

Episode 11: Religious charities | Inclusive relationship and sex education

In episode 11, Chris Sloggett spoke to Megan Manson about charities which exist only to promote religion and whether these or religious charities which do harm are in the public benefit. Chris also spoke to and Alastair Lichten about protests by religious reactionaries against LGBT inclusive education and what the NSS is doing.

Video available at: <https://youtu.be/VVmWU1jwrXE>

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[Chris Sloggett] Hello and welcome to the National Secular Society podcast. I'm Chris Sloggett

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I'm joined now by our Campaigns Officer, Megan Manson, whose research is

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Communications Officer at the NSS. Today we'll be discussing why the advancement

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instrumental in producing this report. Hello Megan.

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of religion shouldn't be a charitable purpose and why the government should

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[Megan Manson] Hiya. [CS] So, firstly do you mind telling me a little bit about

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stand up to religious groups who want to dilute inclusive teaching about

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what you found out when you were doing all your work on this report, during your research?

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relationships, sex and health. In a recent report we highlighted the harm done by

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[MM] Okay. This report, which is called 'For the Public Benefit: The Case for Removing

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allowing organizations which exists solely to advance religion to claim

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the Advancement of Religion as a Charitable Purpose', and its main finding

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charitable status. The report revealed that over 12,000 charities claim their

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was, as you said, that over 12,000 charities are set up to do nothing apart

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status only on the basis that they promote religion, with some using public

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from advancing religion, or so it seems, and the reason for this, is that the

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money to promote extremism and harmful practices. The report was covered in a

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advancement of religion is one of the 13 recognized charitable purposes

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variety of press outlets including in The Observer newspaper and on BBC Radio.

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according to charity law. So there's many different charitable purposes: there's

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the relieving of povert, education, I think facilitating sports is another one,

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and advancing religion is one of those 13. So what it means is an organization

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can set itself up as a charity for simply holding activities which are

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deemed to be advancing religion in any shape or form, even if it's very, very

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difficult for most people to recognize any public benefit to that particular activity

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[CS] Yeah. So, in some cases, this is particularly shocking, isn't it, and you

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uncovered some examples where charities are claiming tax breaks

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despite the fact that they're actively doing harm.

Do you mind telling us bit about that?

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[MM] Well, registered charities are exempt from

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most forms of tax, by the very virtue of the fact that they are charities, because

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they are supposed to be serving a public benefit.

But many of the charities we

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examined didn't seem to be doing this at

all, and, as you said, some of them, I think

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you could argue, are causing more harm than good.

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We found registered charities which are promoting facilitating gay conversion therapy.

0:02:42.600,0:02:49.200

we found charities training people to perform religious, so non-medical, circumcision on babies.

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We found charities exist to certify non-stun, religious methods of animal slaughter,

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which are generally regarded as cruel.

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And we found charities promoting extremist political ideology as well.

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[CS] So these are charities which are being given the opportunity to benefit

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from charitable status, simply because religion is seen as a good thing, and

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they are religious, therefore what they're doing must be good. I suppose

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that's the logic that gets applied.

What do you think is the solution to this?

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[MM] Well, the solution we proposed is, on paper, quite simple.

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It's simply to remove the advancement of religion as one of the charitable

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purposes, so if a religious charity is providing a public benefit, a genuine public benefit, it should be easy for it to register under one of the other twelve heads of charity, for example education, helping the poor, or many different charitable purposes which most of us would recognize and say "Oh yes, that is a definitely a public benefit". And I think there are many religious charities that could serve that and could list as a charity for those purposes. And if it isn't providing a public benefit, if that charity finds it quite difficult to justify its charitable status, if you discount religion, then we should say it shouldn't be a charity. So removing the Advancement of Religion as a charitable purpose would improve confidence in the charity sector, and it would free up more public money for truly beneficial projects, and it would reduce the burden on the charity regulators as well.

