0:24:59.440,0:25:06.080

supporters over this period of time as well. (EP): So a disappointing result really for the campaign

0:25:06.080,0:25:12.560

and that the school is going ahead regardless. (AL): Yes but there are silver linings. I think we

0:25:12.560,0:25:18.640

have learned a lot about how to support local campaigns against faith schools through this

0:25:18.640,0:25:25.440

process. And one of the things we've really seen

is just how faith school groups are completely

0:25:25.440,0:25:32.960  
unprepared for any sort of scrutiny or pushback on a targeted local level. They were just, the

0:25:32.960,0:25:40.000  
diocese just were completely taken off guard by how strong and how organised the campaign was and

0:25:40.800,0:25:46.960  
we played an important role in helping that but that really was driven by local residents. And

0:25:46.960,0:25:52.880  
there are other silver linings to take out of it. The admissions policy at the school will be

0:25:52.880,0:25:59.360  
very discriminatory, far more discriminatory than any school that's been opened in England in years.

0:26:00.080,0:26:06.160  
However for the first time the Catholic education service have and the Catholic diocese have

0:26:06.160,0:26:11.200  
accepted some limit on religious discrimination on admissions. They've always maintained

0:26:11.200,0:26:16.400  
that there can never be any imposed limit on their ability to select,

0:26:18.160,0:26:22.960  
based on religion. (EP): So they've always wanted 100%? (AL): They've always wanted the option of

0:26:22.960,0:26:29.040  
having 100%. The schools can't turn away pupils if they have places but when oversubscribed the

0:26:29.040,0:26:34.400  
Catholic education service has always insisted they should have the ability to select up to

0:26:34.400,0:26:40.480  
100% of pupils based on faith and in fact for years the Catholic education service

0:26:40.480,0:26:47.840  
boycotted the Government's academy schools programme for new schools and refused to open

0:26:47.840,0:26:54.000  
any new schools because it would not accept the 50% cap on religiously selective admissions.

0:26:54.640,0:27:00.800  
(EP): That sounds almost quite fanatical. (AL): It is certainly a very extreme position. It's

0:27:00.800,0:27:06.800  
a position that is significantly more extreme than other faith school providers, even other

0:27:06.800,0:27:12.400  
faith school providers who practise religiously discriminated admissions where you know have had

0:27:12.400,0:27:18.640  
accepted the 50% cap on those. (EP): With which other providers for example? (AL): So the Church

0:27:18.640,0:27:25.120  
of England has opened many Free schools through

the Free schools programme and has therefore

0:27:25.120,0:27:31.200

accepted on those schools limits in terms of their ability to religiously discriminate in admissions.

0:27:31.200,0:27:35.600

And I think it's really important to point out that the Catholic education service's position

0:27:35.600,0:27:42.720

and the position of their diocese on this issue is

very much at odds with ordinary Catholics. We know

0:27:42.720,0:27:47.040

that just religious discrimination admissions is wildly unpopular

0:27:47.040,0:27:55.360

across all religion and belief groups including Catholics. (EP): In terms of this 80% : 20% ratio

0:27:55.920,0:28:00.720

now that's only going to be the case certainly for the first year. How will the school then be

0:28:00.720,0:28:05.840

able to decide what happens about its proportion of selective and non-selective places in the

0:28:05.840,0:28:11.280

future? (AL): In the future the school will be its own admissions authority as a voluntary-aided

0:28:11.280,0:28:18.720

school and can therefore choose, or it would need to consult, however that consultation process

0:28:20.000,0:28:23.360

isn't one that we'd have a lot of faith in because it would be controlled by the

0:28:24.480,0:28:29.920

diocese as the admissions authority and it could come to whatever conclusion it wanted regardless

0:28:29.920,0:28:36.560

of opinion. Consultation processes are about the decision maker assessing arguments; they're not

0:28:36.560,0:28:44.640

a popularity issue. So the diocese and the school acting as admissions authority could increase that

0:28:44.640,0:28:50.080

to remove any limits to religious discrimination and admissions in future years. (EP): And there

0:28:50.080,0:28:54.240

would be no way of challenging that? (AL): As long as they followed the consultation

0:28:54.240,0:28:59.040

process and as long as they they did so in line with the school admissions code which permits

0:28:59.840,0:29:04.720

religious discrimination then I don't believe there will be a grounds to challenge that. However

0:29:04.720,0:29:11.680

even if they weren't to go down that route, having up to 80% of pupils selected based on faith, is



0:29:11.680,0:29:16.160  
having any percentage of pupils selected based on their parents' faith is completely unacceptable.

