

Jewish schools pressured parents to opt children out of sex ed

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Parents have said two state-funded Jewish schools pressurised them to opt their children out of relationships and sex education, with one asking parents to "prevent" RSE from being taught.

[Tuesday morning's](#) BBC Victoria Derbyshire programme [highlighted](#) efforts to shut down RSE at Yesodey Hatorah Senior Girls' School and Lubavitch Senior Girls' School, two Orthodox Jewish state schools in north London.

RSE is due to become compulsory in schools in England from September 2020. The National Secular Society has repeatedly raised concerns with the Department for Education that some faith schools would pressure parents to withdraw their children from RSE.

Email at Lubavitch Senior Girls' School

An email to parents at Lubavitch read: "The problem is the government is making the subject mandatory in September 2020. However, parents have the right to opt out.

"Please exercise your right to prevent it being taught by responding to this email and saying that you do not wish your daughters to receive lessons in RSE."

One mother told the programme the email was "designed to put a stop to RSE being taught" at the school. She also said there was an attempt to prevent children from being exposed to the fact that "people with different sexualities exist".

Lubavitch was caught [encouraging](#) families to opt children out of RSE earlier this year, an issue which the NSS raised with incoming education secretary Gavin Williamson.

Recording from Yesodey Hatorah

In a secretly recorded phone call with a parent, a member of staff at Yesodey Hatorah said the school was encouraging all parents to write in. The letters would say parents did not want their children taught about single-sex relationships or sex education.

The parent told the programme the affected children need sex education "more than any other child in the country" because of insular attitudes within the local Orthodox Jewish community.

One former pupil at Yesodey Hatorah, who has since left the community, also told the programme she had been taught nothing about sex at school.

She added that references to sex had been redacted from science textbooks and that she "freaked out" when she was first told about it, weeks before her wedding.

Parents fearful of consequences of defiance

In response to the BBC's findings Lubavitch Senior Girls' School said a complaint would be investigated if the parent lodged it according to its complaints policy. The parent said she was too scared to do that.

The parent at Yesodey Hatorah added that she would have been "alienated or ostracised" if she had not sent the letter opting her children out of RSE.

NSS response

NSS education and schools officer Alastair Lichten described the revelations as "disturbing but predictable".

"Religion cannot be an excuse to shield children from knowledge which is vital to their own wellbeing and that of others.

"It's no surprise that faith schools, particularly those with a strict religious ethos, would try to shield children from knowledge about relationships and sex. But the government's failure to stand up to them is concerning.

"Ministers in the next government must not allow faith schools to evade expectations on this vital issue."

Earlier this year the NSS [revealed](#) that Orthodox Jewish schools in the state and independent sectors were planning to exploit government loopholes to avoid teaching the subject.

Image: Yesodey Hatorah Senior Girls' School.

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