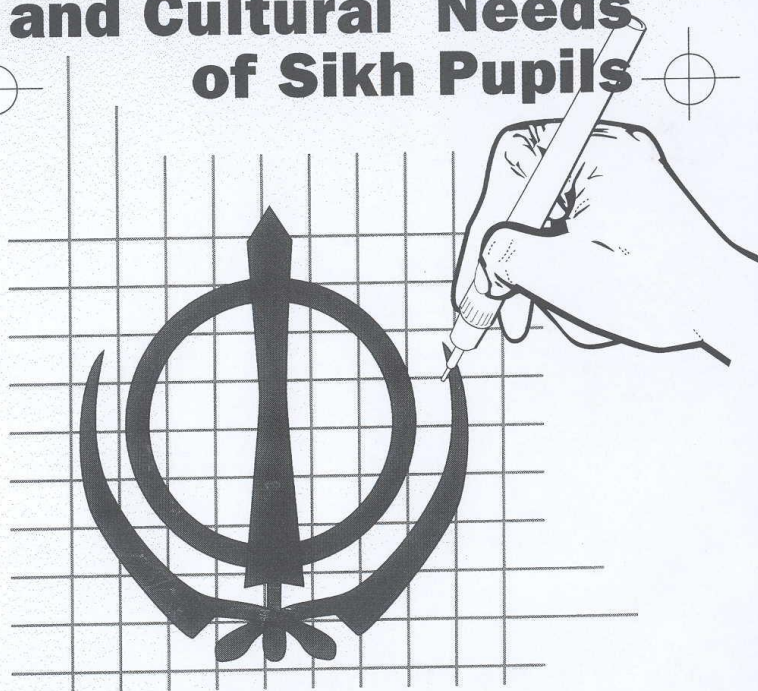


# **Guidelines** *for* **Meeting the Religious and Cultural Needs of Sikh Pupils**



 **Birmingham City Council**  
**Education Service**

# **GUIDELINES FOR MEETING THE RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL NEEDS OF SIKH PUPILS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This document is the outcome of a process of consultation with members of the Council of Sikh Gurdwaras, Sikh organisations, community representatives, head teachers and advisers from the Local Education Authority. It is intended to provide guidance to schools on ways in which they may meet more appropriately the needs of their Sikh pupils.

The purpose of the curriculum in maintained schools is outlined in the 1988 Education Reform Act, '...to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural and physical development of pupils at the school and of society...' and to prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.' To this end, it is necessary to have guidelines on how such aspects of development as are mentioned in the above legislation, could be promoted with regards to Sikh pupils.

Birmingham City Council's policy, 'Education for our Multicultural Society: Equality Assurance, 'aims to provide for the particular needs of pupils having regard for their ethnic, cultural, historical, linguistic, and religious backgrounds'. Guidelines on meeting the needs of Sikh pupils aim to assist the implementation of the Authority's policy and of statutory requirements such as the Education Acts of 1988 and of 1993.

All governing bodies have adopted the 'Birmingham Curriculum Statement' which outlines the 'entitlements' that each pupil is expected to receive. Further guidance in the form of guidelines on meeting the needs of Sikh pupils is required if such 'entitlements' are to be effectively delivered. The Curriculum Statement emphasises the importance of ensuring an 'accessible curriculum.' In meeting the needs of Sikh pupils this partly means a curriculum which encourages Sikh pupils to develop an appreciation of their religious and cultural heritage.

The Authority's multicultural policy document states that 'The assessment of needs and effective educational provision must be informed by a good understanding of all children's backgrounds...' and this requires schools to

'engage in dialogue with their local communities and especially minority ethnic

groups when seeking to arrive at such an understanding.' These guidelines on meeting the needs of Sikh pupils aim to facilitate such a dialogue with the Sikh community.

## **SCHOOLS AND SIKH PARENTS**

If the LEA, schools and parents are to share in supporting children's learning, this requires greater and more effective communication with parents and other agencies representing the interests of the Sikh community. School governing bodies need to look at ways and guidelines by which Sikh parents can be actively encouraged to participate in school matters; for example, by being parent governors, running a mothers' group, assisting in the classroom - working with teachers - particularly on religious and cultural issues.

