

Prayer ban at Katharine Birbalsingh's school is lawful, High Court rules

[A prayer ban imposed](#) at Katharine Birbalsingh's school is lawful, a High Court judge has ruled.

Michaela Community School in Brent, north-west London, has defended a legal challenge from a Muslim pupil, who claimed the school's ban on prayer rituals was discriminatory.

The prayer ritual policy did not "interfere" with the pupil's freedom to manifest her religious beliefs, according to a ruling handed down on Tuesday.

The pupil had chosen the school knowing of its strict regime and could have chosen to attend a different school that would have allowed her to pray at lunchtime, the ruling found.

The judge said the pupil could also perform "Qada" prayers – permitted by Islam to "make up" for missing prayers earlier in the day – "to mitigate the failure to pray within the allotted window".

In his written ruling, Mr Justice Linden said the prayer policy was "a proportionate means of achieving the legitimate aims" of the school and was therefore justified. He found that the disadvantage to Muslim pupils was outweighed by the aims that it seeks to promote in the interests of the school community as a whole, including Muslim pupils.

He said there was a "a rational connection between the aim of promoting the team ethos of the school, inclusivity, social cohesion etc and the prayer ritual policy. . . The disadvantage to Muslim pupils at the school caused by the prayer ritual policy is in my view outweighed by the aims

which it seeks to promote in the interests of the school community as a whole, including Muslim pupils.”

Mr Justice Linden said evidence showed that since the prayer rituals ban was introduced “good relations within the school community have been restored”.

Note – it is the ritual, the orthopraxic Islamic practice of seried ranks, girls and women to the back, knees bend, prostrate, stand, chant, repeat in unison that is banned. NOT the silent communication with God, knowing that He sees into every heart, listening for His word, that a Christian, a Jew and (to the best of my knowledge) a Sikh or Hindu quietly engages in at any moment of our daily life.

The secular school introduced the prayer ban in March last year after up to 30 pupils began praying in the yard.

Ms Birbalsingh, the school’s founder who has been dubbed Britain’s strictest headteacher, has defended the policy, saying it “is wrong to separate children according to religion or race”.

Lawyers for the school previously said pupils praying outside contributed to a “concerted campaign” on social media over the school’s secular approach to religion.

A High Court heard in January that the school was targeted with [death threats](#), abuse, “false” allegations of Islamophobia, and a “bomb hoax”.

Lawyers for the school also said its actions came after a [number of children](#) had been told that they were “bad Muslims” for not praying and had begun to pray.

The pupil’s lawyers previously said the prayer ban unlawfully breached her right to religious freedom, adding that it made her feel “like somebody saying they don’t feel like I properly belong here”. Michaela, a free school founded in 2014, has

around 700 pupils, around half of whom are Muslim.

The pupil's mother said she was "profoundly dismayed by the case's outcome". In a comment issued by law firm Simpson Millar, she said: "The case was rooted in the understanding that prayer isn't just a desirable act for us – it's an essential element that shapes our lives as Muslims..."

[Kemi Badenoch](#) has called the prayer ban ruling a "victory against activists" who are trying to "subvert public institutions".

Responding to Katharine Birbalsingh's statement on social media, which was posted after Mr Justice Linden's judgement on Tuesday, the Business Secretary said: "This ruling is a victory against activists trying to subvert our public institutions. No pupil has the right to impose their views on an entire school community in this way. The Equality Act is a shield, not a sword and teachers must not be threatened into submission."