[CS] Yeah, okay. So there'll be lots of advantages to actually changing charity law, so that

the advancement of religion was no longer seen as de facto, a positive. I suppose that the solution you are suggesting, that we propose in the report, is more a government solution, it's more of a legislative solution. Obviously, when things go wrong with charities, there's obviously often a lot of attention on the charity regulators. What can the charity regulators actually do? [MM] Well the sad thing is, is that the hands of the charity regulators, like the Charity Commission of England and Wales, are largely tied by charity law. So, basically, anything that looks like a charity in its structure and its mission is obliged to register as one. So, because advancing religion is considered a charitable purpose, any organisation that in any way advances religion and otherwise sort of looks like a charity and how its set up has to be registered as a charity. That's the law. Another problem is that it is very

difficult for charity regulators to

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deregister organisations that are found not to be providing a public benefit.

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So, if a charity is bringing about harm in pursuit of its aims, the

0:05:38.610,0:05:41.550

Charity Commission are quite limited as to what they can do to stop it.

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And I think this is a real problem. It doesn't have the power, really, to crack

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down on some of the worst examples we've seen.

[CS] Okay. So these legislative

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changes, that's the main thing. I know we've we've reported some

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charities to the regulators as well, particularly the Charity Commission for

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England and Wales, but it is interesting, I suppose, that their hands are tied.

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A possible comeback to this report, just

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anticipating an argument from our opponents, it's actually an

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argument that we tend to hear quite a lot, is that many religious charities do good.

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Obviously a lot of people would say that religious groups often do

0:06:28.940,0:06:36.479

alleviate poverty or they provide education. How does the report actually handle that?

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[MM] Well, the report acknowledges that there are many people

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who are motivated to do charitable work through their religious beliefs, and we

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support that. We think that any organization that is providing a genuine

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public benefit should be equally eligible for charitable status,

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regardless of whether or not it has a religious ethos. Removing the

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advancement of religion would create a better environment for those genuinely

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beneficial religious charities to flourish, because if you weed out the non-beneficial,

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or the harmful charities, this would increase confidence in the

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charity sector, so more people are willing to donate their money, and it

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would free up the resources of the charity regulator so they can actually

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look after these charities more efficiently.

[CS] Okay. I think it's a quite a comprehensive answer,

0:07:25.380,0:07:29.860

isn't it, that we're not calling for

0:07:29.860,0:07:33.860
religious charities to be
stripped of their status automatically;

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it's just the idea that if you are
promoting religion that should not be

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de facto, a charitable purpose.
So, it's essentially religious charities

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would be subject to a secular public
benefit test. I think that's

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really important to stress, isn't it?
What have we done about this then?

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Obviously we've written this this report.
There's been all this research.

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What have we done?
[MM] Well, we sent the reports to key

0:08:02.100,0:08:05.880
stakeholders, to make this case for
removing the advancement of religion as

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a charitable purpose, and this whole area
has become a new key campaign area for us.

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We're proactively monitoring
religious charities to identify

0:08:15.270,0:08:19.050
potential problems and work with the
regulators in improving this sector.

0:08:19.050,0:08:23.220
We've already reported a number of
problematic charities to the charity

0:08:23.220,0:08:28.560
commission, and action has been taken as
a result. So, for example, we found several

0:08:28.560,0:08:33.390
charities running mosques where
their websites were endorsing

0:08:33.390,0:08:38.020
extremist messages, like calling for the
killing of apostates.

0:08:38.020,0:08:42.360
We reported these to the charity commission
and they've said that they would engage

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with these charities to remind them of
their particular duties, as a charity, and

0:08:46.440,0:08:50.720
a lot of that extremist material is now gone
from those websites, I'm happy to say.

0:08:50.720,0:08:55.620
[CS] Okay. So we're trying to fight the big fight

0:08:55.620,0:08:58.440
and several smaller fights at the same time I
suppose.

0:08:58.440,0:09:02.960
[MM] Yeah
[CS] How can people listening to us, who agree with

0:09:02.970,0:09:06.300
what we're saying, who think "Yeah, there
should be a secular public benefit test.