It would also be useful for parents to be provided with school documents in Panjabi, for example the school prospectus, to inform parents about school matters and provision that is being made for Sikh children in schools. In attempting to overcome translation difficulties schools could make effective use of bilingual staff.

The Birmingham Curriculum Statement emphasises 'Community Education', which means that teaching staff need to have 'an informed knowledge of 'their' children's social and cultural environment, and to use the neighbourhood and its community as a powerful resource for learning.' One of the ways in which schools could achieve this is by organising visits to local Gurdwaras through liaison with Sikh voluntary organisations such as the Council of Sikh Gurdwaras. (Refer to section 13 for a list of agencies, including Sikh voluntary organisations.)

## **SCHOOLS AND GOVERNORS**

Governors play an important role in ensuring the efficient running of schools and in supporting schools. Greater encouragement is needed to involve Sikh parents on governing bodies if the needs of Sikh pupils are to be adequately addressed at a formal level. Schools should actively encourage Sikh parents to become involved on governing bodies, for example, by providing parents with the appropriate information. Where parents experience difficulties in becoming involved on governing bodies schools should consider co-opting others who can speak on behalf of parents, for example, representatives of the Sikh community and voluntary organisations.

## **THE RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL NEEDS OF SIKH PUPILS**

Schools should have an appreciation and understanding of the religious and cultural heritage of Sikh pupils and ensure that this is communicated to all

pupils [not just Sikh pupils] in a positive way. In addition, schools should appreciate and respect the wearing of clothing with religious significance, the principles of modesty, and the dietary needs of Sikh pupils.

### **1. Registration of Pupils' Names**

Sikhs are known by the common names Singh and Kaur. These names should be recorded as presented by parents, either as a surname or as a — middle name, and should not be ignored during registration. If initials S or K are offered these should be incorporated. This will also be helpful to staff as it helps determine gender as Sikh first names are often common to both male and female.

The correct pronunciation and spelling of names should be addressed from an early stage in order not to affect a child's confidence. School forms should incorporate sensitised terminology, such as 'first name' or 'forename' as some phraseology can be offensive.

### **2. Collective Worship**

While taking into account the legal requirements that acts of worship draw on all major religious traditions represented in the country, the majority are 'broadly Christian' in character. All worship in schools must be appropriate to the family background [including religious background] of pupils in the school.

Parents should be made aware that they have the right to withdraw their children from the whole or part of the programme of worship in school. Parents should also be made aware that they have the right to ask the head teacher if worship can be organised for a group of pupils, in accordance with their faith, on school premises. However, parents need to be informed that schools do not have to provide any alternative form of collective worship following withdrawal. Groups of parents may organise this on a voluntary basis and schools can put them in touch with Sikh voluntary organisations such as the Council of Sikh Gurdwaras, and Sikh Community and Youth Service who can advise parents on such matters.

Schools should be encouraged to invite parents to attend or take part in acts of collective worship in order to see for themselves how they reflect the family and faith background of the pupils. It is encouraging that this practice is already being adopted by some secondary schools. School brochures with a statement of collective worship outlined in them, should be made accessible to parents of pupils.

### **3. Religious Education**

Schools should take advantage of the advice and information that Sikh organisations (see section 13) can provide on selecting suitable resource materials for the Sikh section of the Religious Education syllabus. Schools should also consider inviting speakers from the Sikh community to talk about Sikhism in RE classes and assemblies. An understanding of the religious and cultural background of Sikh children can only be strengthened if schools liaise with Sikh organisations and the community at large. This is emphasised in the Authority's multicultural policy document which states that schools should '...engage in dialogue with their local communities and especially minority ethnic groups when seeking to arrive at such an understanding.'

### **4. Religious Festivals**

Many schools celebrate Diwali, Eid and Christmas. Appropriate contact time should also be allocated to Sikh festivals such as the birth of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Vaisakhi and Bandi Chhorr (which is a separate and distinct festival from the Hindu Diwali). These celebrations should be given importance, appreciation and be presented in the context of the children's general knowledge, history of the world and world religions in a planned structure. Schools should consider the use of festival days for staff training where possible.

