

The Rights of U.K. Parents to Remove Children from Religious Education Classes

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Headteachers in the UK have complained about parents removing their children from religious education classes, especially those about Islam. [The Independent has the story:](#)

Parents should not be allowed to selectively remove their children from religious education (RE) lessons, headteachers say, as study reveals many withdrawal requests are over the teaching of Islam.

But parents have a perfect right, under both the 1944 and 1988 education laws, to remove their children from any classes on religious education they wish to, and are not even required to give a reason. Do the headteachers not know the laws that are in place? Or do they hope to persuade Parliament to undo them?

More than two in five school leaders and RE teachers have received requests for students to be withdrawn from teaching about one religion, research from Liverpool Hope University has revealed.

Islam is the dominant focus of these parental withdrawal requests, according to the study of 450 school leaders and heads of RE.

One participant, who received requests for children to be withdrawn from mosque visits said: "The students that have been removed are the ones that need to understand different cultures the most."

Really? Perhaps these children are being withdrawn by parents who know perfectly well what Islam is all about, do not wish their children to be subject to indoctrination, and do not believe that their children will better "understand different cultures" by visiting mosques – for what will be a carefully-choreographed visit where a friendly reception makes visiting Infidels overlook the fact that nothing of substance is being learned.

The majority (71 per cent) of teachers believe a law allowing parents to withdraw their children from RE is no longer required, according to the study in the British Journal of Religious Education.

The right of parents to "withdraw their children from RE" is "no longer required"? Given that classes on Islam, complete with a visit to a mosque, are in the opinion of many parents not so much education as indoctrination, the right of parents to withdraw their children from RE classes is "required" as never before.

It comes after a report from Thurrock council revealed that parents in Essex were withdrawing their children from

religious education lessons on Islam and stopping them from visiting mosques.

Iman Atta, director of Tell Mama, an activist group which records and measures anti-Muslim incidents in Britain, told The Independent: "We have been hearing about cases where parents are pulling their children out of mosque visits as part of religious education since they do not want them to be near a mosque.

"This has been taking place over the last five years and shows that there are parents who have fears or dislike Islam. This is also concerning, since what kinds of views are their children being exposed to? It does not bode well for the future of people and communities living together".

Iman Atta apparently thinks, without a shred of evidence, that parents who do not wish their children to be subject to Islamic indoctrination are thereby "exposing" them to anti-Islamic views. Objection to one's children being indoctrinated in a particular faith is not the same thing as preaching hatred of that faith.

When Iman Atta raises the concern that children may be exposed to (anti-Islam) views which "do not bode well for the future and [religious] communities living together," she does three things, none of them acceptable. First, she wants you to believe that any parents who remove their children from the classes on Islam are necessarily exposing them to anti-Islamic views, when the parents may simply explain that they would not object to a neutral presentation of Islam, but will not have their own children subjected to what, they have strong reason to believe, amounts to indoctrination rather than education.

Second, she is silent on the behavior of Muslim parents. Are they willing to have their own children participate in classes in Christianity and Judaism and Hinduism, including visits to churches and synagogues and temples? We have every reason to

doubt it. Nothing has been said about this. And if Muslim parents object, would the headteachers be as ready to force those Muslim students, despite their parents' wishes, to participate in such classes and such visits, just as they now are trying to force non-Muslim students to take classes in Islam and to visit mosques? Or are there different rules for Muslim parents and students?

Third, Iman Atta worries about the effect on non-Muslim children if they are excused from classes on Islam. She fails to understand the gravamen of the parents' complaint, which is not against all classes on Islam, but against classes on Islam that amount to indoctrination, by leaving out so much of what the Qur'an contains that is so disquieting, and mendaciously presenting what is included. Further, she and those headteachers determined to thwart the desires of parents fail to recognize that the right of parents to withdraw their children from RE and from collective worship has been enshrined in law by both the 1944 and 1988 education acts. Parents can withdraw their children from some or all of the RE curriculum without giving a reason. These laws are still in force.

Fourth, Muslims have the chutzpah to claim they are worried that non-Muslim children who withdraw from classes on Islam or visits to mosques will be sending a message to Muslims that is not conducive to (faith) "communities living together." Can they think of anything in Islam that might send an even more disturbing message to non-Muslims, not conducive to "communities living together?" In more than 100 verses the Qur'an commands Muslims "to fight" and "to kill" and "to smite above the necks at" and "to strike terror in the hearts of" Infidels – are those verses helpful for promoting "communities living together"? And what about the verses that tell Muslims not to take Christians and Jews as friends, "for they are friends only with each other"(5:51)? Are the verses where Muslims are told that they are the "best of peoples" (3:110)

and non-Muslims are “the most vile of created beings” (98:6) likely to promote “communities living together”? Surely these verses do far more to prevent “communities living together” than the parents who do not wish to have their children forced to visit a mosque or be subject to other forms of Islamic indoctrination.

