

19th October 2023

Dear Headteacher and Governors,

We wanted to contact you about the recent and ongoing events in Israel/Palestine, in relation to the Jewish pupils and staff within your school community and to make you aware that when the situation in the region escalates, many Jewish people in the UK (and around the world) are deeply affected.

Many Jews in the UK have close family and friends living in Israel who will be directly affected by the conflict. In addition, statistics from the CST (Community Security Trust) show that levels of antisemitic events and attacks in the UK rise dramatically when there is unrest in the region – since October 7th, antisemitic incidents against British Jews are up by 500%.

The Jewish community in the UK is a tiny minority (about 0.4% of the British population) and at times of heightened antisemitism can feel overwhelmed and intimidated.

We are sending you this letter to make you aware that Jewish members of your school community may have heightened emotions at the moment and may need pastoral support.

Below are also some guidelines on antisemitism and the law to help your staff navigate actions and opinions that may be expressed by members of your school community.

We are aware that the DfE has issued schools a directive not to be 'political'. We would ask you to note that recognising that a terrorist attack occurred, leading to a state of war is stating facts, and not being 'political'. These current events should not be totally ignored by a school, just as any other tragic world event would be mentioned/recognised in a school assembly or similar.

In addition, the teaching of Judaism in RE has nothing to do with the current political events in Israel / Gaza. The teaching of Judaism should not be avoided or even postponed.

Key messages that we politely request you to promote to your students and staff:

- 1) This war is not a Jews Vs Muslims war. It is a war between Israel and Hamas which controls Gaza (a Palestinian enclave between Israel and Egypt).
- 2) British Jews and Muslims should not feel that they must take sides or fall out over this conflict, even if they disagree on politics.
- 3) If you use social media, please make sure that you do so responsibly, only sharing reputable news sources and refraining from any language which could reasonably be seen as inflammatory. There are huge numbers of sites run by people who wish to incite for war and violence.

Legalities and guidelines that your staff should be aware of:

- Displaying or wearing flags or symbols representing groups deemed by the government to be terrorist groups (ie Hamas) is illegal. While displaying badges, flags or clothing representing a country is not illegal, you should consider whether it is likely to create an atmosphere which will intimidate other students.
- Antisemitism is context-specific. 'Free Palestine' may not be an antisemitic slogan, in and of itself, however chanting it at a Jewish pupil or teacher is very likely to be, as it is identifying the teacher or pupil as Jewish and as an object of protest because of their Jewishness. This is also bullying.
- Use of the phrase "from the river to the sea" is not acceptable. It implicitly denies Israel's right to exist, and calls to remove the State of Israel, and the Jewish people, which would comprise yet another ethnic cleansing of the Jewish people from the Middle East.
- It is antisemitic to proclaim that Jewish people have more loyalty to Israel / their Jewish identity than they do to Britain.
- Making references to or comparisons between Gaza and ghettos and camps or between the treatment of Palestinians by the Israeli government to Jews during the Holocaust is given as an example of antisemitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism.
- Repeated use of 'Zionists' as a pejorative and replacement for 'Jews' is not acceptable.
- Holding Jewish people accountable for the actions of Israel and / or calling on Jewish people to speak out on Israel simply because they are Jewish is not acceptable.

Thank you for your understanding at this difficult time for everybody.

Please feel free to contact us if we can support you as a school or your Jewish pupils/staff in any way. You can reach our Education Officer via anna.silver@bod.org.uk.

Yours sincerely



Edwin Shuker

Vice President, The Board of Deputies of British Jews