

NSS calls for investigation of Orthodox Jewish schools after driving ban on mothers

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The National Secular Society has called on the Department for Education to investigate two independent Orthodox Jewish schools following demands that pupils be barred from school if dropped off by mothers after a driving 'driving ban' was imposed on women by school leaders.

A religious ruling from rabbinic leaders of the Orthodox Jewish Belz sect says allowing women to drive violates "the traditional rules of modesty in our camp."

Belz sect members run two large schools in north London, Talmud Torah Machzikei Hadass, which educates 444 boys and Beis Malka, which is attended by 135 girls. Both schools are rated 'good' by Ofsted.

The Jewish Chronicle has [revealed](#) that a letter sent out last week by the sect's leaders insists that as of August students would not be allowed to enter school if their mothers drove them there.

According to the letter, the increasing numbers of mothers who drive has led to "great resentment among parents of pupils in our institutions".

Stephen Pollard, editor of The Jewish Chronicle, said he found the ban "repellent" and said the call to prevent children from attending the schools if their mothers drive them would have "profound implications".

Commenting on the reports, National Secular Society campaigns manager, Stephen Evans, said: "We trust the DfE will ensure that no child is ostracised or has their education disrupted on the basis of a misogynistic diktat handed down by religious leaders.

"We have written to the DfE asking it to investigate whether these schools are being run by fit and proper persons, whether they are in breach of Independent School Standards by undermining the fundamental value of individual liberty and whether any discrimination has occurred contrary to Equality Act 2010."

Dina Brawer, UK Ambassador of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, told London's Evening Standard: "Blocking women from driving portrays this very patriarchal society where traditional values are upheld, but they are facing a changing world and they are reacting with an almost extremism.

"They see any role that women take outside the home space as a bit of a problem and somehow it's really hard for them to see women being independent and doing things on their own."

It is not the first time that Orthodox Jewish schools in Stamford Hill have caused controversy. In 2014 The National Secular Society uncovered evidence of the publicly funded Yesodey Hatorah girls' secondary school [censoring exam paper questions](#) on human reproduction and evolution. NSS campaigning led to the exam regulator Ofqual [banning redaction of exam questions](#), a practice that had previously been tolerated on grounds of 'religious sensitivity'. The controversy

raised questions over whether some faith schools are compromising children's education by shielding them from key scientific concepts.

Earlier this year, the NSS [raised concerns](#) over the growing number of children being 'educated' in unauthorised religious schools, some of which are run by the Charedi community in Stamford Hill.

UPDATE

In a statement released to the National Secular Society, Education Secretary and Minister for Women and Equalities, Nicky Morgan said:

"This is completely unacceptable in modern Britain. If schools do not actively promote the principle of respect for other people they are breaching the independent school standards. Where we are made aware of such breaches we will investigate and take any necessary action to address the situation."

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