

# Britain's strictest headteacher: I was forced to stop Muslim prayers after teachers were racially harassed

*The latest day at the High Court, from the [Telegraph](#). Notice the racial harassment was ongoing during the period the students were conducting Islamic ritual. It wasn't a consequence or protest at being stopped; it was one of the reasons they were stopped.*

Katharine Birbalsingh has said she was forced to ban Muslim prayers after teachers were racially harassed.

The school leader, known as Britain's strictest head teacher, is facing a High Court challenge from a Muslim pupil over the prayer policy at Michaela Community School.

Commenting on the row for the first time, she warned that "multiculturalism can only succeed" when every group makes sacrifices "for the sake of the whole".

In a statement shared on Wednesday morning, Ms Birbalsingh said the school's governing body decided to stop prayer rituals when some pupils started them "against a backdrop of events including violence, intimidation and appalling racial harassment of our teachers".

Ms Birbalsingh said the decision to ban prayer rituals "restored calm and order to the school".

She said: "We have always been clear to parents and pupils that when they apply to Michaela that because of our

restrictive building combined with our strict ethos that does not allow children to wander around the school unsupervised, we cannot have a prayer room.”

She added: “We believe it is wrong to separate children according to religion or race, and that it is our duty to protect all of our children and provide them with an environment which is free from bullying, intimidation or harassment.

“Multiculturalism can only succeed when we understand that every group must make sacrifices for the sake of the whole.” Ms Birbalsingh said that to achieve its results, the school “must be a place where children buy into something they all share and that is bigger than themselves: our country”

About 30 pupils began praying in the school’s “wet” and “dirty” yard in March last year, using blazers to kneel as they were not permitted to bring in prayer mats, the hearing at the High Court was told.

The court heard the school was targeted on social media with “threats of violence”, abuse, “false” allegations of Islamophobia, and a “bomb hoax”, but that the situation had since “calmed”.

Her lawyers (*of the complainant pupil*) claim the prayer ban “uniquely” affects the Muslim faith over other religions due to its ritualised nature and rules around prayer.