

Schools won't compromise on relationships education, rabbis tell PM

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Seventeen rabbis have said Charedi Jewish schools will refuse to compromise with requirements to teach about the existence of same-sex couples when relationships and sex education becomes compulsory this year.

In a letter to the prime minister, the group [requested](#) that Charedi schools be allowed "to continue to educate our children in keeping with our sacred traditions".

The group said it had "made it very clear that we are obliged to follow by our Torah without changing anything whatsoever".

The letter does not explicitly refer to LGBT people, but it appears to suggest leaders of Charedi schools who concur with the rabbis will refuse to mention their existence.

It comes shortly after the government defended accommodations for religion in RSE teaching in England – despite criticism from peers.

Requirement to take religious background "into account"

During a [debate](#) in the House of Lords last week education minister Elizabeth Berridge noted that government guidance will require schools to take pupils' religious background "into account" when teaching RSE.

Shortly before the guidance was published last year the National Secular Society [urged](#) the education secretary to reconsider this requirement, amid a Muslim-led campaign against LGBT-inclusive education which featured protests outside schools.

Berridge also noted that primary schools are "strongly encouraged and enabled" to teach about families with same-sex parents in relationships education.

She described this language as more "permissive" than that used for secondaries, [prompting](#) concern from NSS honorary associate Michael Cashman on Twitter.

NSS response

NSS chief executive Stephen Evans said the rabbis' letter showed "the folly of giving ground to religious groups on education about relationships and sex".

"The government should firmly rebuff this letter. Schools which refuse to abide by agreed standards should be deregistered.

"And ministers should reflect on what taking children's religious background 'into account' will mean when some religious leaders are so determined to pass their bigotry on to the next generation.

"Religious groups mustn't have a veto over children's right to receive a decent education, nor over society's interest in teaching children that LGBT people exist."

Mr Evans added that the NSS would seek clarification from the government over its position.

Peer raises concern over right to request withdrawal

The government's guidance also grants parents the right to request their child be withdrawn from sex education, which will be taught in secondary schools.

In last week's Lords [debate](#) crossbench peer Ruth Deech said children in faith schools who are withdrawn could miss classes "they sorely need". She added that children in "very religious schools" are "most vulnerable to ignorance and prejudice".

Deech's comments echoed concerns [previously raised](#) by the NSS.

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