

Dear (Headteacher)

Re: Solidarity with child victims of Gaza

I am writing to express my concern in the way the school has chosen to treat children and their families who wish to express their solidarity with the child victims of Gaza. My son was absent from school on the morning of Friday 17 November to attend a solidarity demonstration with the child victims of Gaza at Ilford Town Hall. I had already submitted a letter explaining the reason for their absence and my decision to attend the solidarity demonstration. I am the parent and legal guardian, and it was my decision, in consultation with my son. If the school had concerns about my decision, they should have engaged with me in a productive dialogue. Instead, the school chose to target my son with a punitive sanction of a 30-minute late detention and the recording of an unauthorised absence. It is incorrect to record both. Either he is absent or he is late. In either case my son had a valid reason which was explained in writing, in advance. While my son did not attend the detention, it was a stressful and distressing process which required me to come to school and engage with staff at the school. I observed how upset and angry other parents were and all of this could have been avoided if the school had taken an approach of understanding and dialogue.

I would invite staff at the school to challenge their own unconscious bias towards the suffering of Palestinians and explore what independent human rights organisations have unequivocally said regarding the current situation in Gaza. These include organisations like the UN Human Rights Office to the High Commissioner¹, Amnesty International², Human Rights Watch³ and B'Tselem⁴. In anticipation that you might consider these organisations to be tainted by antisemitism, I invite you to consider that these organisations include Jewish Israeli human rights organisations and how the Jewish community has been at the forefront of challenging the genocide being carried out in Gaza. The conclusion which they reach all revolve around an unfolding genocide in Gaza, war crimes being committed by Israel, systematic apartheid in Israel towards the Palestinians and conditions for living which are not fit for human habitation in Gaza.

Rather than sanctioning children, the school could have taken a wholistic approach to their safeguarding responsibilities towards the children in their care. I would invite you to consider the following:

1. Have you checked on the mental health and well-being of children at your school and how they have been affected by images of death and destruction in Gaza?
2. Have you checked if any children have relatives and friends in Gaza? I am aware of people in the local community who have lost up to 17 members of their extended family when residential blocks have been targeted with arial bombardment in Gaza.
3. Have you checked if children who have seen graphic images of dead and seriously injured children being pulled out of the rubble of residential blocks, hospitals and schools need professional counselling, and have you offered professional counselling in school?
4. Have you checked if any of your staff have served in the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), either in the past or present and hence may have a conflict of interest when supporting children who wish to express solidarity with the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza?
5. Have you joined the chorus of schools up and down the country which have supported fundraising campaigns for Gaza? This could give children a positive outlet to provide humanitarian aid for Gaza.

In anticipation that you might consider that the national demonstrations in Central London are sufficient for children to attend, I would like to clarify the purpose of the solidarity demonstration on the morning of Friday 17 November. There have been almost 5000 innocent child victims of the Israeli bombardment of Gaza. As a result, all schools in Gaza are now closed due to children being dead or injured and schools being destroyed with targeted missile attacks. The demonstration was in school time to express solidarity with the remaining children in Gaza who are traumatised

¹ [Gaza: UN experts call on international community to prevent genocide against the Palestinian people | OHCHR](#)

² [Damning evidence of war crimes as Israeli attacks wipe out entire families in Gaza - Amnesty International](#)

³ [Questions and Answers: The Humanitarian Catastrophe in Gaza | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](#)

⁴ [Revenge policy in motion; Israel committing war crimes in Gaza | B'Tselem \(btselem.org\)](#)

for life and unable to attend school. They are being robbed of their future and I wanted my family to express solidarity with these innocent victims for a few hours.

In anticipation that you may choose not to engage with this letter as it is 'political', I refer you to all the human rights organisations quoted above which have produced independent reports on the scale of humanitarian suffering in Gaza. I also encourage you to read the Department of Education guidance on political activism by secondary pupils⁵ which states, 'Interest and engagement with political issues should be encouraged.'

Moving forwards, I feel it is important that the school engages with parents with constructive dialogue and does not target our children with punitive sanctions.

In this regard I am stating as the parent and legal guardian of my son:

- 1) My son will not attend a detention for my decision to withdraw him from school to attend the solidarity demonstration as it was my detention as his parent and legal guardian.
- 2) My son will not attend an internal exclusion for my decision to withdraw him from school to attend the solidarity demonstration as it was my detention as his parent and legal guardian.
- 3) There will be no statements taken from my son regarding the humanitarian suffering in Gaza or his attendance at the demonstration without my presence. He is already traumatised by the images he has seen from Gaza, and I do not want his mental health further damaged through any form of questioning from the school.
- 4) My son will not attend any assembly where staff are critical of my decision to attend the solidarity demonstration. School staff have a duty of care entrusted to them by parents. They have no right to undermine or criticise parents in front of their children.

As a parent and legal guardian, I would like full visibility and transparency about what is being recorded on my son's record regarding his attendance at the solidarity demonstration. I accept the Department of Education has given guidance to record an unauthorised absence. That is regrettable but it is an important lesson for my son of how victimhood is often seen through a lens of race and religion and not through the lens of humanitarian suffering. Any record or comment being placed against my son's record beyond an unauthorised absence needs to be communicated to me as a parent and legal guardian.

It is my sincere wish that through this crisis a new a stronger relationship can be forged between the school and the parent body, providing the school is prepared to engage with parents with dialogue, understanding and respect, and the focus remains the well-being of children.

Yours sincerely

⁵ [Political impartiality in schools - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/political-impairment-in-schools)