The aim of religious education and collective worship should be to create understanding, respect and tolerance. The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education recognises this aim and includes the Sikh religion. It will be useful for schools to liaise with Sikh voluntary organisations which can provide guidelines on celebrating festivals in a culturally sensitive and appropriate way. Materials and resources should be checked with such community organisations as there are some resources which are incorrect or misleading. It is essential that religious festivals are not confused with cultural aspects of festivals; this should be considered when resources and materials are selected. (Please refer to 11. Music, Dance and Drama)

### **5. Sex Education**

The D/EE Circular 5/94 'Education Act 1993: Sex Education in Schools,' provides up to date guidance on sex education in schools. Governors in primary schools should decide whether or not to provide sex education. Their decision and subsequent policies must be written down and be available for parents. Parents should be made aware that such information exists. Schools ought to review their sex education policy annually. Where possible, schools should make use of facilities such as

translators to ensure that parents have equal access to understanding the curriculum.

Parents should be made aware that it is compulsory for secondary schools to provide sex education usually within the framework of a personal, social and health education programme. Parents should also be made aware of the right to withdraw their children from any or all parts of a school's programme of sex education other than those elements required by the National Curriculum Science Order. It is important to emphasise cultural perspectives in terms of roles and responsibilities in relationships, these being: family, community, arranged marriage and parenting. Due to cultural sensitivity it is advised to have separate male and female classes for this part of the curriculum.

## **6. Community Languages**

The Birmingham Curriculum Statement states that the Education Service should: 'Value and utilise the home and community languages of its many bilingual speakers.' When a child first starts school, knowledge of the child's first language (often Panjabi) should be fully utilised in helping the child to acquire new knowledge, understanding and skills. This development should take place right from reception stage.

At primary level, schools should attempt to make use of bilingual teachers and classroom assistants to help relate the child's first language to learning experiences encountered by the child. Schools should also encourage parents and others in the community, wherever possible, to be involved in this learning process. A session, however small, to teach the child's first language should be incorporated within the school timetable. Schools which provide this service outside school hours must be commended. Achievements in a child's first or heritage language should also be reported to parents so that it is not seen as secondary; this will also enhance a child's self esteem.

At secondary level, schools should give Sikh pupils every opportunity to study Panjabi as their foundation or additional foreign language where this meets National Curriculum requirements. It is important that teachers and other school staff recognise the importance of children retaining and developing their first language.

## **7. Dietary Needs**

It is forbidden for any Sikh to eat halal meat according to the four 'kurehats' (misdemeanours). As such no Sikh child should be served halal meat in any capacity.

Many Sikh children are vegetarian and as such also abstain from food containing eggs, fish, cheese made with animal rennet, and products containing gelatine. The school meals service provided by D.S.O. should cater for the needs of different types of vegetarian diets. In order to provide a culturally sensitive school meals service it is essential that — products are adequately labelled and that the needs of vegetarian children who do not eat these products are met.

## **8. Dress and Uniform - Please also refer to Appendix 1 & 2**

### **8(a) 5 K's- Religious Observance**

Schools should allow the observance of the five K's and take a sensitive approach towards such issues. In case of doubt or the need for further clarification, head teachers are advised to seek guidance from the Local Education Authority, or consult with Sikh organisations as listed on pages 8 and 9

An awareness of religious symbols should be part of general religious education for everybody so that children are not ignorant about the significance of such symbols. Such knowledge will make children aware of how important these symbols are to Sikh children and their families. Appendix 1 gives a basic outline of the five K's and provides practical guidance.

### **8(b) Uniform**

Schools should allow children (both boys and girls) to wear the turban, a 'patka' or 'dupatta' / 'chunni' (head covering). See Appendix 1.

The wishes of parents who may not want their daughters to wear skirts should be respected. Although the home environment is where most Sikh girls wear traditional dress i.e. salwar kameez, schools should consider the wishes of those parents who prefer their daughters to wear traditional dress at school, provided that this conforms to school colours.

