

Teacher sacked for saying gay child would go to hell loses in court

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An employment tribunal has [rejected](#) claims of religious discrimination by a former teacher who was sacked after making homophobic remarks to students.

Svetlana Powell, represented by the Christian Legal Centre, made a claim against T2 Apprenticeship Academy in Bristol. The academy dismissed her during her probationary period for gross misconduct related to "inappropriate comments regarding religion and sexual orientation".

The complaint against Powell related to an employability skills class in July 2016, where she was providing cover for another teacher, and where a senior manager was called to a "disturbance".

In an email following the event the then academy manager, Elizabeth Barker, described arriving at a "shouting match". Pupils then told Barker they had "been preached at all day about Christianity". One pupil said he had stopped attending classes with Powell after she said he "was a bad Christian for believing in homosexuality".

Pupils said Powell had "compared homosexuality to murder" and told an openly gay student she would be going to hell.

According to Barker, Powell had "made [H, an unnamed student] repeat the prayer of repentance before he was allowed to leave his 1:1 sessions with her" and "told all of the learners today they will never be happy until they accept god."

The following morning Barker called Powell into a meeting to discuss the events and the pupils' testimony. The following day Powell was suspended on the advice of the academy's HR department. Following a disciplinary hearing on 27 July 2016 Mrs Powell was dismissed.

Powell's legal team compared her case to that of Andrew Spargo, another teacher who shared his political and non-religious beliefs with the same class. According to Barker, Spargo had been counselled by management, including having his classroom activity monitored, and "now agrees that he talks about these subjects too often and in too much detail". She added that he "has agreed to leave his opinions at the door and purely focus on delivering maths, English and employability to the learners".

The tribunal found that Spargo was not a good comparator because (among other differences) he "did not lose control of a class", had agreed to "leave them (his political views) at the door", and "his views were not directed toward any particular individual in his class or their protected characteristics".

National Secular Society education and schools officer Alastair Lichten said: "Predictably this case is being used to once again promote the persecution fantasies of a small group of Christians who feel their religion should give them a free pass to proselytise, discriminate, harass or single out others at work. Mrs Powell was in a position of authority over vulnerable students and she abused that position.

"Mrs Powell felt that she had been drawn or 'manipulated' into expressing her views on homosexuality. However it is a teacher's job to set professional boundaries both on the class and themselves. As this case shows, teachers can discuss religious and political views when they come up in the classroom, and schools can provide guidance to teachers where such discussions aren't conducted appropriately, or stray over the line. Mrs Powell had multiple opportunities to deescalate the conversation or simply say that she didn't want to discuss her personal views.

"As she was told in the disciplinary meeting of July 27: 'This isn't about religion, not any religion. Voices were raised in your class, people walked out because they were uncomfortable, asked to drop it and still continued. You should have taken control and stopped the conversation. It escalated out of control.'"

See also [Was this Christian teacher really sacked for telling a lesbian pupil 'God loves you'? by Harry Farley in Christian Today](#)

[Read the judgment in full.](#)

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