

# All pupils withdrawn from sex education at independent Jewish school

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Every parent has withdrawn their child from sex education classes at an independent faith school with nearly 250 pupils in Gateshead, an inspection report has revealed.

The latest [Ofsted report](#) for Ateres Girls High School, published on Tuesday, said "all parents have exercised their right" to withdraw their children from the teaching of sex education.

Ateres Girls is an Orthodox Jewish independent school for girls aged 11-16, with 246 pupils on roll.

However, the report said leaders "have fulfilled their statutory responsibilities regarding the teaching of relationships, health and sex education," because the school had allowed for sex education to be taught by "an external provider from within the Jewish community".

## Relationships and sex education

According to the report, the school consulted with parents about the content of sex education lessons and informed them that they could withdraw their children from them.

The sex education policy "anticipates that parents are likely to withdraw their child", the report said.

All parents withdrew their children following the consultation.

## Equality issues

The school failed its inspection because pupils are not taught about sexual orientation or gender reassignment and consequently are "not being prepared fully for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society".

The school was rated as 'requires improvement' in its previous inspection in 2019 as it refused to allow pupils to be taught about LGBT people. It was issued a [warning notice](#) as a result in 2020.

Schools are [required](#) to promote equality and pupils' understanding of the protected characteristics which are outlined in equality law.

## Forced marriage in Jewish communities

In February a [report](#) from Jewish counter-extremism group Nahamu highlighted how a lack of relationships and sex education (RSE) contributes to forced marriage in Charedi ('ultra Orthodox') Jewish communities.

It said the lack of RSE in Charedi schools means engaged couples may not be prepared for sexual relations, may not understand consent, and may not recognise abusive behaviours.

It also said the exclusion of any reference to LGBT+ people in Orthodox Jewish schools means LGBT+ people in Charedi communities face "very serious issues of consent" when presented with a universal expectation of early, heterosexual marriage.

## NSS comment

National Secular Society head of policy and research Megan Manson said: "It is alarming that a school where no pupils are receiving sex education can be considered to be meeting statutory responsibilities to provide RSE. It risks setting a precedent that renders the standards used to regulate independent schools meaningless.

"With the problem of forced marriages in Orthodox Jewish communities increasingly coming to light, it is increasingly important to ensure all children, regardless of their parents' religious background, have access to age-appropriate, objective and inclusive RSE."

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