

Muslim couple sue school that banned their daughter's hijab: Parents say it is a sin for the nine-year-old to go bare-headed in front of male teachers

- **The parents, who have not been named, claim the school's dress code is a violation of their daughter's religious freedom**
- **But the school claims they were made aware of the policy two years ago when she enrolled**
- **Now the couple are taking the school to court over the hijab ban**

By Sam Webb



Dispute: A Muslim couple are taking the school attended by their nine-year-old daughter to court after she was banned from wearing a hijab. Pictured is a girl wearing a hijab in Kabul, Afghanistan. File image

A school is being sued by a Muslim couple after it banned pupils from wearing the traditional Islamic headscarf. They launched their legal battle with St Cyprian's Greek Orthodox primary in south London after withdrawing their nine-year-old from the school when she was banned from wearing one.

The parents say it would be a sin for their daughter's head to be uncovered while in the presence of male teachers as she has 'reached puberty'.

After failing to gain the support of the school governors, they have now launched a legal action to overturn the ban.

The school now faces a High Court Case amid claims that the uniform policy is a violation of the child's religious freedom.

But Kate Magliocco, head of St Cyprian's Greek Orthodox Primary School in Thornton Heath, south London, said the parents were informed about their uniform policy when their child, whose brother remains a pupil at the school, was first admitted at seven.

She said: 'The school is being taken to the High Court by parents of a Muslim girl.

'They believe that, because she is nine, she has reached puberty and it would be a sin for her not to be covered because the school has male teachers.

'The decision not to allow her to wear a headscarf was taken by the governing body.

'The school has a very particular uniform policy, which is shared with parents and, as head, I must follow the plan.'

'The pupil in question came to us from a private school.'

'Her parents actively chose us and, before she arrived, we held a meeting which included details of the uniform plan.'

She added: 'They are a really nice family and it is a regrettable situation for both sides.'

Government guidance on school uniforms states that schools should 'act reasonably' in accommodating religious beliefs when it comes to hair, clothes and jewellery, but heads have the final word on restricting religious dress. Admission details on the school's website begin with the promise: 'The children of St Cyprian's will be equipped with the knowledge, skills and spirituality to enable them to achieve their full potential and to prepare them to contribute positively to the challenges of a diverse multi-cultural society.'



The dispute over the ban on the hijab will now go to the High Court, a move the school described as 'regrettable'

It adds that the school will 'respect the religious beliefs and practice of all staff, pupils and parents'.

The uniform policy on the school website requires girls to wear a dark blue coat, an optional blazer, a skirt, white blouse and a navy blue pullover, but it does not mention a ban on headscarves. There have been a number of legal challenges launched after pupils fell foul of school dress policy on religious and racial grounds.

Shabina Begum successfully challenged her Luton school, which had refused to allow her to wear a traditional gown, six years ago. The judgement was later overturned.

A court hearing is due to take place next month.