0:09:06.300,0:09:12.509
Yeah, religion isn't de facto a source of good,
it's not necessarily a charitable purpose".

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How can they help us to make the case?

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[MM] One of the best ways people can
help is to spread awareness of this issue,

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because, at the moment, a lot of people

0:09:24.720,0:09:29.759
wouldn't even realize that religious organizations are charities. And I think

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very few people know that the reason why they seem to benefit from seemingly

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unjustifiable tax breaks is because they have this privilege in charity law, that

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advancing religion in and of itself is recognized as a charitable purpose.

0:09:43.300,0:09:47.339
So we need to get the word out that religious privilege must be removed from the

0:09:47.339,0:09:53.040
charitable sector, and that all charities, whatever their ethos, should be held to

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the same high standards, and demonstrating a tangible public benefit.

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One of the easiest ways you can do this is to write to your MP about the issue

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and we've got a template email for you to do this on our website.

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So, if you just go to our website, which is secularism.org.uk you'll find a button

0:10:10.019,0:10:14.850
that says 'Get Involved'. If you select under the menu 'Write to Your MP' you can

0:10:14.850,0:10:19.500
select the letter from there.
Of course, please do read the charity report

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itself, which you can download from our website for free, or if you'd prefer a

0:10:23.940,0:10:27.700
paper copy you can get in touch with us and we can see what we can do about that.

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[CS] So the report is called "For the Public Benefit: the Case for Removing the

0:10:32.040,0:10:36.930
Advancement of Religion as a Charitable Purpose" by the National Secular Society.

0:10:36.930,0:10:42.520
Megan Manson, thank you very much.
[MM] Thanks, Chris.

0:10:47.500,0:10:51.650
[CS] And now, religious campaigners are stepping up their efforts to shut down

0:10:51.650,0:10:56.360
teaching about relationships and sex which doesn't conform to their narrow worldview.

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This week BBC Panorama reported on mainly Muslim protesters who

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have gathered outside schools in Birmingham for months

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in an attempt to get them to change their curricula, with some support from

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reactionary groups among other religions as well. Meanwhile the government is

0:11:11.840,0:11:14.840
making it compulsory to teach relationships and sex education from

0:11:14.840,0:11:19.260
September 2020, but it's made some concerning concessions to religious groups.

0:11:19.260,0:11:23.820
I'm joined to discuss this by our Education and Schools Officer, Alastair Lichten, who has been

0:11:23.820,0:11:27.380
monitoring these stories and coordinating our response to them. Hi Alastair.

0:11:27.380,0:11:31.100
[Alastair Lichten] Hi Chris.
[CS] This is a huge topic

0:11:31.100,0:11:35.660
really which has been in the news regularly for many months now. There are

0:11:35.660,0:11:40.190
also at least a couple of parallel ongoing stories here, as I've just

0:11:40.190,0:11:45.050
been outlining. So just to start with could you summarise why there are

0:11:45.050,0:11:49.360
protests in Birmingham and elsewhere, and what's going on with regard to that?

0:11:49.360,0:11:54.680
[AL] For years there's been momentum behind making RSE statutory and inclusive in

0:11:54.680,0:12:00.500
England, Scotland and Wales. Now pretty near the only opposition to this has

0:12:00.500,0:12:04.340
been from regressive religious groups. We've seen this opposition take

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different forms, so, if we were having this conversation this time last year, we'd

0:12:09.050,0:12:12.200
probably be talking about mainly reactionary Christian groups. We happen at the

0:12:12.200,0:12:16.370
moments to be talking about mainly reactionary Muslim groups. What

0:12:16.370,0:12:20.350
has got a lot of press coverage and is the big thing at the moment are

0:12:20.350,0:12:26.030
predominantly Muslim campaigns, touring the country, spreading misinformation and

0:12:26.030,0:12:31.720
encouraging parents to protest outside schools and target LGBTQ teachers and allies.