It is imperative that the turban should not be touched or handled in any way other than by the wearer as this is of gross offence. This should be considered when dealing with cases of bullying and harassment where as a course of which, such offence has taken place.

Uniform in relation to P.E. and games, and swimming is discussed separately under these headings, respectively.

### 8 (c) P.E. and Games

During P.E. and games modesty needs to be respected. For example, if parents prefer their children [ boys or girls] to wear loose fitting tracksuits or other appropriate dress, schools should allow this. The wearing of shorts or skirt for P.E. and games should not be compulsory and as such this should be clarified for parents and children in the school — prospectus and uniform lists. (Please refer to Appendix 1,2)

### 9. Showering and Changing

Schools are advised to allow the observance of religious dress code during showering and changing. Pupils should be allowed to cover themselves appropriately to retain modesty when showering and changing. It would be advisable to move towards individual shower cubicles as this would retain modesty and privacy for all children, although this does, of course, have budget implications. Showering and changing facilities should nonetheless be provided separately for boys and girls. (Please refer to Appendix 1)

### 10. Swimming

Similar issues to showering and changing are involved with swimming. In addition schools should respect the principles of modesty and consult with parents on whether they would prefer separate male and female classes for swimming. Sikh girls may prefer to wear clothing such as leggings or track suit instead of swimsuit. These should be included as options in uniform lists. (Please refer to Appendix 1).

### 11. Music, Dance and Drama

Having taken into account the legal requirements of following the National Curriculum, schools should consider the wishes of parents who may place a varying degree of emphasis on religious music on the one hand and folk music on the other [examples of the latter include Bhangra and Giddha.] All children should be given the opportunity to explore the musical and artistic aspects of Panjabi culture in order to raise cultural awareness and appreciation. It is also important for schools to be aware that Sikhs do not humanise the Gurus and that any artefacts or Sikh scriptures that have been brought into school are treated with respect. The content of music and songs should be studied and advice sought on suitability from community organisations.

### 12. Welfare

School governing bodies and staff should take account of the negative effects of racism and bullying both physical and mental, in relation to the child's mental well-being, quality of life and self-esteem. By

addressing these needs of Sikh pupils and all other pupils, governors can help fulfil their obligations. Governors and staff should take special care in relation to religious discrimination.

Several cases involving Sikh children have caught the attention of the media, for example Vijay Singh in Manchester. These cases bring to light the vulnerability Sikh children have to bullying due to their outward identity and distinguishing characteristics. In Birmingham there is now a helpline which has been set up by the community in response to these issues (see section 1 3). Staff need to be sensitive to such issues and respond in a non-aggressive and sympathetic manner in consultation with community organisations and parents.

### 13. Further Information

If schools require further guidance or clarification on any matter contained in this document, they are asked to contact the following organisations.

Council of Sikh Curdwaras Sikh representatives on SACRE:c/o  
The Clerk, SACRE c/o Martineau Education Centre  
Birmingham Education Department.  
Balden Road, Harborne  
B32 2EH

Council of Sikh Curdwaras in Birmingham  
P.O. Box 2318  
Hockley  
Birmingham  
B19 2EZ  
**Tel: 01 21 7730399**

Personnel &Equalities  
Division Honeywell  
House 38-50  
Orphanage Road  
Erdington, B4 9HL  
Tel: 0121 303 2621

Sikh Religious Symbols Action Committee International  
11 Apollo Way, Perry Barr  
Birmingham B20 3ND  
Tel. 0121-356-7070

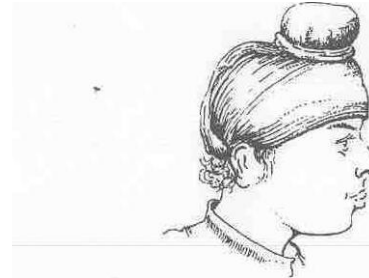
Sikh Community and Youth **Service**  
348 Soho Road,  
Handsworth,  
Birmingham. B21 9BU  
Tel. 0121-523-0147

Sikh Helpline & Information Centre  
c/o Guru Nanak Gurdwara South Birmingham  
629-631 Stratford Road,  
Sparkhill,  
Birmingham, B11 4LS  
Tel. 0121-247-3235

Schools may find useful to contact the following Sikh organisations for information on resource materials on Sikhism.

