

Jewish school may severely restrict families' IT use, says DfE

Posted: Mon, 19th Aug 2019

The government has said it will not prevent an independent Jewish girls' school from placing severe restrictions on families' IT use after the National Secular Society raised concerns.

The [IT policy at Beis Chinuch Lebonos School](#) in north London allows governors to monitor parents' smartphone usage and bans children from using or holding smartphones at home.

The NSS wrote to the Department for Education last month and questioned whether the school was breaching its duty to prepare children for life in British society.

The DfE has now told the NSS the restrictions the school places on families' behaviour are "a contractual issue and not one in which the department can intervene".

The school's IT policy:

- Discourages parents from using smartphones at all
- Tells parents who need smartphones they must block browsers and open any apps they need for business purposes "through the school office"
- Tells parents the governors may require them to install the 'Covenant Eye' app on their device as "an extra precaution" if they request "long or questionable" lists of apps
- Requires the school's technology department to approve any internet enabled devices at home
- Says children "may never hold any type of smartphone in their hands", may not have access to internet enabled devices at home and may never text
- Tells parents they must take precautions to ensure children cannot access wi-fi codes – "including, but not limited to, physically removing the label from the router"
- Tells parents they must never share "clips, pictures etc that they have received on screen" with their children and says children may only watch pre-approved DVDs.

The NSS's education spokesperson Alastair Lichten wrote to Theodore Agnew, the minister responsible for faith schools, to raise the case last month.

Mr Lichten wrote that the policy "seriously undermines pupils' access to information, opportunities to develop safe IT skills and ability to engage in personal expression and exploration". He also asked the government what action it would be taking.

In response a DfE spokesperson said the department did not agree that the school was breaching the standards placed on independent schools.

"The independent school standards relate to provision made by the school and do not seek to regulate the relationship between schools and parents – except in requiring schools to supply certain information to parents and to deal in a specified way with complaints.

"In any event, nothing in the standards requires access to the internet in any form either at school or in the home, to meet those standards."

Mr Lichten said the government's response was "unacceptable".

"The IT policy at Beis Chinuch Lebonos School places severe restrictions on the religious freedom of girls and their families. The government should be doing everything it reasonably can to resist this control freakery. But unfortunately it appears to have washed its hands of any requirement to hold the school to account for it.

"This is only the latest demonstration of the brazenly authoritarian attempts by a number of Orthodox Jewish schools to control the lives of their pupils and pupils' families. Ministers must make clear that schools exist to open opportunities for their pupils, not to shut them off, and certainly do not have the right to create insular communities in which families' private lives are severely restricted."

Several Jewish schools have placed draconian restrictions on families' private lives in recent years.

Last year the Office of Schools Adjudicator [ruled](#) that several Jewish state schools could place religious [restrictions](#) on children's families provided they were clearly explained.

And in 2015 two orthodox Jewish schools [said](#) they would ban children from attending school if they were dropped off by their mothers in 2015.

Mr Lichten raised these cases in his letter and asked the government to review the OSA's remit.

Beis Chinuch Lebonos was told it was failing to meet the independent school standards in an [inspection](#) by the education watchdog Ofsted in March. Ofsted said the school was failing to promote regard for all groups of people with protected characteristics under equalities legislation.

Image by [fancycrave1](#) from [Pixabay](#).

[Discuss on Facebook](#)

While you're here

Our news and opinion content is an important part of our campaigns work. Many articles involve a lot of research by our campaigns team. If you value this output, please consider supporting us today.

- [Support us from just £1 a month](#)

- [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

Councils say faith schools disadvantaging looked after children

Evidence increasing that faith schools disadvantage those with greatest need. [Read More »](#)

Don't merge secular school into faith school, NSS urges council

The National Secular Society has urged Southwark Council to reject plans to merge a nonreligious school into a faith... [Read More »](#)

Faith school banning parts of geography lessons, Ofsted finds

Ofsted finds faith school prohibiting parts of lessons it judges incompatible with its religious beliefs. [Read More »](#)

Remove religious barriers to inclusion in NI schools, paper says

"Little change" in school religious composition for over two decades, research finds [Read More »](#)

Peer calls for more secular democracy in RE debate

Lord Warner challenges prayers in parliament and schools, bishops' bench, and faith schools.

[Read More »](#)