

Educational Potential of the Hijab: A cloth which can tie us together

By Yusra Dahri, London.

Recently in the news, Amanda Spielman, Ofsted chief inspector, has progressed with her previous comments about the hijab. It's true that there is no necessity in primary school for a Muslim girl to wear the hijab. I didn't wear a headscarf in primary school, but I don't see the harm in wearing it either.

My classmates, genuinely curious, would have asked me why I wore it, and I would have explained to them why I liked wearing it and why my mother wore it. It could open up pathways for interfaith discussion and be an interesting supplement to RE, opening up the world for everyone present which is arguably, the purpose of school. Fast forward five or six years, when the hijab has been heavily politicised, perhaps my classmates would remember our discussions over what has been filtered down to them through the media.

Now, I try imagining what it would be like to be a little Muslim girl today. If I wanted to wear my headscarf, I would be questioned. Not by my friends, but by adults. I would be asked why I got in trouble by my friends and if I told them it was because of my headscarf, they would undoubtedly think it was something bad. By the time we reached secondary school, it would be a taboo topic. Instead of building a bridge between two parts of my life, I would begin to disrespect either religion or the establishment of education. Either would detract from my quality of life and personal enrichment.

I just have to wonder if this Ofsted policy would end up doing more harm than good. What's the point in trying to relieve a child of family pressures when it is swiftly replaced by those of society and politics? School lays more and more pressure on children, year after year. As a student myself, I would say that my religion and prayer helped me more than anything my school could provide pastorally during my GCSEs. If I wanted children to fully succeed and enjoy their education, I would at least give them the freedom to think for themselves.

Personally, I feel the education sector has more to reconsider in regards to the restrictions placed on pupils propagated by the education system itself rather than diverting attention to the religion some students happen to follow.