0:12:31.720,0:12:36.290
This is very nasty and a very dangerous moment.

[CS] So what's your assessment of the way

0:12:36.290,0:12:41.220
the government has responded to this? How could it show the schools more support?

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[AL] I have to say that the DfE's response has been inadequate.

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And that's not me just reflexively bashing the DfE, I can point to good

0:12:48.290,0:12:52.220
things they've done about this, but they needed to do a lot more, a lot earlier,

0:12:52.220,0:12:55.679
and a lot louder. When you've a mob outside a

0:12:55.679,0:13:02.160
school shouting homophobic abuse at teachers, at public servants, that needs

0:13:02.160,0:13:06.689
to be damn near number one priority for the Education Secretary. There needed to

0:13:06.689,0:13:10.379
be a strong public rebuttal of the misinformation and lies being spread

0:13:10.379,0:13:15.779
about RSE, there needed to be a message
early, public and loud to all schools

0:13:15.779,0:13:20.339
that not only is inclusive RSE an
option that schools might select,

0:13:20.339,0:13:25.379
but is required by this legislation.
By attempting to appease reactionary

0:13:25.379,0:13:30.600
religious groups elsewhere, the DfE made
it harder to confront these groups, and it

0:13:30.600,0:13:35.480
just go to show that bullies can't be
appeased, they need to be confronted. The

0:13:35.480,0:13:41.120
DfE needs to support Ofsted in making
absolutely clear that schools which fail the
legal requirements

0:13:41.120,0:13:45.420
for inclusive RSE will be held accountable.
[CS] So it's partly

0:13:45.420,0:13:53.369
about messaging and it's partly about, I
suppose, legislation and the

0:13:53.369,0:13:59.420
the more concrete methods of accountability.
[AL] Yeah. Defending what's there.

0:13:59.420,0:14:04.339
[CS] So, I'm suppose, that moves us quite
nicely to

0:14:04.339,0:14:09.029
government guidance. So, meanwhile the
government has made it compulsory for

0:14:09.029,0:14:13.949
schools to teach about relationships, sex
and health in all schools in England

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from September next year. This is a step
forward, but you're concerned about

0:14:19.709,0:14:23.730
dilutions for religious groups.
[AL] Yes I am. I think I'll just quickly correct
my

0:14:23.730,0:14:27.449
previous answer: I talked about both
legislation and guidance. The legislation

0:14:27.449,0:14:31.170
requires the government to bring in the
guidance. The guidance is what says what

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needs to be in RSE, then that filters
down to school policy. But going back to

0:14:35.999,0:14:40.019
this question, I have to plug our
excellent research report "Unsafe Sex

0:14:40.019,0:14:44.069
Education", which which was from last year.
That really showed how

0:14:44.069,0:14:49.259
discriminatory, inaccurate and
shame-based RSE is still taught in many

0:14:49.259,0:14:51.839
faith schools.
I guess that's hardly surprising given

0:14:51.839,0:14:56.100
the institutional homophobia in every
faith group which run schools,

0:14:56.100,0:15:00.899
particularly the two largest providers:
the CofE and the Catholic Church. That's

0:15:00.899,0:15:04.169
not to say there's not good practice and
there aren't faith schools which don't

0:15:04.169,0:15:11.070
allow their faith ethos to
dilute or to disrupt RSE. Beyond that,

0:15:11.070,0:15:15.930
the requirement for all schools, not just faith schools, to take into account the

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religious background of pupils, creates two problems. Firstly it encourages faith

0:15:21.750,0:15:26.700
schools to try and push the boundaries to make RSE less comprehensive and less

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inclusive, so Catholic schools not wanting to teach about reproductive

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rights, other faiths schools not wanting to teach about LGBT issues. And secondly, it

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encourages religiously motivated parents to believe that they can restrict RSE in non faith schools.