0:29:16.800,0:29:23.280  
But I think we should really take stock. This is the most discriminatory new

0:29:23.280,0:29:28.080  
school that has opened in England (I would need to check) but I believe it'd be around

0:29:28.080,0:29:33.920  
a decade. (EP): I think Tracy and Terri also said that the diocese was quite high-handed in

0:29:33.920,0:29:41.280  
its approach. What was your impression of how the diocese handled the opposition to its proposal?

0:29:41.920,0:29:46.960  
(AL): I think they were just completely unprepared for there being opposition to the proposals

0:29:46.960,0:29:54.160  
because there's so little scrutiny and so little transparency around these proposals and in most

0:29:54.160,0:30:00.320  
school types the organisation proposing the school is very much in charge of any of the consultation

0:30:00.320,0:30:06.400  
process so they're used to just promoting surveys and things like that to their supporters.

0:30:07.120,0:30:10.800  
So that is probably why they were just

completely unprepared for there being this organised opposition and they just couldn't come up with any arguments why the school

0:30:10.800,0:30:17.120  
needed to be Catholic, or they just said they know it's basically they just wanted to have

0:30:17.120,0:30:20.560  
a Catholic school there. There was very little serious engagement with any of the criticism.

0:30:20.560,0:30:25.760  
The concession, if you can call it that - I suspect they view the concession of having only

0:30:25.760,0:30:31.840  
you know a cap in terms of 80 % of discriminatory admissions - I suspect they view that as quite a

0:30:31.840,0:30:38.320  
large concession. I certainly wouldn't and many local residents wouldn't. (EP): Was there any

0:30:38.320,0:30:43.760  
sense that there was a sort of anti-Catholic feeling among the opponents? (AL): Well when

0:30:43.760,0:30:50.240  
people are used to their position being privileged, people can very often react in

0:30:50.240,0:30:55.600  
terms of feeling attacked when they're criticised and I'm talking about the diocese in this case

0:30:55.600,0:31:01.520  
because we should always remember there are people

of all faiths and none who oppose faith schools

0:31:06.880,0:31:14.000 including many Catholics. There was suggestion in some quarters, I think on social media

0:31:14.000,0:31:20.560 and I believe one church's newsletter explicitly said that the campaign was anti-Catholic without

0:31:20.560,0:31:24.800 producing any evidence of that. I think they were just defining being against a faith school that

0:31:24.800,0:31:31.280 happened to be Catholic as anti-Catholic. I should point out that the church newsletter

0:31:31.280,0:31:37.200 which made that claim about the campaign against the school did apologise and acknowledge they were

0:31:37.200,0:31:44.720 wrong about that. But just to give you a bit of insight we ran multiple petitions on our website

0:31:44.720,0:31:51.920 through the various stages of this campaign and I read hundreds upon hundreds of petition

0:31:51.920,0:31:58.960 signatures, vast vast majority from local residents and I think I came across one comment in

0:31:58.960,0:32:05.680 all those hundreds that was unacceptably, it was just anti-Catholic, it wasn't against the school

0:32:06.240,0:32:11.040 necessarily and that happened to be someone, I'm not sure how they found the petition,

0:32:11.040,0:32:15.280 but it wasn't even from a local resident. (EP): And the residents, I mean there's

0:32:15.280,0:32:20.880 quite a strong opposition was there any support for having this Catholic faith school? (AL):

0:32:20.880,0:32:27.680 I think there was support across Peterborough as a whole but that support is largely generated by

0:32:27.680,0:32:34.240 the Catholic church and having that very great strong distribution network it was very much

0:32:34.240,0:32:39.680 able to promote the proposal and to promote the consultation to their own supporters.

0:32:41.440,0:32:47.360 That's how this process works. An analysis of the consultation responses across Peterborough

0:32:47.360,0:32:53.920 showed I think that the majority of those people supported the proposal. Again all those caveats

0:32:53.920,0:32:59.680 about that different that asymmetrical promotion. But an analysis of people very local, that you

0:32:59.680,0:33:04.080

know those who would actually be most directly affected by the school, showed an extremely strong

0:33:04.080,0:33:09.200  
opposition among local residents. (EP): Well let's talk about the Department for Education, because

0:33:09.200,0:33:15.600  
the Department for Education also had a big role in this and there were suggestions that it was not

0:33:15.600,0:33:21.840  
very transparent about how it handled these two different bids by the diocese and then by Hampton

0:33:21.840,0:33:29.040  
Academy's Trust. What's your experience Alastair of how transparent or not the DfE is when it gets

0:33:29.040,0:33:33.760  
bids for new schools? (AL): I always remember chatting to a local councillor from a London

0:33:33.760,0:33:40.640  
borough about I think it was a wave 13 of Free school applications a couple of years ago now

0:33:41.280,0:33:48.160  
and he just said "Oh nothing to do with us, it's in the black box the DfE. The DfE centralise a

0:33:48.160,0:33:55.360  
huge amount of decision making about new schools

and there is virtually no transparency about this.

