

Faith school allocation “inappropriate”, say parents

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Families of children allocated places at Hindu faith school in the London Borough of Redbridge plan to appeal the decision, saying the school's religious ethos is at odds with their own beliefs and values.

Some families have missed out on all preferences listed on their school application form, and have instead been allocated places at Avanti Court Primary, a Hindu faith school in Redbridge.

The development of "spiritual insight" is at the heart of the school's curriculum, which draws on the teachings of Krishna Chaitanya, a 16th century Indian saint. Collective worship includes Kirtan (chanting mantras), meditation and prayer. Children are not permitted to bring in packed lunches for fear that children may share food which may be against individuals' dietary requirements.

Bruce Law, an atheist whose daughter Marietta has been allocated a place at Avanti Court Primary, said he regarded a Hindu faith school is an inappropriate place for his daughter's education, and will appeal the decision.

Mr Law told the National Secular Society: "One of the reasons we chose non-faith schools on our applications form is that they do not give prominence to any particular belief system. We want our daughter to make up her own mind on these matters when she is old enough."

"The school has told us we are able to withdraw our daughter from some religious aspects of the school. However after visiting the school it became clear that there is no escaping Hinduism and its beliefs.

"Even if we do exclude Marietta, we are concerned about the feeling of alienation this would cause. We were told there are only three children in the entire school who sit out in this way. How can they fail to feel segregated?"

When Mr Law's wife, Shaheen, spoke to the local authority about their concerns, she was told the religiosity of the school was "neither here nor there".

Shameela Adam, of South Woodford, was also allocated a place at the Hindu primary school for her son Amaar, despite the family's Muslim beliefs.

She said: "I just didn't expect it, this is a Hindu school and we are a practising Muslim family. This does not go down well with me or my husband. This is the opposite to what we believe in and completely against our faith."

Ian Bond, deputy leader of Redbridge's council, advised parents to appeal if they are unhappy with their allocated school.

He said: "It is impossible to give everyone there first choice places at primary schools. Unfortunately that is the way it is. At the moment we have only just got enough places so there will always be some parents who are left disappointed.

"The Hindu Avanti Court is a very good school and all faith schools must take a number of students who are not from that background, I don't see a problem there."

Under the European Convention on Human Rights, parents have a [right to ensure their religious or philosophical beliefs are respected](#) during their children's education. This does not oblige the state to fund religious schools of any kind.

Stephen Evans, National Secular Society campaigns manager, said: "It's vital that enough school places exist to ensure no child is expected to attend a religious school against their parents' wishes.

"The best way to achieve that is to move away from the concept of faith-based schools that teach religion-specific values, and move towards truly inclusive schools that teach universal shared values".

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