

Falconer backs teachers' rights

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Teachers should have better protection to stop false allegations by pupils ruining their careers, the Lord Chancellor has told head teachers.

Unfounded charges should not stay on teachers' records, Lord Falconer said.

Teachers should be granted anonymity while inquiries are made and, in the case of a head teacher, the name of the school should be withheld, he added.

He also backed schools over unreasonable demands by Muslim pupils to wear Islamic dress in schools.

In a speech about human rights to delegates at the annual conference of the National Association of Head Teachers in Bournemouth, Lord Falconer said teachers were very vulnerable to false allegations.



Lord Falconer said teachers should use common sense

'Ruin lives'

"Suspensions going on years or investigations going on years ruin lives often utterly unfairly," he told the conference.

"Your human rights demand a fair process, and that basic fairness is what any person would expect."

He cited the story of Dame Mary MacDonald, a head teacher who was falsely accused of slapping a pupil, and said such claims could "damage the teacher hugely". Lord Falconer stressed that pupils and parents must feel safe to make allegations if they had a genuine case.

But he said decisions currently went against the teacher too often. "Among many public servants, particularly heads and teachers, there is a sense that the balance isn't right," he said.

But he stopped short of endorsing sanctions against people who made allegations which turned to be false.

"We have got to have systems in place which give children a sense they can feel safe to make the allegations."

The general secretary of the NAHT, Mick Brookes, welcomed the backing of the Lord Chancellor.

"We're really pleased he's been so supportive. There's a statement of intent there," he said.

Earlier in the conference, the NAHT had warned parents were making unfounded complaints about their children's schools in the hope of making money in out-of-court settlements.



False allegations can ruin a teacher's career

A report presented to the conference suggested "most teachers and heads" had faced false allegations at some point in their careers.

Islamic dress

In his speech, Lord Falconer also backed schools over unreasonable requests to wear Islamic dress in class. He said the Law Lords had made the right decision in backing Denbigh High School in Luton over its decision not to allow a pupil to wear the jilbab, a long loose gown.

Shabina Begum had worn the shalwar kameez - trousers and tunic - and headscarf before saying her religion required her to wear the jilbab. Lord Falconer said schools should weigh up local sensitivities when devising uniform policies, but said those who took a common sense approach had nothing to fear from the Human Rights Act.

"The case showed how uniform can be a difficult issue and one where head teachers and the schools' governing bodies have to think extremely carefully," he told delegates. But more than that it showed that common sense and human rights are entirely in line with each other."

Well it would seem teachers will have more rights than parents. As far as showing that common sense and human rights are entirely in line, I'll be buggared before i agree that line.