**Sikh Missionary Society UK 10,**  
**Featherstone Road, Southall,**  
**Middlesex, UB2 5AA Tel. 0181-**  
**574 1902**

**British Organisation of Sikh Students**  
**P.O Box 4350**  
**Handsworth,**  
**Birmingham, B21 2 FB**  
**Tel. 07939345678**



## APPENDIX 1

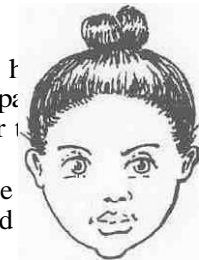
### The Five Kakars of Sikhism

Schools should be aware that the wearing of the "five Kakars" (or "five K's") **at all times** is of utmost importance and sensitivity for initiated Sikhs, and is the subject of vows made during the Amrit ceremony. Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Guru, ordered all Amritdhari (initiated) Sikhs to wear the 5K's and the turban.

It is essential for an initiated Sikh to keep his/her vows, and this commitment, which is not entered into lightly or easily, should be respected by the school community.

### The Five Kakars. *Jes uncut hair.*

A Sikh treats hair as a divine gift from God. **Rumal** is a white cloth and for a Sikh to keep this natural form is material used for covering the head. The hair is a symbol of faith, and preserving knot. hair in its natural form confirms a Sikh's belief in the acceptance of God's will, and teaches humility and acceptance.



The Kes must be covered at all times, and are covered in the following ways.

**Dupatta or chunni** is a headscarf usually worn by women and girls.





The ***Dastar*** (turban) is a long piece of material with which Sikhs cover their hair. This may vary in colour, size and shape., and may conform to school colours. (Refer to Appendix 3)

A ***Patka*** is a smaller piece of material (similar to a head scarf) and is likely to be worn by younger children. The patka is commonly worn during recreational activities, such as sports, swimming and games. \_\_\_\_\_

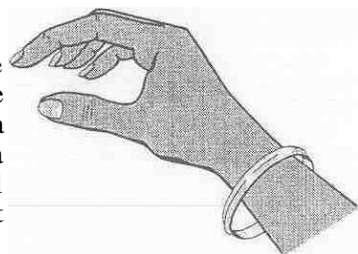


### ***Kangha - comb***

The kangha is a wooden comb, which is kept in the hair and is covered by the turban/patka/ dupatta or chunni. Apart from its practical use, a comb is clearly a symbol of cleanliness. Just as a comb helps to remove the tangles and cleans the hair, similarly a Sikh is reminded to get rid of any bad or evil thoughts by repeating 'Naam' (God's name) in the mind.

### ***Kara - iron bangle***

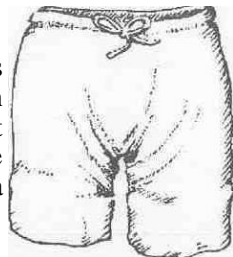
Kara literally means a fink: signifying the bond between a Sikh and the Guru (Divine Master). The kara is circular in shape and is a symbol of restraint. In practice the kara is a constant reminder to the Sikh of ideal behaviour in the event of weakness and thus it must not be confused with jewellery.



One Kara of an adequate size and reasonable thickness should be worn. During sports activities the kara can be covered with a sweat-band. The Kara as already emphasised is one of the five K's and should not be removed to suit the environment; for example during exam -time or in the classroom.

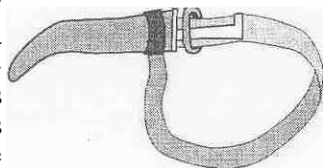
### ***Kachhera - shorts***

This is a particular type of under garment which is symbolic of continence and high moral character. In sports and swimming long shorts or jogging/track suit bottoms are worn over the kachhera. During bathing the kachhera is maintained on the body and changed by a specific method.



