

More schools suspend diversity teaching under Muslim pressure

Posted: Wed, 20th Mar 2019

Four more primary schools in Birmingham have stopped teaching lessons about diversity amid complaints from mainly Muslim parents about references to LGBT people.

The decision from Leigh Trust, which runs the schools, comes after a different school was forced to [suspend](#) similar lessons last week amid high-profile parental protests.

The National Secular Society said the trust's decision would "encourage some of the loudest and most intolerant religious voices to demand more unreasonable, unworkable concessions".

The news has emerged as parents also pressurise at least seven schools in Greater Manchester to avoid teaching about LGBT rights in their sex and relationships education lessons.

The four schools in Birmingham are Leigh Primary School, Alston Primary School, Marlborough Junior and Infants School and Wyndcliff Primary School. All four are part of the same multi-academy trust.

The trust decided to suspend the No Outsiders programme until it has reached an agreement with parents after a similar decision at Parkfield Community School, also in Birmingham.

In a letter Leigh Trust has said it will end the lessons until after the Islamic month of Ramadan, which finishes in June, according to the [BBC](#).

The trust added that it wanted to discuss the programme with parents to find "a positive way" of teaching about the Equality Act of 2010. The act protects individuals from discrimination on the basis of a range of protected characteristics.

Some parents have complained that the lessons contradict their interpretations of Islam because they promote acceptance of LGBT people. They have also claimed the lessons are not appropriate for the age of the children learning them.

Inspectors from Ofsted said they had found no evidence that Parkfield's 'No Outsiders' lessons focused disproportionately on LGBT issues or were not age-appropriate on a visit to the school last month.

In Manchester parents from mainly Muslim backgrounds at seven primary schools have contacted school management to complain about sex and relationships education, according to [The Guardian](#).

The government is planning to make it compulsory to teach age-appropriate lessons about relationships, sex and health from 2020.

Last month the Department for Education (DfE) [reaffirmed](#) that there would be no parental right to withdraw children from relationships education, which will be taught in primary schools. Parents will have the "right to request" withdrawal from sex education, which will be taught in secondary

schools.

A parent of a primary age child at one of the schools, William Hulme Grammar in Whalley Range, said some parents had handed out letters urging others to sign a petition against the lessons.

The parent said other parents were making calls for protests and withdrawals of children at primary schools across the region on a WhatsApp group with almost 250 members.

NSS chief executive Stephen Evans said: "The spread of Islamic censorship of diversity education in Birmingham is deeply concerning. It will encourage some of the loudest and most intolerant religious voices to demand more unreasonable, unworkable concessions.

"There appears to be no credible evidence to support the claims being made against the No Outsiders programme, which has been taught for several years and which promotes tolerance in an age-appropriate manner. Schools need to stand up to parents making these kinds of demands – and the government needs to back them up unequivocally.

"Unfortunately Leigh Trust has taken the easy way out and given intolerant parents all the more reason to double down on their demands. And the response of parents in Manchester is a sign of where this logic leads.

"This also raises questions for the government, which should be giving a very strong message that it backs schools which promote inclusion in the face of religious groups' intolerance."

The NSS wrote to the Department for Education (DfE) earlier this month to seek assurances that it was "providing unequivocal support" to Parkfield and a teacher facing a personal campaign of abuse.

The DfE has yet to respond to the letter at the time of going to print. Last week a parents' group behind the protests at Parkfield [reported](#) having "a positive meeting" with the DfE about the lessons shortly before they were suspended there.

A [letter](#) requesting withdrawal from sex and relationships education is also being distributed for bulk use among parents in Manchester, according to BBC journalist Sima Kotecha.

The letter says the parent who signs it is asking the school in question to "respect my religion" and cites protections against discrimination in equalities legislation.

It also asks schools to "make me aware of the topics that the school will be covering" in the lessons and to make clear what alternative provision they will make available for withdrawn children.

The letter is available on the website of the Stop RSE campaign, which is coordinating some anti-RSE efforts. Last month an NSS [exposé](#) highlighted the bigoted messages behind the campaign.

William Hulme said it had been contacted by five parents about the government's proposed changes and the resulting discussions had been straightforward and amicable.

An assistant head of one of the other schools, Angela Stansfield of Acacias Community Primary School in Burnage, said some parents had requested a meeting.

"A significant issue with our parents seems to be linked to LGBT, and our approach has always been that we do not promote any particular sexuality."

The other five affected primary schools in the Greater Manchester area are Birchfields, Gatley, Plymouth Grove and Claremont primary schools and MEA Central.

On Tuesday parents protested against No Outsiders outside a school in Birmingham which does not run the programme, Anderton Park primary school.

A key figure behind the Stop RSE campaign, Kate Godfrey-Faussett, organised a petition which gained more than 100,000 signatures and secured a debate on religious opt-outs in parliament on 25 February.

In response to the Parkfield protests the lead commissioner for countering extremism, Sara Khan, [warned](#) of the risk of giving too much ground to extremists on a trip to Birmingham.

"I am very alive to the fact that the longer we allow things like this to go on and ferment, the more extremists will exploit it."

Sara Khan will address the NSS's [Secularism 2019](#) conference in London on Saturday 18 May.

MPs [debated](#) the government's latest guidance on relationships, sex and health education in parliament on Wednesday. Several expressed "concern" or asked for "reassurance" for religious groups, while others expressed concern about the potential impact on LGBT+ people.

[Discuss this on Facebook.](#)

This story was updated on Friday 22 March to include a reference to the debate which took place in parliament.

Secularism 2019: Reclaiming Religious Freedom

This conference will serve to highlight that true "religious freedom" means freedom of belief for people of all religions and none, and will also explore the limits of religious freedom when it impedes on other human rights, including bodily autonomy, equality and freedom of expression.

- [More information](#)
- [Tickets](#)

- [Share on What's App](#)
- [Share on Facebook](#)
- [Share on Twitter](#)
- [Share on Email](#)
- [Subscribe to RSS Feed](#)

Tags: [Faith schools](#)

Related Campaigns

-

No more faith schools

We need inclusive schools free from religious discrimination, privilege or control.

[Read More](#)

Related Articles

NI assembly votes in favour of inclusive, evidence-based RSE

MLAs speak of "twisted" RSE teaching that thoughts of sex are "sinful" and same-sex relationships "laughed at". [Read More »](#)

Faith school takeover proceeds despite overwhelming opposition

NSS: Governors 'concealing' strength of feeling against Church of England ethos. [Read More »](#)

NSS announces major conference on protecting liberal values

Kenan Malik, Joan Smith and more speaking at NSS Secularism 2024 conference in London. [Read More »](#)

Allowing more religious selection in schools would be a big mistake

Abandoning the 50% admission cap would exacerbate the discrimination, disadvantage and division inherent with faith schools, argues Stephen Evans. [Read More »](#)

NSS joins open letter against faith school discrimination

Education experts, politicians, religious leaders and public figures unite to call on Education Secretary to keep the faith school admissions cap. [Read More »](#)