0:33:55.360,0:34:01.840  
The DfE have on multiple occasions refused to provide information on applications or

0:34:01.840,0:34:07.600  
proposals for new schools, refused to provide any information about how they assess these proposals.

0:34:08.480,0:34:14.560  
They claim that they're assessed to ensure they're inclusive however you could create a position that

0:34:14.560,0:34:19.840  
organising a school around a faith at all is not inclusive and the DfE in any case provide

0:34:19.840,0:34:26.160  
no information to back up how they make those assessments. They refuse to provide copies of

0:34:26.160,0:34:32.400  
the feedback that are sent to proposers of schools They refuse to provide full copies of application

0:34:32.400,0:34:37.440  
forms. Most schools of proposal are actually academies rather than voluntary aided schools

0:34:37.440,0:34:42.960  
but these issues across these are very similar. (EP): But basically what they do is they say "We

0:34:42.960,0:34:49.120  
will fund this proposal but we won't fund another

proposal". (AL): Yes so effectively we heard some

0:34:49.120,0:34:56.000

of the insight to the financial situation from the point of view of councillors and the information

0:34:56.000,0:35:00.640

that they have which was interesting. We understand how little detail the DfE are

0:35:00.640,0:35:04.080

willing to share with us but it's interesting how little detail they're willing to share with

0:35:05.360,0:35:11.920

local councillors. When the DfE have a preferred, you know, what option they would like in a certain

0:35:11.920,0:35:19.120

area, they are able to effectively, as I think you summarised, not provide funds for alternatives.

0:35:20.080,0:35:26.880

So, we don't know and in this case you know we had two different applications to run a school

0:35:26.880,0:35:31.680

on this site. This was a sight which was paid for but we should remember by local residents.

0:35:31.680,0:35:35.920

This is a new housing development and everyone who bought a house on that new housing development

0:35:35.920,0:35:41.040

would have effectively, through what's known as the Section 106 agreement, contributed to the

0:35:41.040,0:35:46.240

building of this school directly, not just not just in the general way we will do through taxes.

0:35:46.880,0:35:52.480

And there were two different proposals. The proposal for a community ethos, that's you

0:35:52.480,0:35:59.120

know not a faith school, academy on the site was rejected by the DfE you know and therefore the

0:35:59.120,0:36:08.080

proposal to open the faith school was just put in a much stronger position. But because the DfE

0:36:08.080,0:36:13.360

refused to provide any transparency in terms of how these proposals are assessed we can't know.

0:36:13.360,0:36:19.440

There may have been some very good reason why the proposal from the non-faith community ethos

0:36:19.440,0:36:25.040

academy project was rejected. However we just have no way of knowing that so it does seem like

0:36:25.040,0:36:29.760

the DfE just blocked the option they didn't like and supported the option they do like.

0:36:30.560,0:36:36.560  
Local councils have it, have a statute, a legal duty to ensure there is adequate school provision

0:36:36.560,0:36:42.960  
but if the DfE control a local council's ability to seek new proposals and really limit this,

0:36:43.600,0:36:46.240  
they're in situations where there is a new school need.

0:36:46.880,0:36:51.600  
Any exploration of an inclusive community for school can be completely shut down

0:36:51.600,0:36:57.520  
and faith schools forced on communities who just don't want them. (EP): On that point now Terri of

0:36:57.520,0:37:02.640  
course has mentioned the Lib Dem position but the DfE is we're currently in a conservative

0:37:02.640,0:37:08.000  
government and in fact Peterborough council is a Conservative controlled council. What is

0:37:08.000,0:37:14.560  
the Conservative position? Are they generally in favour of faith schools? (AL): If we go back a few

0:37:14.560,0:37:20.640  
years to the Theresa May Government, when she came in as Prime Minister one of her first policies was

0:37:20.640,0:37:28.720  
to suggest removing the cap on religious selection

or discrimination in admissions to new academies

0:37:28.720,0:37:35.920  
and that actually eventually became a Conservative party manifesto commitment. However even with

0:37:35.920,0:37:42.400  
very very strong support among the Conservative party and a majority government they eventually

0:37:42.400,0:37:48.720  
decided that would not be a viable route. Damian Hinds became Education Secretary and he had been

0:37:49.280,0:37:54.960  
a very big supporter of this policy and then found that it just wasn't practical to implement.

