

Teacher suspended after using Muhammad cartoon in class on blasphemy

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A teacher has been suspended after using a cartoon of Islam's prophet Muhammad in a religious studies lesson about blasphemy, while protesters have gathered outside the school demanding the teacher's dismissal.

Batley Grammar School in West Yorkshire has [confirmed a decision to suspend the teacher](#), pending an independent formal investigation, and apologised for the use of the resource.

The school has also said it has withdrawn teaching on the relevant part of its course and will review its RS curriculum "to ensure no other resource or statement is inappropriate".

Meanwhile protesters gathered outside the school gates this morning, causing significant local disruption and pushing the school's starting time back to 10am.

The National Secular Society has criticised the protests and the school's response.

The NSS has also [written to the school](#), to ask for an explanation of its rationale and urge it not to pander to demands for blasphemy taboos.

Reports suggest the teacher warned that some members of the class may find the cartoon offensive, before using it to prompt a discussion about killings that have taken place after the publication of Muhammad cartoons.

School's statement

In a statement, the school said: "The school unequivocally apologises for using a totally inappropriate resource in a recent religious studies lesson. The member of staff has also given their most sincere apologies.

"We have immediately withdrawn teaching on this part of the course and we are reviewing how we go forward with the support of all the communities represented in our school.

"It is important for children to learn about faiths and beliefs, but this must be done in a sensitive way.

"The school is working closely with the governing board and community leaders to help resolve this situation."

NSS comment

NSS chief executive Stephen Evans said the protest was "an attempt to impose an Islamic blasphemy taboo on a school".

"Teachers must have a reasonable degree of freedom to explore sensitive subjects and enable students to think critically about them.

"Schools will understandably want to promote community cohesion and inclusiveness. But this cannot be achieved by pandering to religious groups who wish to dictate what can and cannot be taught.

"And the school's weak response will fuel a climate of censorship, which is brought on by attempts to force society as a whole to accommodate unreasonable and reactionary religious views."

Government response

In a [statement on Thursday evening](#) the Department for Education said it was "never acceptable to threaten or intimidate teachers", adding that schools are "free to include a full range of issues, ideas and materials in their curriculum".

Notes

- In October last year a school teacher in Paris, Samuel Paty, was [killed after he showed cartoons of Muhammad](#) from *Charlie Hebdo* magazine during a class about free expression.
- Protesters gathered at the school for a second day on Friday, while students at the school launched a [petition to keep the teacher](#).

Story updated on Friday 26 March to reflect some new developments.

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