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So if we look at these protesters outside schools in Birmingham, who are saying "You're not taking

0:15:45.240,0:15:48.840
into account our religious background".
[CS] Again it is partly

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about the message that it gives to people, who seem to be

0:15:53.940,0:15:59.190
completely set on trying to bully the government, and indeed individual

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schools, which is an easier easier thing to do: to bully individual schools.

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[AL] The DfE has tried to appease religious groups, and then, when groups like

0:16:07.020,0:16:10.680
the National Secular Society have gone and pointed out this problem, and the really

0:16:10.680,0:16:15.210
great problems caused by this, their unclear language about taking people's

0:16:15.210,0:16:19.560
religious backgrounds into account, the DfE then try to appease us and try to

0:16:19.560,0:16:24.990
appease LGBT inclusive groups. They say "Oh don't worry about it. It's

0:16:24.990,0:16:29.220
not going to cause this problem. You're crazy. It's not going

0:16:29.220,0:16:33.600
to cause this problem in schools."
Actually, you know, the evidence shows it does.

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[CS] So it's trying, really, to triangulate on something, where it really just needs

0:16:38.700,0:16:44.240
to be a bit more non-negotiable. So those who disagree with us often say

0:16:44.240,0:16:48.930
parents have the right to decide what children learn at school. What's your

0:16:48.930,0:16:52.380
response to that argument?
[AL] Parents have the right to raise their children

0:16:52.380,0:16:56.610
in accordance with their beliefs, but schools don't need to kowtow to these

0:16:56.610,0:17:03.270
beliefs in every instance. The campaign to make RSE compulsory has gone on,

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it's been a decade of consultations, of progress, parents have had every opportunity to get involved, to respond to consultations, to put their views across. When schools create their RSE curriculum, they speak to parents. Parents have every opportunity to put their views across, but a small minority of parents that basically don't want certain issues covered, they don't get to override that whole process .

We should also point out that this inclusive RSE is incredibly widely supported and expected by parents. So, actually, most parents support this.

[CS] You're particularly concerned about the way the religious groups misuse the term "age-appropriate" as well. Do you mind explaining why that is?

[AL] Yeah. This is a bit of a bug bear for me, and it's actually quite simple. In part "age-appropriate" is just kind of a euphemism for people saying we don't want to cover these topics. It's also

part of the long running, very nasty, homophobic narrative that LGBT people are trying to influence children. It is part of the very nasty history of tying homosexuality to paedophilia. It's also part of conspiracy theories and misinformation around RSE, that it's teaching explicit LGBT content to young people. Jewish Orthodox schools, for example, hope to use this "age-appropriate" language to just completely get around acknowledging that LGBT people exist, by simply raising the age appropriateness. They say "Oh it can't cover LGBTQ issues, it's not age-appropriate till..." - and then set an age which basically means the school says "it's not appropriate till sixth form" and the school happens not to have a sixth form, or students leave at that age anyway, so trying to use age-appropriateness just to avoid it entirely. It's simple: The age appropriateness of RSE content doesn't change based on sexuality. At a certain age children

0:19:06.570,0:19:11.070
are old enough to learn that some people
have a mommy and a daddy. Children that

0:19:11.070,0:19:14.250
age are also old enough to learn some
people have two mommies or two daddies

0:19:14.250,0:19:19.650
or one daddy or one mummy. To use an
analogy, and I don't know how film

0:19:19.650,0:19:23.220
classifications work, I'm sure the
audience will write in to me how I'm

0:19:23.220,0:19:27.000
wrong about this process, but in an
analogy, let's say you have a film and

0:19:27.000,0:19:33.660
it's a 'U' certificate, and it
has a relationship plot as part of it,

0:19:33.660,0:19:38.160
you've got a man and a woman who are
holding hands, you change

0:19:38.160,0:19:41.940
that to make it two men or two women
holding hands, it's still a 'U'.

0:19:41.940,0:19:48.180
Take the other end of the scale, you've got a
film that's an 18 it's got a romance or

0:19:48.180,0:19:52.950
relationship plot which features some
sort of representation of sex.

