

There is concern that Roman Catholic schools promote sectarianism following comments made by an ex-police chief and a former football commentator.

Former football commentator and school teacher Archie Macpherson has called for an “open and honest debate” after expressing concern that religious schools could reiterate differences.

He believes dividing children from a young age based on their parents’ religion can emphasise religious differences and contribute to the sectarian attitudes that are deeply rooted in Scottish society.

Alastair Lichten, head of education at the [National Secular Society](#) and coordinator of the national campaign [No More Faith Schools](#) said: “Schools can cause sectarianism without it being a nefarious plan. We’re sure no one intends schools to cause sectarianism, but ultimately if you’re dividing children up based on their parents’ religion and saying ‘this group of children go to this type of school, and that type of child goes to that type of school’, you’re encroaching division from a very early age.”

His comments follow those of deputy chief constable of Lothian and Borders Police Tom Wood, who wrote in the [Scotsman](#) that Roman Catholic schools should be closed to eradicate sectarianism.

He argues that the “century-old practice of segregation is contradictory to say the least” in a society where we have “equality as our watchword”.

“I think it’s easy to look to the past and say there was a time where [we can] understand having Catholic schools but ultimately we want to move in Scotland to an entirely non-denominational system,” said Lichten.

However, some reject the idea that Roman Catholic schools promote sectarianism.

Dave Scott, director of the charity [Nil by Mouth](#) said: “I have visited I would estimate probably 200 schools in Scotland during my 10 years at Nil By Mouth and I have yet to be at a single one of them where sectarianism is promoted. I think people can have sectarian attitudes in schools but I don’t think either non-denominational or denominational schools promote sectarianism in any way.”

[Keir Bloomer](#), independent education consultant and former director of education at Clackmannanshire Council said: “I am sure they do not promote sectarianism in the sense of advocating it. I don’t see the existence of separate schooling as necessary being the key issue.”

“I would prefer that families did not choose a school based on religious preferences,” he added. “However...I believe in freedom of choice. I support the continued existence of Catholic schools so long as there are families wanting to use them.”

Currently, parents in Scotland have the choice to send their child to a nondenominational school or a denominational school based on their religion and catchment area.

Statistics from the Scottish Government show that in 2018, 427 more students were enrolled in Roman Catholic schools than in 2018.

“18% of the population...chooses to go to Catholic schools, and while parents are making those choices, I think you have to kind of respect those in some ways,” said Scott.

The debate about Roman Catholic schools follows sectarian disorder at an Irish Unity march in Govan in August.

Two men were arrested following the riots.

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon described the incident as 'utterly unacceptable' on Twitter.

Sectarianism in Scotland dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when Scotland began to break links with the Catholic Church in favour of Protestantism.

It continued following mass immigration to Scotland after the Irish famine in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Today, it is most visible in football, with some fans continuing to use sectarian chants and songs at matches.