

Why have I never taught a Jewish child?

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Is this the way to unite society – with faith schools teaching the supremacy of their ideology and how wrong the rest of us are, asks Dennis O'Sullivan, a headteacher with thirty-five years of experience in education.

Teaching British Values is now compulsory in our schools and we are drawing in on ourselves, into Little Britain, because of a fear of the actions of a tiny, tiny minority of so-called radicalised British Muslim youth.

As we clamour for restrictions on immigration, alongside a liberal's fear of talking about race, we label some communities as dangerous and not very British. Fear of Islam is irrational but encouraging Muslims to retreat as some sort of alien breed is counter to our democracy and the values we claim as our national identity. And it alienates Muslims.

Faith schools are marching towards segregation and the creation and strengthening of racial barriers between communities. The government adores free schools and plans to open another 500, many of them single faith schools.

In 2014 there were 6,848 state funded faith schools – about a third of the total and around a 3% increase in the last decade. Jewish and Muslim faith schools, a tiny minority of these, increased from 37 to 48 and from 7 to 18 respectively over the last 7 years. 1.8 million students are in faith schools. Most of these are Catholic or Church of England primary schools.

In 36 years in multi-cultural East London schools and a largely mono-cultural Hertfordshire town I have taught around 7,000 children aged 11-18. I have known many churchgoing Christian children, active Catholics, practising Hindus and Sikhs. Muslims studied alongside other faiths and we had small numbers of Baptists, Buddhists and at least 8 Jehovah Witnesses. But never a Jewish child.

I spoke to a London headteacher about the number of Jewish children in his 1000 strong school. The school had many Jewish children until the opening of a nearby Jewish Free School at which point all Jewish children left. If we segregate children by religion are we surprised they become segregated socially and that elements of separatism will pervade?

As more Jewish kids are taken into faith schools and fewer are taught alongside non Jews should we be surprised that the horror of anti Semitism is prospering in Britain, with more attacks in 2014 than for decades?

There is a video of the Muslim IQRA Primary School in Slough which starts with a boy doing morning prayers in Arabic with the other assembled children. This faith school was created because, "the community wanted it." The allocation of community status is an interesting one: is there just one Muslim community; just one English community? Despite support for our school's planning application people living within 100 metres of the school have designated themselves "the community." And really did expect their views to take prominence. It seems we can all claim community support if we narrow our constituency sufficiently. In theory, non Muslims could attend the IQRA school but they don't. My understanding is that at least some Muslim schools ban

stringed instruments, singing, dancing and figurative art because they conflict with the teachings of the Koran which suggests they can lead to sexual arousal and idolatry.

The Catholic Church has refused to open further academies until the government changes its policy on a 50% cap on the control of admissions. This cap on single faith control of admissions upset Jewish community leaders, too, but the [Government says](#) that, "new faith schools established with taxpayers money in areas where there is a shortage of good places will be available to all who need them." Why wouldn't faith schools, all built upon such positive principles want to attract others to their moral outlook?

I worry about the curriculum in all schools, with the drive in reverse gear to the artless, toneless mind-numbing rote learning, speed writing and endless test-practising menu. However, what do faith schools teach? I was taught the Catholic view of many things, which included virgin birth, resurrection and the chastity of priests. I was 18 before I dared tempt hellfire by entering a non Catholic place of worship.

In July 2013, a state-funded orthodox Jewish girls' school in north London was admonished after [it was discovered](#) that students had their GCSE exams censored, with questions about evolution deliberately blacked out of science papers. The OCR examinations board found that 52 papers in two GCSE science exams sat by pupils at Yesodey Hatorah Senior girls' school in Hackney had questions on evolution obscured, making them impossible to be answered.

When we separate from others we allow gossip, exaggeration and ignorance to take hold, playing into the hands of those who want to divide people. David Green, chief executive of the think-tank Civitas, said, "Some Muslim schools in Britain have become part of a battleground for the heart and soul of Islam. Their aim is to turn children away, not only from Western influence, but also from liberal and secular Muslims." Mr Green says that children in some of the Islamic schools are not being prepared to live in a free and democratic British society. Indeed, they are being made to despise our culture.

It is wrong to go down the Daily Mail's 'one school does it so they all do' route in condemning the new government sponsored free school, Islamic Al-Madinah school in Derby. Here, allegedly, girls have to sit at the back of classrooms, boys and girls are segregated at meal times and there is a strict dress code even for non Muslim staff. Sensibly, Manzoor Moghal, chairman of the Muslim Forum, [declared](#): "We are not living in rural Pakistan or a Taliban-run region of Afghanistan. Such superstitious, divisive nonsense should have no place in a British school." Whose voice will be considered typical?

We don't know what goes on in religiously separated schools so I guess we have to believe the [Mail](#) when they add, using anonymous sources, "Growing Government worries over what is being taught in the quickly rising number of private and publicly-funded Islamic schools has led to reports that the home intelligence service, MI5, is to send in undercover agents posing as teachers to check if children are being brainwashed in Islamic radicalism." By 'eck.

Might the reality be that some or most faith schools develop thoughtful, tolerant, responsible and caring young citizens as Ofsted reported on the JFS ([Jewish Free School](#)). Their "religious outlook is orthodox, and one of its main aims is "to ensure that Jewish values permeate the school". Jewish Studies is a core subject for all students all of whom take the GCSE examination in Religious Studies. Ivrit and Israel Studies are included as part of Jewish Education.

[King Solomon High School](#) in Ilford also highlights the importance of Israel, wanting to teach "a positive and proud sense of Jewish identity built upon a sound knowledge of Jewish practice and

observance and an appreciation of the centrality of Israel in Jewish life".

I do worry when I see so many children waving the flag of Israel on a school website; we might all be expected to worry if Muslims were pictured with the Saudi flag enthusiastically paraded. We worry anyway if the English flag is given prominence.

We should live, work and study side by side in mutual respect of different traditions and cultures. We should celebrate and proclaim the characteristics that can bring us together. Let's promote acceptance of others, both within the school community and in the wider world, incorporating values such as caring, kindness and charity. Study together in secular schools for a better world.

Dennis O'Sullivan is a headteacher with over 35 years of experience in education. This article originally appeared on [The News Hub](#), and is republished here with the permission of the author.

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