0:19:52.950,0:19:56.640
That stays an 18 regardless of
whether it's between a man and

0:19:56.640,0:20:02.930
a woman or two men or two women etc.
It's this treating LGBT issues as

0:20:02.930,0:20:06.990
something extra, like a controversial subject

that needs to be debated

0:20:06.990,0:20:11.130
and children aren't old enough
to learn about it till different

0:20:11.130,0:20:15.300
age levels. Children actually get on with
this fine. Use

0:20:15.300,0:20:19.140
diversity examples, just integrate it with
the rest of curriculum. Good teachers,

0:20:19.140,0:20:24.510
good schools are already doing this and it's
not actually that controversial.

0:20:24.510,0:20:28.650
[CS] That also seems to come across
in some of the press coverage

0:20:28.650,0:20:37.530
actually: newspapers saying LGBT
content or LGBT issues, and it's

0:20:37.530,0:20:43.230
quite interesting the way the religious
groups narrative gets pushed in a sort

0:20:43.230,0:20:50.820
of soft way by just through
the use of language which buys

0:20:50.820,0:20:54.660
into their narrative, if you see what I
mean. What we talk about is

0:20:54.660,0:21:01.290
LGBT inclusive education or just inclusive
education, if

0:21:01.290,0:21:03.990
you want to call it that, because
actually a lot of

0:21:03.990,0:21:10.440
the actual teaching is often not about gay
people.
[AL] It's just

0:21:10.440,0:21:14.010
basically talking about relationships
and you've got a couple of

0:21:14.010,0:21:18.450
examples, let's say
I'm illustrating a children's book about

0:21:18.450,0:21:23.610
relationships, I wouldn't draw
all the characters in the book as white,

0:21:23.610,0:21:27.390
I'd do a mix of different
ethnicities in the characters in my

0:21:27.390,0:21:32.520
examples, and that's just
exactly the same but with sexual

0:21:32.520,0:21:36.690
orientation and gender.

0:21:36.690,0:21:41.280
[CS] Sexuality is only actually a part of
what's being taught, what's

0:21:41.280,0:21:47.280
being discussed. And yet the discussion
would suggest that these lessons are

0:21:47.280,0:21:54.800
entirely about gay people or LGBT
people. There's a danger that

0:21:54.800,0:21:58.890
people who follow this casually get the
wrong end of the stick and then

0:21:58.890,0:22:03.420
misunderstand what's actually being taught.
[AL] I understand

0:22:03.420,0:22:09.090
that and I think that is a bit of a risk,
because actually we're doing a lot to

0:22:09.090,0:22:13.200
respond to this, because there's a lot
going on. But I would rather not be

0:22:13.200,0:22:17.000
talking about this, to be honest. I would
rather this was just basically so

0:22:17.000,0:22:21.630
uncontroversial. This should be the same level
of

0:22:21.630,0:22:26.730
controversy as finding out that you have
a textbook that has pictures of

0:22:26.730,0:22:32.060
different people with different ethnicities on
it.
That's really how controversial it should be.

0:22:32.060,0:22:37.780
[CS] So, moving on to our own role on this,
what are we doing

0:22:37.780,0:22:43.420
to keep the religious groups in check?
[AL] I would say reactionary religious groups

0:22:43.420,0:22:45.720
and groups who are trying
to impose their religion.