0:37:54.960,0:37:59.920  
So that policy would have, if that policy gone through all new academies could potentially

0:37:59.920,0:38:04.960  
select up to 100% of their pupils based on faith if they were religious. To mitigate

0:38:04.960,0:38:09.280  
from their point of view the impact of not fulfilling that manifesto commitment

0:38:09.280,0:38:15.040  
they decided to make alternative funds available for a new wave of voluntary-aided schools

0:38:16.400,0:38:22.240  
but there are slightly more hoops to jump through in terms of opening a voluntary-aided school,

0:38:23.200,0:38:29.520  
for example there is the requirement to find some capital commitment which theoretically comes from

0:38:29.520,0:38:34.720  
a religious organisation but typically just comes from alternative sources of public money.

0:38:34.720,0:38:39.920  
And that's why there have been, that's why this new school in Peterborough is the first

0:38:39.920,0:38:45.520  
of this type to open in as I say about a decade.

(EP): And then just to be clear voluntary-aided

0:38:45.520,0:38:49.600  
ones are schools, are the type which can select up to 100% on the basis

0:38:49.600,0:38:55.600  
of religion. (AL): Yes and in terms of other parties' policies speaking about in England,

0:38:55.600,0:39:01.920  
the Green Party supports a move to having an entirely secular community ethos education system,

0:39:02.640,0:39:08.400  
the Labour Party- I don't think they have really a position - they generally speaking support

0:39:08.400,0:39:14.320  
efforts to make schools more inclusive. They were supportive of the 50% cap on admissions

0:39:14.320,0:39:18.560  
but we've seen contradictory messages from recent shadow education secretaries,

0:39:19.200,0:39:24.400  
the Liberal Democrats support an end to religious selection and school admissions

0:39:24.960,0:39:30.080  
and I believe support and move to having a community ethos for all new schools being

0:39:30.080,0:39:37.040  
community schools. However their position is that while you have a situation where any group can

0:39:37.040,0:39:43.600  
bid or effectively bid for a contract to run a new school that faith group should be equally able

0:39:43.600,0:39:49.520  
to put forward such proposals. (EP): Sure so the question is really how much longer is this going

0:39:49.520,0:39:55.120  
to go on for that faith schools can bid to if the term faith organizations can bid to open a new

0:39:55.120,0:40:00.160  
faith school? (AL): One of the things we've got to do and we really we push for our 'No More Faith

0:40:00.160,0:40:08.000  
Schools' campaign is to just organise locally to challenge every new faith school proposal and to

0:40:08.000,0:40:16.320  
always always push push push for inclusive secular community ethos alternatives. (EP):

0:40:16.320,0:40:22.800

Finally Alastair how close do you think we are to getting rid of the ability of schools to select

0:40:23.360,0:40:30.240

students on the basis of their religion?

(AL): People have a wide variety of views

0:40:30.240,0:40:36.240

on faith schools and there are many people who would prefer we didn't have faith schools

0:40:36.240,0:40:42.240

but it's not necessarily their highest priority. However if we look at specifically the question of

0:40:42.240,0:40:45.040

whether or not faith schools should be able to discriminate in admissions

0:40:45.680,0:40:53.760

there's quite a strong public consensus on this.

It's very very difficult for religious groups to

0:40:53.760,0:41:00.080

defend publicly funded schools discriminating against children on the basis of their parents

0:41:00.080,0:41:06.960

religion. They typically try and obfuscate this or downplay the level of discriminatory admissions

0:41:07.520,0:41:14.880

so across all faith and belief groups and across people with differing views on Facebook there is

0:41:14.880,0:41:22.240

such a strong consensus against discriminatory admissions that I think that will be the first

0:41:22.240,0:41:27.920

and very big domino to fall. (EP): Alastair Lichten, thank you very much. (AL): Thank you.

0:41:32.680,0:41:33.680

(EP):

0:41:33.680,0:41:38.160

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0:41:38.160,0:41:41.920

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0:41:42.720,0:41:47.200

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0:41:47.200,0:41:53.840

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0:41:53.840,0:41:59.920

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