

Priority Motion – OFSTED comments about the wearing of the hijab in schools

Conference notes:

- i) that the National Education Union believes in a system of comprehensive education in which schools are welcoming and inclusive for all students
- ii) that the “core values” of Ofsted include the following statements:
 - a) *all of our work will be evidence-led and our evaluation framework will be valid and reliable;*
 - b) *we will remove from our frameworks any measures that do not genuinely assess quality of education, training and care.*
- iii) the announcement, by Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector (HMCI) , in December 2018 that Ofsted inspectors will speak to young girls wearing the hijab “to ascertain why they do so in school” and that, “where primary school children are expected to wear the hijab, it could be interpreted as sexualisation of young girls”;
- iv) further statements, including in a speech on 1st February, that linked wearing the hijab with the need for a “muscular liberalism” to promote British Values against those who “actively pervert” the purpose of education;
- v) that no such announcements have been made about other religions or articles of clothing;
- vi) that research consistently finds that there is a diversity of viewpoints within the Muslim community and that girls who wear the hijab do so for a variety of reasons;
- viii) that Muslim women play a full part in our society and that there are many female role models who choose to wear the hijab and other articles of clothing that may be associated with their religion;
- ix) that similar moves in France and other European countries have had a negative effect on cultural relations and community cohesion.

Conference believes:

- a) that the statements from HMCI go beyond the remit of Ofsted;
- b) that there is no evidence that particular clothing has an impact on a child’s learning or attainment;
- c) that such discussions are best conducted in a way which promotes inclusion for individual children and counters stereotypes about gender, faith and culture ;
- d) that HMCI’s statements have ramifications beyond the school gates and must be seen in the context of increased attacks on the Muslim community and particular stereotypes about Muslim girls and Muslim women;
- e) these statements could have a negative impact on local communities and lead to further marginalisation of, and increased physical and verbal attacks on, Muslim women and girls;
- f) that the NEU, in conjunction with others, has developed resources aimed at tackling sexism and the culture of sexual harassment in schools as a whole and that this is an area where Ofsted would do better to learn from developing good practice and to help build schools’ capacity to challenge and tackle sexism and racism.

Conference welcomes the statement from Tower Hamlets council, that they see no need for schools to change their uniform policy and that, *“young people should have the choice to wear a hijab without fear of unfair targeting or challenge”*.

Conference instructs the NUT Executive to seek agreement within the NEU JEC to:

- i) robustly challenge these statements from the HMCI ;
- ii) reissue guidance to schools on how to develop a dress code policy;
- iii) provide resources to support NEU members to collectively challenge unfair targeting or inappropriate dress codes in their workplaces;
- iv) work with members and other relevant organisations to investigate and report on the wellbeing and educational experiences of Muslim girls in primary and secondary schools.
- v) write to Local Authorities and MATs outlining this position and asking them to issue guidance to schools to this effect.