

Dress and faith in schools

Many religious and cultural traditions require particular dress, wearing the hair in a certain way, having locks, not cutting the hair, or wearing head coverings e.g. hijabs, turbans and Yarmulke and/or wearing long or modest clothing which covers the body and/or the wearing of particular jewellery like the Sikh Kara, or bracelet. In most cases these should not be in conflict with office dress codes, uniforms, or health and safety, but sensitivity and flexibility should be shown and efforts made to accommodate the wearing of religious dress safely.

If it is practical and safe to do so, staff and pupils may welcome the opportunity to wear clothing consistent with their religion. Where organisations adopt a specific dress code or uniform, careful consideration should be given to the proposed code to ensure it does not conflict with the dress requirements of some religions. General dress codes which have the effect of conflicting with religious requirements may constitute indirect discrimination unless they can be justified for example, on the grounds of health and safety.

Some religions require that women and sometimes men should dress modestly and organisations should consider whether this requirement is contravened by their dress code. For example, Jewish women may wish to wear a shirt or blouse outside their skirt in order to avoid accentuating their body shape. This may also apply to women from other religions. Islamic dress for both sexes should be modest and not tight-fitting, transparent or accentuate the body shape. In practice this means a wide variety of styles can be worn. Boys should always be covered between the navel and knee and girls reveal only their hands and faces.

Provided that Muslim girls are permitted to wear long, loose versions of a school skirt, trousers, long sleeves and a headscarf to cover their hair, they can comply with school uniform as regards colour, fabric etc without problem. The school has a right to expect that Muslim parents provide their children with clothing in a material suitable to the climate of the UK and to see that any headscarf or hijab worn by their daughters can be safely tied for work in the science lab, domestic science or CDT workshops.

If schools have a policy on the wearing of jewellery, having tattoos or other markings, they should try and be flexible and reasonable concerning items of jewellery and markings which are traditional within some religions or beliefs. Unjustifiable policies and rules may constitute indirect discrimination.

There are items of jewellery, which are culturally specific to some religions, for instance Hindu men wear neck beads (Kanthi Mala) which are an indication of their faith. Additionally, some religions are designated by body markings such as a red spot on the forehead (Bindi Sindur) and schools should consider allowing for these within their policies.

Many Muslim children wear Qur'anic verses which may be wrapped or sewn in cloth or contained in small metal boxes or locket worn on a chain or string around the neck or upper arm, or pinned inside clothes. These are religious artefacts and not jewellery.