0:22:45.720,0:22:50.430
We should also say that support for
inclusive RSE is pretty widespread

0:22:50.430,0:22:55.890
across the religious spectrum, from
atheists to religious groups. I'm really

0:22:55.890,0:22:59.820
proud of the work the NSS and others are
doing this. We have been right

0:22:59.820,0:23:04.890
out in front on this. We've been
consistently warning of the problems

0:23:04.890,0:23:08.730
with the RSE guidance, that
vague language, about taking different

0:23:08.730,0:23:12.300
religious backgrounds into account. We

0:23:12.300,0:23:17.190
predicted, we said straight away how
this was going to be exploited. Some of

0:23:17.190,0:23:22.350
the pro-LGBT equality groups and the pro-RSE
groups, who had been so focused on

0:23:22.350,0:23:26.700
building consensus, they wanted
to pretend that wasn't really a

0:23:26.700,0:23:31.410
problem. So in some ways, without
taking away from their great

0:23:31.410,0:23:35.400
contribution, we've been ahead of LGBT
equality groups on this. We were the

0:23:35.400,0:23:39.820
first to expose some of the extremist
content put up behind the anti RSE campaigns.

0:23:40.000,0:23:43.700
And now we've brought public focus to that.
A lot of that

0:23:43.710,0:23:47.010
information has been deleted from
websites. The fact that we

0:23:47.010,0:23:50.190
got that information, we archived that,
to expose

0:23:50.190,0:23:55.020
who is leading these campaigns, was a
really valuable service. At the moment

0:23:55.020,0:23:59.800
the largest, most active groups are Muslim
groups, but there are

0:23:59.860,0:24:03.040
reactionary religious groups of all stripes.

0:24:03.040,0:24:06.090
We are even seeing people
who are normally

0:24:06.090,0:24:11.100
anti-muslim bigots, really say
nasty stuff about Muslims, suddenly

0:24:11.100,0:24:14.280
coming out the woodwork to work with
these groups. Homophobia has an

0:24:14.280,0:24:19.380
amazing power to bring people together.
[CS] For anyone listening who thinks that

0:24:19.380,0:24:24.740
this is worthwhile, any of our supporters
in particular, how can they help us make our
case?

0:24:24.740,0:24:28.980
[AL] I don't go all emotional here, but
I think we need to defeat this hate by

0:24:28.980,0:24:34.620
showing a little love. So if your school
is doing inclusive RSE, let the teachers

0:24:34.620,0:24:39.179
know that you support that, and you
support them. If someone you know is

0:24:39.179,0:24:44.370
spreading these anti RSE misinformation
messages, you can

0:24:44.370,0:24:48.179
maybe just gently correct them, maybe
just point out, not

0:24:48.179,0:24:51.420
necessarily confronting them, but say
"look, actually, here's the facts, here's

0:24:51.420,0:24:55.320
the information about it". Obviously if
you want to counter misinformation you

0:24:55.320,0:24:59.980
need to get the facts, and I have to say
again, that our report on this has been
fantastic.

0:24:59.980,0:25:05.900

You can visit secularism.org.uk/rse for all our work on this topic.

0:25:05.900,0:25:10.540

I absolutely recommend that you sign the petition that we have and write

0:25:10.580,0:25:14.580

to your MP on the campaign's pages. There's links to do all of that.

0:25:14.580,0:25:20.860

[CS] Plenty of stuff on our website for anyone who's interested in helping us now on this.

0:25:20.860,0:25:26.960

And finally, something which our Chief Executive, Stephen Evans, wrote a blog about recently.

0:25:26.960,0:25:32.040

Secularists have tended to defend sexual freedom, the right to have

0:25:32.040,0:25:36.500

sex and relationships with who you want I was just wondering

0:25:36.500,0:25:39.020

why you think that is?

[AL] I think as a straight

0:25:39.020,0:25:44.180

cis dude, I'm best placed to answer this question! But in all seriousness I think

0:25:44.190,0:25:48.980

there are multiple reasons.

The fact is firstly that just like

0:25:48.980,0:25:54.040

non-religious people, LGBT folk have been most often targeted by religious power,

0:25:54.040,0:25:59.880

so they gravitate to groups who are opposed to that sort of religious power. That

0:25:59.880,0:26:04.920

means that LGBT folk, including those of faith I have to say, have been very well

0:26:04.920,0:26:08.730

represented in the secularist movement and in the history of the NSS, which means

0:26:08.730,0:26:12.990

that the NSS and the wider secular movement have been very good at

0:26:12.990,0:26:17.010

responding to their concerns.