We still do not know the details about the contents of the material being offered in U.K. schools on Islam in classes on religious education. But it’s not hard to guess what kinds of things will receive attention, and what will not. Students will be told about the Five Pillars of Islam: Shahada (Profession of Faith), Zakat (required charity), Sawm (five canonical prayers daily), Ramadan (the month of daytime fasting), and Hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca to be undertaken once in a lifetime by all those Muslims who can afford it). They will not, however, be told that the Zakat is meant only for fellow Muslims, unlike Christian charity, which is meant for everyone. Nor will they learn that in saying the five prayers, an observant Muslim will recite the Fatihah, the first surah of the Qur’an and the most common prayer in Islam, seventeen times. The final two verses of the Fatihah ask Allah: “Show us the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast favoured; not the (path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray.” The traditional Islamic understanding of this is that the “straight path” is Islam – cf. Islamic apologist John Esposito’s book *Islam: The Straight Path*. The path of those who have earned Allah’s anger are the Jews, and those who have gone astray are the Christians. Thus Muslims, in saying their required prayers, curse the kuffar 17 times a day. That will not be mentioned in those RE classes on Islam.

Students in RE classes will undoubtedly be assured that in Islam “there is no compulsion in religion” (2:256). They are unlikely to know that this is not in fact true, that there is plenty of compulsion. Consider that apostates from Islam are

to be killed; Muhammad says in a famous hadith that “if a man changes his [Islamic] religion, kill him.”(Sahib al-Bukhari, 4.52.260). That is one terrifying form of “compulsion in religion.” Nor will they be taught in the school classes on Islam about the status of the “dhimmi,” which allowed non-Muslims to continue to stay alive under Muslim rule, albeit subject to a host of onerous conditions, including the payment of the Jizyah. Many millions of people have converted to Islam during the last 1,400 years only in order to escape from the “dhimmi” status; this too is a form of “compulsion” that will not be mentioned in these RE courses.

The other Qur’anic verse sure to be taught is 5:32, in its abridged and deceptive version: “If any one slew a person... it would be as if he slew a whole people; and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of a whole people...” But the full verse, far from denouncing the taking of lives, provides the reasons for doing so: “We ordained for the Children of Israel that if any one slew a person – unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land – it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people.”

Thus the justifications for killing someone are given (and the manner of killing described in 5:33) – either for murder, or for “spreading mischief in the land,” which would include any act against Islam or Muslims, any act of blasphemy or questioning that might weaken the hold of Islam on its adherents.

If 2:256 and 5:32 will certainly be included in the school lessons on Islam, we also know, with equal certainty, what will not be included in the RE classes. None of the more than 100 verses commanding Muslims to fight the Unbelievers will be included – as, e.g., 2:191-193, 4:89, 8:12, 8:60, 9:5, 9:29, 47:4. Nor will the verses about the superiority of men to women (as 4:34), or the verses about the superiority of

Muslims to non-Muslims (3:110, 98:6) be mentioned. Left out of the discussion about Muhammad will be his comment on women in the hadith (it is “because of the deficiency of her intelligence” that a woman’s testimony is worth only half that of a man), his consummating his marriage to Aisha when she was nine and he was 54, his remarks in the hadith on warfare (“War is deceit” and “I have been made victorious through terror.”) He’ll be sanitized, cleaned up, ready for his close-up.

It should not be hard for the aggrieved parents to explain that they have good reason to believe that their children’s religious education classes on Islam amounted to indoctrination. They can list the subjects that have been completely ignored in the classes – above all, the duty to engage in Jihad to spread Islam until it everywhere dominates. They can also show that some Qur’anic texts are misleadingly presented (as the literal meaning of 2:256 is offered, but not its meaning in Islamic practice).

Teachers warned in April last year that parents were increasingly abusing the right to withdraw their children from religious education lessons due to their prejudices.

The parents are not “abusing the right to withdraw their children from religious education,” but rather, exercising that right. It is not for the teachers to decide what constitutes “abuse” of the right. Both the 1944 and 1988 education acts give parents the right to withdraw their children from any religious education classes they choose, and they need not give a reason. The parental right is total.

