

## School wrote to parents telling them their eight-year-olds had to attend workshop on Islam - or be branded RACIST on their permanent record

- Headmistress Lynn Small wrote to parents about multicultural school trip
- Children will attend 'Explore Islam' workshop at Staffordshire University
- Pupils would receive 'Racial Discrimination note' if they didn't go, she said
- Parents at Littleton Green Community School in Huntington complained
- Staffordshire County Council stepped in and head had to apologise

By [Harriet Arkell](#)

**PUBLISHED:** 14:50 GMT, 22 November 2013 | **UPDATED:** 17:43 GMT, 22 November 2013

Parents today accused a primary school of trying to 'blackmail' them after they were told their children would be marked down for racial discrimination if they did not attend a workshop on Islam.

The headmistress of Littleton Green Community School, in Huntington, Staffordshire, wrote to parents telling them about the school trip to the Explore Islam workshop at Staffordshire University next week.

They were told the Years Four and Six children would be looking at religious artefacts on their visit - and threatened with being labelled as racists 'throughout their school career' if they did not go.



Parents accused Littleton Green community school of 'blackmailing' children to go to a workshop on Islam



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Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2013

Dear Parent/Carer,

As part of the National Religious Education Curriculum together with the multicultural community in which we live, it is a statutory requirement for Primary School aged children to experience and learn about different cultures.

The workshop is at Staffordshire University and will give your child the opportunity to explore other religions. Children will be looking at religious artefacts, similar to those that would be on display in a museum. They will not be partaking in any religious practices.

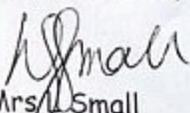
Refusal to allow your child to attend this trip will result in a Racial Discrimination note being attached to your child's education record, which will remain on this file throughout their school career.

As such our expectations are that all children in years 4 to 6 attend school on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> November to take part in this trip.

All absences on this day will be investigated for their credibility and will only be sanctioned with a GP sick note.

If you would like to discuss this further please contact our R.E Coordinator, Mrs Edmonds.

Yours Sincerely

  
Mrs Lynn Small  
Head Teacher

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**The letter: Parents were sent a letter which threatened to brand their children 'racist' if they didn't go**

Littleton Green head Lynn Small wrote to parents and carers of children at the school on Wednesday, saying the visit was organised to fulfil the part of the national curriculum requirement that children 'experience and learn about different cultures'.

She said the trip would give pupils time to 'explore other religions' and said they would be looking at exhibits 'similar to those in a museum'.

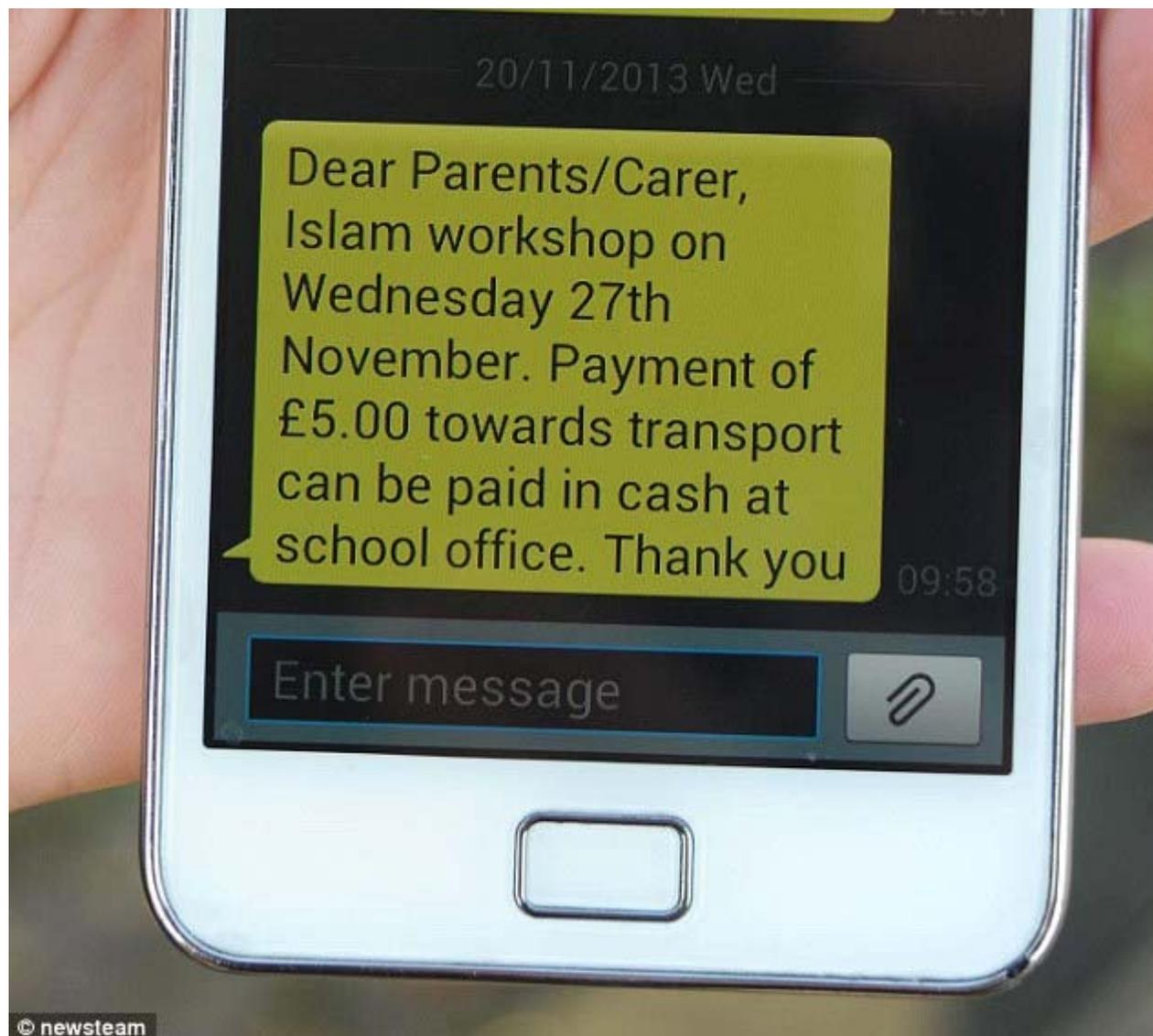
But the letter said: 'Refusal to allow your child to attend this trip will result in a Racial Discrimination note being

