

Faith school closes so staff can go on religious pilgrimage

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A Catholic primary school in Birmingham closed for a day during term-time so that its staff could attend a pilgrimage to the Vatican.

Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School in Birmingham closed its doors to pupils so that staff could go on a four day trip. Parents said the decision was a "disgrace." One father commented: "Parents are fined if they take their children out of school for trips or holidays ... what I do find abhorrent is that a school will then fail to lead by example by closing to pupils so the teachers can swan off to Rome."

The headteacher said the most recent trip came after a "successful staff pilgrimage" two years prior. She added, "our faith is very important to us, as is the spirituality of both the children and the staff."

The trip was authorised by school governors, who are chaired by a local priest, the Very Rev. Canon Sean Grady, who has previously put his name to a [letter](#) urging the Government to reject equal marriage legislation, insisting marriage "is only possible between a man and a woman".

The Archdiocese of Birmingham said that "Catholic schools have a duty to support the spiritual development of staff, so that in turn, they are able to nurture the spiritual development of the pupils in their care."

He added that it is "an expectation that Catholic schools devote one of their five annual staff training days for this purpose. Such opportunities may include pilgrimage or retreat experiences.

"In making a pilgrimage to Rome, staff of this outstanding school have willingly given of their own time so that they can work to strengthen the Catholic mission of the school on their return."

The pilgrimage included time for staff to have "periods of reflection" and prayers.

The school, which prioritises 'baptised Catholic children' over non-Catholic in its [admissions](#), is judged "outstanding" by Ofsted. The last [Ofsted report](#) in September 2014 said the school's "spiritual ethos" informs "every aspect of the school's work" and that "pupils show great respect for all faiths." The school's motto is "Christ is the centre of our school community, where we live, love and learn together."

Stephen Evans, National Secular Society campaigns manager, commented: "It's very revealing that teacher training days are now being held at the Vatican. Rather than truly nurturing the development of the pupils in their care, it's clear that this publicly funded school operates more like a religious community, seeking to influence young children to adopt religious beliefs before they're mature enough to make up their own minds."

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