

THE WEEK

Should rainbows be banned in schools?

A Canadian high school says the colorful symbols of gay pride are too politically charged to be displayed on campus. Really?

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After a Canadian school banned rainbows displayed at a gay pride event, one group of students went stealth and buried the multicolored motif in cupcakes. *Photo: CC BY: Trebz*

Best Opinion: *Death + Taxes, The Stir, Care2*

St. Joseph Catholic Secondary School in Ontario, Canada, has banned rainbows, after 16-year-old Leanne Iskander, founder of the school's "unofficial" gay-straight alliance (official gay clubs aren't allowed), displayed the multicolored motif at an anti-homophobia event. The school maintains that the symbol is simply too politically charged to be displayed on campus. Instead of backing down, Iskander and her fellow students went undercover, baking rainbows hidden inside cupcakes, using colorful batter that was only revealed when the treats were pulled apart, and selling them for 50 cents each. They wanted to donate the \$200 they raised to an LGBT organization, but the school insisted that the cash go to a Catholic homeless shelter, and is sticking with its anti-rainbow stance. Is this rainbow ban fair?

No, the ban is bigoted and ineffective: Banning rainbows can't "prevent kids from coming into contact with anything gay," says Carmen Lobello at *Death + Taxes*. They'll just express their pride in other, secretive ways, as already demonstrated by the covert cupcakes. Tennessee is playing this game, too, with its "Don't say gay" bill that tries to ban any mentions of homosexuality in school. But this Canadian school is "is going for broke," and its attempt to subdue student pride will probably backfire. If not, "we'll know officially that the devil has won."

"Catholic school bans rainbows — fun and carebears likely next"

Plus, it's impossible to enforce: The school board must not realize how common rainbows really are, says Maressa Brown at *The Stir*. Does this mean "the school also has something against Rainbow Brite pictures hanging in lockers?" And what to do when a teacher wants to explain the phenomenon of rainbows in class? Yes, rainbows are "associated with pride," but as Iskander says, "there's so many other things that a rainbow could be. It's ridiculous."

"Catholic school bans rainbows from anti-homophobia event"

At least the school allows pro-LGBT events: Even though "official" gay-straight alliances aren't allowed, it's promising that the students were permitted to form groups to combat homophobia in the first place, says Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux at *Care2*. "And they were allowed to have a booth against homophobia during the school's social justice week." That's what makes the rainbow ban so strange. It just makes the school look desperate.

"Catholic school bans rainbows at pro-LGBT event"