attached to your child's education record, which will remain on this file throughout their school career.'

It went on: 'All absences on this day will be investigated for their credibility and will only be sanctioned with a GP sick note.'

Today angry parents criticised the school's 'ludicrous' threats and accused Mrs Small of attempting to 'blackmail' them into sending their children on the trip, which they have been asked to pay £5 a head for.

Mother Gillian Claridge, 55, said: 'How dare they threaten to brand the children racist at such a young age? It's going to make them feel like little criminals.'



Parents were sent a text telling them to pay £5 towards transport for the trip to Staffordshire University



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**Headmistress Lynn Small had to apologise for her original letter and wrote to parents again last night asking them to 'disregard' what she had said**

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'The very nature of religion is all about choice - on this occasion they were not being given any choice at all.

'It was draconian move and it has left a lot of parents fuming.'

Mother-of-four Tracy Ward said: 'I was shocked by the letter. To be told my kids have got to attend this workshop is disgusting.

'Everyone should have a choice, but that's my opinion and I don't want a stain on my kids' record as a result.

'They are not old enough to be called racist.'

Her sister Donna, whose daughter also attends the school, said: 'It's not our religion. We should have a right to stop our children going.'

Stacy Waldron, 26, who has an eight-year-old daughter at the school, said: 'I feel my child will be racist if I don't allow her to go.

'This is my choice, not hers, and she shouldn't have to pay for it.'

Around 100 pupils were expected to take part in the course, which involves students being shown Islamic artefacts including a Koran and a prayer rug.



**Littleton Green community school in Huntington, Staffordshire, was told it 'required improvement' by Ofsted**

But after parents contacted the school and council chiefs intervened, they were then forced to make a U-turn.

Yesterday Mrs Small wrote to parents apologising for 'inaccuracies' in the previous correspondence., and asking them to 'on reflection disregard a section from the earlier letter'.

South Staffordshire Conservative MP Gavin Williamson said the original threat was 'bonkers'.

He said: 'The idea of attaching a racial discrimination note to children's education records saying it will remain on their file for the duration for their school career seems unfair, particularly when it is not the child's decision whether or not he or she attends.'

'It seems a very heavy-handed approach.'



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Littleton Green: The children from the primary school in Huntington are due to go on the trip next week

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**Angry parents outside Littleton Green School - they say their children should not be branded racist if they don't go**

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Defending the decision, Mrs Small said that exposing the pupils to other faiths was part of the school's statutory duty.

She said: 'We are a mainly Christian school, but we have to cover at least one other religion as part of the national curriculum.

'This visit is part of that. They would not be taking part in any religious practices.

**'We have pupils and teachers at the school who belong to the Islam faith and it is right for the children to understand and appreciate their faith as well as their own.'**

*- Headmistress Lynn Small*

'We have had similar workshops on a variety of religions in the past - including one on Islam - with no problems at all and the children have absolutely loved it.

'We have pupils and teachers at the school who belong to the Islam faith and it is right for the children to understand and appreciate their faith as well as their own.'

The school, which was told it 'required improvement' in an Ofsted report earlier this year caters for 341 pupils aged between three and 11.

A spokesman for Staffordshire County Council said: 'We strongly advised the school to contact parents immediately to explain no notes will be made on any of the pupils' records if their parents choose not to attend the visit.

'We understand this has now been done.'

He added: 'This is a school matter and the council was only contacted once the letter had been sent.

'We believe it is important for children to find out more about different cultures.

'However parents also have a right to withdraw their children from religious activities. Clearly it is not appropriate for comments about racial discrimination to be made in these circumstances.'

## **THE ORIGINAL LETTER FROM SCHOOL HEAD LYNN SMALL TO PARENTS**

*Dear Parent/Carer,*

*As part of the National Religious Education Curriculum together with the multicultural community in which we live, it is a statutory requirement for Primary School aged children to experience and learn about different cultures.*

*The workshop is at Staffordshire University and will give your child the opportunity to explore other religions.*

*Children will be looking at religious artefacts similar to those that would be on display in a museum. they will not be partaking in any religious practices.*

*Refusal to allow your child to attend this trip will result in a Racial Discrimination note being attached to your child's education record, which will remain on this file throughout their school career.*

*As such our expectations are that all children in years 4 and 6 attend school on Wednesday 27th November to take part in this trip.*

*All absences on this day will be investigated for their credibility and will only be sanctioned with a GP sick note.*

*If you would like to discuss this further please contact our RE Coordinator, Mrs Edmonds.*

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