### ***Kirpan - sword***

The word Kirpan comes from the word 'kirpa' and 'aan'. 'Kirpa' means an act of kindness, a favour; and 'aan ' means honour and self-respect. Thus for Sikhs, the kirpan symbolises hand of mercy. To call it a dagger or a knife is insulting to this article of faith as the functions of these two items are very different from the Kirpan. (See Appendix 2)



## **APPENDIX 2**

### **WEARING KIRPANS IN SCHOOLS.**

1. Birmingham LEA recommends that the Kirpan should be allowed to be worn in schools in compliance with the following guidelines:
  - (a) it is restricted to pupils who have gone through the Amrit Pahul ceremony;
  - (b) the Kirpan will be sheathed and secured, in line with religious requirements;

(c) the sheathed Kirpan will not be displayed openly and will be worn under clothing to ensure the highest possible safety at all times;

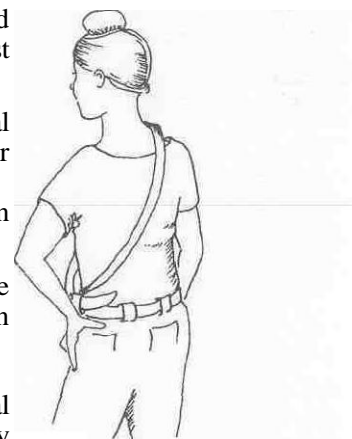
(d) during physical education, sports and recreational activities, the Kirpan be kept under clothing or carried in a secure pocket in shorts or swimming shorts, etc. so that it is not visible and other children have no access to it;

(e) on no account, will the Kirpan be drawn while the young person is in school, on a school trip or on school transport.

2. Birmingham LEA recommends that schools consult the pupil, the pupil's parents and representatives of local Sikh organisations with a view to determining a mutually acceptable size for the Kirpan to be worn by that pupil in school taking into account the following considerations:

- (a) Sikh authorities recommend that a Kirpan ranging in size from 5 to 8 inches (including blade) is appropriate.
- (b) Some individual Sikhs may find it acceptable to wear a smaller and more symbolic Kirpan, (those who have not undertaken Amrit Pahul).
- (c) It is common practice for individual Sikhs to give serious consideration to the size of the Kirpan that would be appropriate for them to wear in different contexts such as work, leisure and other activities.
- (d) The number of cases are likely to be very few.

3. Clearly it is for the governing body and staff of the school to decide on this issue. However, the LEA believes that the recommendations in paragraphs 1 and 2 above balance the concern of schools and Sikh parents and would encourage schools to seek a similar compromise if faced with difficulties in deciding on this issue. Where an agreement has been reached with the pupil, parent and local Sikh representatives any transgression should be dealt with seriously under the school's policies for behaviour management and discipline.
4. Should schools experience difficulties in complying with these guidelines, advice can be sought from the Assistant Director, Personnel and Equalities and/or the Birmingham Advisory Service for Schools (BASS).
5. The carrying of a Kirpan for religious purposes is a statutory defence under Section 4 of the Offensive Weapons Act 1996.





6. The Birmingham Education Service guidelines Wearing Kirpans In Schools will be subject to regular review by officers of the City Council in consultation with the Council of Sikh Gurdwaras.

7. The following paragraphs taken from DfEE guidance issued in 1997 provide further information on this matter which schools may find useful.