The second part of it is that often

0:26:17.010,0:26:22.500

secularism is in the position of responding to theocratic and hardline

0:26:22.500,0:26:27.360

religious movements and those movements have in recent years, in a recent

0:26:27.360,0:26:32.490

decades, had a particular focus on targeting LGBT people. And, therefore, if

0:26:32.490,0:26:37.600

we're challenging the abuse of religious power,

that's what we're going to be focusing on.

0:26:37.600,0:26:42.160

[CS] I suppose secularists ultimately go where

0:26:42.179,0:26:45.990

religious groups try to impose their way of life on other people, don't they?

0:26:45.990,0:26:49.100

To some extent we don't really get to pick our battles.

0:26:49.100,0:26:53.010

Also just another important point to pick up on there, I think, which

0:26:53.010,0:26:56.940

is the second time that you've raised it, is the

0:26:56.940,0:27:01.920
the possible reluctance among some
groups, which do stand for LGBT rights in

0:27:01.920,0:27:07.890
general, to confront religious homophobia.
[AL] I want to be very careful,

0:27:07.890,0:27:13.679
because I don't want to be
bashing LGBT groups who are doing

0:27:13.679,0:27:20.220
really important work, but there is that
tendency to, for example, I'm not gonna

0:27:20.220,0:27:25.800
name any names but "Smome Wall",
they want to work in schools promoting

0:27:25.800,0:27:31.620
LGBT inclusive education. So they want to try
and work

0:27:31.620,0:27:35.309
around these problems, so when we point out
all these problems -

0:27:35.309,0:27:38.970
institutional homophobia and
institutional transphobia in faith

0:27:38.970,0:27:44.550
schools - they've taken from what their
perspective is a strategic decision,

0:27:44.550,0:27:49.860
clearly, that it's better to try and work
with schools in order to make it more

0:27:49.860,0:27:56.540
inclusive, and people can legitimately say
that's a good approach, I'm sure.

0:27:56.540,0:28:00.690
But because we don't have that necessary
incentive we

0:28:00.690,0:28:06.780
often just had the ability to speak the truth.

And we saw it with the RSE campaign.

0:28:06.780,0:28:09.920
NSS was right in the center of the coalition

0:28:09.929,0:28:17.190
pushing for inclusive RSE, and then we got
that.
We got statutory RSE. The law was

0:28:17.190,0:28:21.630
brought in that required the guidance
being brought in. Then all the other

0:28:21.630,0:28:24.580
groups wanted to declare a victory.

0:28:24.580,0:28:29.440
Sometimes celebrating, saying "we won" is
important
but they all wanted to celebrate and say "we
won"

0:28:29.440,0:28:33.730
and then the NSS was sort of "Downers", saying

0:28:33.730,0:28:37.840
"actually, you've still got this sort of thing here,
it says that you can

0:28:37.840,0:28:42.220
use it for this purpose etc".
[CS] Okay. Alastair Lichten, thank you very
much.

0:28:42.220,0:28:51.669
[AL] Thanks so much, Chris.

[CS] If you're keen to join the push back
against

0:28:51.669,0:28:54.880
religious groups who are trying to
undermine inclusive education you might

0:28:54.880,0:28:59.980
consider coming to our Bradlaugh lecture
with Andrew Moffitt, in Manchester on 7th
September.

0:28:59.980,0:29:03.240
Andrew was targeted by

mainly Muslim protesters for promoting

0:29:03.250,0:29:07.150

inclusive education at a school in
Birmingham. There are more details on our

0:29:07.150,0:29:12.640

website at secularism.org.uk/events
Alternatively, you can join or donate

0:29:12.640,0:29:17.080

to the NSS on our website. There are
links to everything that we've discussed

0:29:17.080,0:29:23.320

in the show notes. Thank you for joining
us on the NSS podcast we'll see you next time.