Members of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers section of the National Education Union called on the government to take steps to prevent parents from selectively withdrawing youngsters from RE classes.

“Cases of parents withdrawing selectively from teaching of one religion, predominantly Islam, were often presented by

participants as representing a hostility and intolerance to those of other faiths," the new research says.

Those who pull their children out of classes in indoctrination are not showing either "hostility" or "intolerance." If a reasonable unit on Islam, one that did not stint on conveying the disturbing aspects of the faith, were to be offered, many of those parents might be willing to have their children take part. The teachers, those "participants" who claimed these parents represented a "hostility and intolerance to those of other faiths" apparently are unable to recognize, and discuss in good faith, the charge that these classes on Islam amount to indoctrination.

But it [the report] concludes: "While it was true that Islam's prominence as a target for withdrawal implies prejudice, our findings suggest that teachers saw the reasons for this withdrawal as misunderstanding more than prejudice."

The teachers' condescension – pitying these poor parents who simply "misunderstand" what these classes on Islam are about – is ludicrous. These parents are in no need of pity; they rightly suspect that the classes on Islam take the form of systematic indoctrination and apologetics; the evidence is to be found in both the topics covered and those carefully not covered.

How arrogant of the teachers who are so sure that these islamocritical parents who wish to withdraw their children are know-nothings, ignoramuses who are the very people "most in need" of classes on Islam. Many – including you and me – will draw a different conclusion. These are the parents who know the most about Islam, and especially about the many disturbing Qur'anic verses that are ignored in the required classes; it is because of their knowledge, not their ignorance, of Islam, that they are so exercised by the sanitized version of the faith that their children are expected to endure.

Here is a short list of topics that might be presented by the parents who have withdrawn their children, or are thinking of doing so, that they demand be included if the course is to be anything other than an exercise in indoctrination:

1. Apostates from Islam are to be executed. Non-Muslims can survive as dhimmis, subject to a host of onerous conditions; as a result, millions of non-Muslims over time converted to Islam.

2. The Qur'an repeatedly instills contempt for non-Muslims. While Muslims are described as "the best of peoples" (3:110) non-Muslims are described as "the most vile of created beings." (98:6). Furthermore, Muslims are told not to take Christians and Jews as friends, "for they are friends only with each other." (5:51) These verses help explain the unwillingness of many Muslims to integrate into a society of Unbelievers, who are to be regarded only with contempt.

3. The Qur'an is full of verses commanding violent Jihad, and any study of Islam, no matter how brief, needs to reveal, not to cover up, these verses. Until now, in these RE classes, the duty of Jihad has been ignored, or misrepresented as the "struggle to become a better person" (relying on one very weak hadith about Muhammad describing his return home from war as going "from the Lesser Jihad [of war] to the Greater Jihad" (of domestic life), which is not at all what the Qur'an means by "Jihad" (at, e.g., 2:191-193, 4:89, 8:12, 8:60, 9:5, 9:29, 47:4), nor does the observable behavior of Muslims over the past 1,400 years suggest that the primary meaning of Jihad is an "internal struggle" to master oneself.

4. Non-Muslims should be informed that Muhammad is regarded by Muslims as "the Perfect Man" and "the Model of Conduct." They should also learn that Muhammad consummated his marriage – that is, had sexual intercourse with – Aisha when she was nine years old and he was 54. He ordered the torture of Kinana of Khaybar so as to find out where a treasure had been hidden,

and once the information was obtained, Kinana was to be murdered. He took part in the mass killing of 600-900 prisoners of the Banu Qurayza, sparing no one, even though the tribe had been completely crushed and was no longer a threat. Muhammad asked aloud for others to "rid me" of certain people who had mocked him; all three – Asma bint Marwan, Abu 'Afak, Ka'b bin al-Ashraf – were then murdered by his followers. These events give people a good sense of Muhammad, free of the hagiographic treatment that Muslims naturally favor, where such material is deliberately kept out.

5. If more parents wish to withdraw their children from religion classes in Islam, it is because they have good reason to suspect the classes will not convey disturbing truths about the faith. They are fully entitled by law to do so. It will be helpful if those parents were to present to the educational authorities in the U.K. the Qur'anic verses they think ought, at a minimum, to be included in any course on Islam, and those aspects of Muhammad's life that are most necessary for non-Muslims to learn about. It will be fascinating to see how, from within the educational bureaucracy of Great Britain, the Defenders of the Faith respond.

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