- a. Sikhs who have been initiated in a ceremony called Amrit Pahul are required to carry a Kirpan at all times. The Kirpan is a ceremonial sword and is one of the five sacred symbols of the Sikh faith. Both male and female children can be initiated. There is no lower age limit, but the child must be old enough to understand the significance of the ceremony. Children of primary school age have undergone the ceremony.
- b. Some Sikhs believe that it is sufficient for the Kirpan to be symbolic, so that Kirpans as small as one and a half inches long can be worn under clothing and sealed so that they cannot be drawn, Kirpans may sometimes be secured in protective padding. Other Sikhs believe that the Kirpan must be around eight inches long with a five inch blade.
- c. Governing bodies of all schools and, in the case of county and controlled schools, LEAs, have responsibilities under health and safety legislation to ensure the welfare of those within schools. It is for them to decide whether to allow Sikh children to wear a Kirpan in schools. They will need to be able to satisfy themselves that the Kirpan does not present a health and safety risk either to the child wearing it or to other pupils and staff.
- d. LEAs and governing bodies also need to be aware of the possible impact of the Race Relations Act 1976. The courts have ruled that Sikhs are a 'racial group' for the purposes of the Act. Depending on circumstances, a rule which operated to forbid the wearing of a Kirpan, or resulted in, for example the exclusion of a pupil who insisted on wearing one, might be alleged to constitute unlawful indirect discrimination under section 17 of the act. A requirement will not be indirectly discriminatory, however, if it is adopted for a legitimate objective and is an appropriate and reasonably necessary means of achieving this objective. In particular cases it may be appropriate to take legal advice.
- e. Schools should be fully aware of the religious observance of Sikhs and the need to deal with this issue sensitively. It should normally be possible to reach a compromise between the religious practice of the

Sikh community on the one hand, and the understandable concerns of schools and non-Sikh parents on the other, for example by permitting the wearing of symbolic Kirpans secured as described above.

*('School Security' 1997 DfEE),*

## APPENDIX 3

### Mandla v Lee

Mr Sewa Singh Mandla, a Sikh parent, tried to enrol his son as a pupil at a private school in Birmingham. The headteacher at the school, Mr Dowell Lee, refused to admit the boy to the school unless he complied with the school's uniform rules by removing his turban and cutting his hair.

Mr Mandla took the case to Birmingham County Court, where he argued that the headteacher's 'no turban' rule constituted unlawful indirect discrimination under Section 1(1)(b) of the Race Relations Act 1976, because:

- The school's uniform rule constituted a test, condition or requirement which his son could not comply with because of the cultural norms of Sikhs as a racial group.
- The rule could not be justified.

The County Court and Court of Appeal dismissed Mr Mandla's claim and held that:

- Mr Mandla's son could physically comply with the requirement by removing his turban.
- The 'no turban' ban was justifiable in terms of the uniform rules.
- Sikhs were not a racial group as defined by the Race Relations Act 1976.

The case was taken to the House of Lords where the appeal was upheld on the following grounds:

- The term 'can comply' in the Race Relations Act should not be interpreted in a literal physical sense, but construed as meaning 'can practice comply' consistent with the customs and cultural norms of the racial group.
- The 'no turbans' rule could not be justified on educational grounds.
- Sikhs were an ethnic group under the Race Relations Act 1976.

The Mandla case in relation to school admissions criteria means that uniform and dress regulations which result in the rejection of a pupil who cannot comply with them for cultural or religious reasons are likely to be unlawful.

## Acknowledgements

The Council of Sikh Gurdwaras in Birmingham is grateful and acknowledges the work and input of all those organisations and individuals who have been involved and contributed to the development and preparation of these guidelines.

The Council of Sikh Gurdwaras Education Group comprising of organisational representatives and parents, have provided ongoing assistance, involvement and contribution.

**Paramjit Singh Chandan**, The Council of Sikh Gurdwaras in Birmingham, *Former Chairman CSG*

**Ram Singh**, The Council of Sikh Gurdwaras in Birmingham, *Former G, Secretary-Member CSG & Parent*

**Mohan Singh**, Guru Nanak Gurdwara South Birmingham/CSG, *General Secretary CSG & Parent*

**Balbir Singh**, *Parent*

**Jagdev-Singh Boparai**, CSG, *Comm. Development Officer*

**Narinder Kaur Moor**, CSG upto 1996, *Former Educ. Detached Duty Worker*

**Sukhvinder Singh/Jatinder Singh**, Sikh Community and Youth Service, Birmingham, *Project Co-ordinator*

**Madan Singh**, Sikh Symbols Action Committee International, *Convenor Sukhdev*

**Singh**, Guru Nanak Gurdwara South Birmingham, *Education Worker*

**Achhar Singh**, Guru Nanak Gurdwara, Sedgley St, Wolverhampton, *Member and Parent*

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