

Exclusive: Most state Jewish schools enforce religious dress

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Nearly 60% of state-funded Jewish schools in England compel pupils to wear religious clothing as part of the school uniform, National Secular Society research has revealed.

Out of 49 state-funded Jewish schools, 29 were found to list specifically Jewish items of clothing as part of the compulsory school uniform on their website, mostly for boys. This includes the kippah (skullcap) and tzitzit (ritual tassels).

"We are proud to be a Jewish school. Boys are expected to wear a Kippah and Tzitzit," says Rimon Jewish Primary School, a free school in Barnet, on its [online uniform policy](#).

Hertsmere Jewish Primary School's Parent Handbook [specifies](#) that "boys are required to wear a kippa and tzitzit at all times," even from nursery level.

Some schools threaten punishment for boys who do not wear the kippah. Yavneh College, an Academy in Hertfordshire, [instructs](#): "Boys must wear a kipa at all times during the school day, except when playing sport. If a boy does not have a kipa, he is educated away from his peers and we try to contact his parents to ask them bring in a kipa for him. Alternatively, he can purchase a kipa for £2 from the school office."

There are also schools that expect the kippah to be worn even outside school grounds. Hasmonian High School's [uniform policy](#) states: "Boys are reminded that they must travel to and from school in full school uniform including a tie, blazer and Kippa."

Some schools also issue requirements for girls. Lubavitch House School Senior Girls in Hackney [states](#): "At all times, both in private and in public, in uniform and especially when not in uniform, pupils are expected to dress in a modest way, befitting a true Jewish girl and as required by Shulchan Aruch (Jewish Code of Law). Specific dress guidelines will be issued to your daughter before acceptance into the school, which will be explained and each pupil will be expected to abide by them at all times."

There are also schools that impose Jewish dress and modesty standards on external visitors. Broughton Jewish Cassel Fox Primary School in Salford's [Dress Code](#) for visitors states: "Jewish male visitors must wear a head covering. All female visitors must wear skirts of at least knee length, not trousers, and ensure that arms are covered until the elbow. Low necklines may not be worn and midriffs should not be visible. These guidelines are in accordance with Halachah and the ethos of the School."

Similarly, Avigdor Hirsch Torah Temimah Primary School in Brent has a [visitors' guide](#) on its website that says: "We request that female visitors, both Jewish and non-Jewish, dress smartly and modestly with high necklines, at least mid-length sleeves, and legs covered to below the knee; skirts or dresses are preferable to trousers."

Beis Yaakov Primary School in Barnet specified similar standards of modesty in its [visitors' guide](#), which has since been removed from its website following an [exposé by the NSS](#) on its policies, including the teaching of creationism.

At only four state Jewish schools is it clear that Jewish items of dress are not compulsory for any student at any part of the school day. Only one school, JCoSS in Barnet, acknowledges the right for pupils to have a personal choice in the matter. In its [FAQ](#) section it states: "A kippah is included as a part of the school uniform, but the decision whether or not to wear it will be a personal one for both girls and boys."

The research follows a [previous study](#) by the NSS on compulsory hijab and other Islamic dress at English Muslim schools. It was found that 10 state-funded Muslim schools make the hijab compulsory.

Since that research Ofsted has [announced](#) its intention to crack down on possible resulting breaches of the Equality Act.

All of the NSS's findings have been shared with the Department for Education, Ofsted and the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Megan Manson, campaigns officer at the NSS, said: "Forcing children to wear religious clothing is forcing them to take the identity of a particular religion, regardless of what the child may personally believe. It means that children lose their fundamental right to freedom of belief.

"School uniforms are usually intended to generate a sense of unity and equality among all pupils. But these uniform policies play a different role – to serve as a means of enforcing religious ideology, and to set boys apart from girls. And while girls may not be forced to wear a kippah, some Jewish schools have issued 'modesty codes' that are clearly sexist. It is important to recognise the background and context of what is euphemistically termed 'modesty'. At its heart, it is about controlling women.

"Incorporating religious items into compulsory school uniform policy not only makes religion inescapable at all times for the pupil; it also blurs the line between learning and acts of worship. Without a clear demarcation between what is education, and what is religious instruction, pupils are far more susceptible to indoctrination into a worldview governed by religious codes, rather than one formed through objective, critical thinking.

"Schools should be places where pupils can explore their beliefs for themselves. But as long as religious dress codes are enforced, the schools take this opportunity away."

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