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2026

Teacher Guide: UK Settlement Sanctions

What does peace look like to you?

What gives you hope?

How do you cope with fear or anger?

How do you react to hate?

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Introduction

On 8 September 2026, the UK government announced sanctions targeting Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank.

This is a significant, emotive and fast-developing story, and pupils may arrive at school having seen strong reactions from family, community leaders, social media or the news.

This guide gives you the core facts, a summary of how different organisations have responded, and — most importantly — a way of helping pupils understand why people on different sides feel so strongly, without promoting a political position so they have space to think about it for themselves.

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What the Government Announced

- Foreign Secretary Ed Miliband told Parliament that the UK Government now formally regards Israel's occupation of the West Bank as unlawful.

- The UK will ban imports of goods produced in Israeli settlements, and sanction individuals and companies involved in settlement construction, finance, real estate and advertising.
- New sanctions were also placed on a number of individuals accused of inciting or carrying out violence against Palestinian communities, and a ban for arms licences and other exports that materially contribute to the occupation.
- The government described violence by extremist settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank as amounting to “ethnic cleansing.”
- France and Canada announced similar import bans at the same time; Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Poland, Portugal and Sweden pledged to support further action.
- The measures are expected to take six to nine months to come into force.

This builds on a longer UK policy of treating settlements as illegal under international law (a position reinforced by a 2024 International Court of Justice advisory opinion) — but it is the first time that position has been backed by material economic measures that support the Government’s position, and the first time that Israel’s occupation of the West Bank as a whole has been recognised by the UK Government as illegal.

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How Different Organisations have Responded

Reactions have not split neatly along religious lines. Within both the British Jewish and British Muslim communities — and across British politics — there is a real range of views. Presenting that range, rather than two opposing blocs, is itself an important lesson for pupils.

Jewish communal organisations and leaders

The Board of Deputies of British Jews said it received the announcement with "deep regret," warning it could damage UK–Israel relations and have harmful consequences for British Jews, and noting the difficult timing so close to the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, at a time of high concern about communal security.

The Jewish Leadership Council was similarly critical, arguing the move risks harming Jewish life in Britain and accusing the government of responding to pressure from the "most extreme elements of British society."

Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis described the announcement as "a dark day for British Jews," arguing that the sanctions amount to gesture politics that could end up emboldening antisemitism rather than reducing it.

Not every Jewish voice took this view. Several rabbis, including at London's New London and Kingston Liberal synagogues, publicly welcomed the sanctions as consistent with a vision of Israel founded on justice and peace, and encouraged their communities to support progress toward a two-state solution.

The organisation Yachad stated: "The international community has an obligation to act to prevent a scenario in which there can be no possible pathway towards a permanent political resolution to the conflict, which is what the UK Government is attempting to do today."

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How Different Organisations have Responded cont...

Muslim, pro-Palestinian and human rights organisations

The Palestinian Ambassador welcomed the measure, saying that "it's a significant day" and "the UK is leading not following" in applying sanctions, which is important considering its "historical responsibility".

The Labour Muslim Network called the announcement an important and long overdue step that it had campaigned for over many years, describing it as a potential starting point for further action.

The UK Muslim Network welcomed the measures, and issued a reminder that legitimate criticism of the policies and actions of the Israeli Government "must never be allowed to translate into hostility towards Jewish communities in Britain".

The Council for Arab-British Understanding welcomed the announcement as a major move, while arguing it does not go far enough — calling for tighter labelling rules and a ban on financial services linked to settlements.

Human rights and aid organisations were broadly supportive: ActionAid UK called the measures "overdue and a first step against complicity in an unlawful occupation", while Amnesty International UK and some Israeli human rights groups described them as "hugely welcome and potentially a turning point on accountability".

Some pro-Palestinian voices said the sanctions were welcome but insufficient, calling instead for a full arms embargo and an end to military cooperation with Israel.

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How Different Organisations have Responded cont...

Pro-Israel supportive and sceptical political voices

Israeli President Isaac Herzog called the UK's move “gross interference” in Israeli democratic politics, arguing the sanctions would not resolve the conflict and would end up harming Palestinians rather than helping them.

Conservative Shadow Foreign Secretary Tom Tugendhat said the policy would be ineffective, while still acknowledging that illegal settlement building and incitement by some Israeli ministers were wrong.

The intervention was described by the president of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, a former Israeli prime minister, an ex-head of the IDF and former ministers and diplomats – as an “inevitable consequence” of Israeli government and security failures.

Wider political reaction

The Liberal Democrats called the move “long overdue” but said ministers now need to act with urgency.

The Green Party welcomed it while pushing for a full two-way arms embargo and wider sanctions.

Reports suggest most MPs across the House of Commons backed the government's decision, with only a small number of vocal critics.

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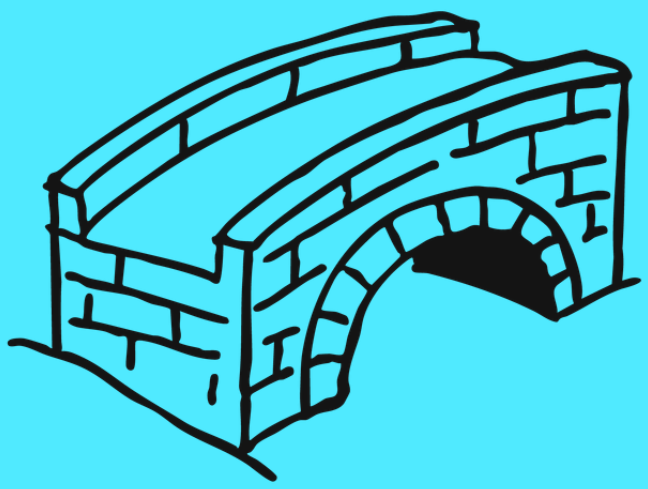
Why people feel so strongly: building empathy for all sides

This is the heart of a good classroom conversation. Pupils need to understand that strong reactions on both sides come from real fears and real experiences, not simply from being 'on a side.' As usual, this issue is far more complex than a 'two sides' paradigm.

For many in the Jewish community

- Israel is bound up with family history, faith and identity for many British Jews, so criticism of the Israeli state can feel personal rather than purely political.
- There is real, evidenced concern about rising antisemitism in the UK, and a fear that strong government language about Israel could be misused by people who target Jewish communities rather than Israeli policy.
- Some feel that Israel is held to a standard, or given a scale of scrutiny, that other states are not — and that this is unfair given the security threats Israel says it faces.
- The timing near Rosh Hashanah added to a sense, for some, of a community already feeling vulnerable being caught off guard — compounded by the approaching anniversary of the Yom Kippur attack on a synagogue in Manchester.



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Why people feel so strongly: building empathy for all sides cont...

For many Palestinians, British Muslims and pro-Palestinian campaigners

- Palestinian communities in the West Bank have lived for years with military checkpoints, movement restrictions, illegal occupation, and, according to human rights monitors, rising settler violence and human rights violations — while previous UK condemnation brought no economic consequence.
- For people who have campaigned on this issue for a long time, the announcement can feel like validation that their concerns were not exaggerated — hence describing it as "overdue."
- Many in this group are also quick to say the measures do not go far enough, reflecting a sense that words and partial steps have not, in the past, changed conditions on the ground.

Noticing what unites us

Almost every organisation quoted above — on every side — frames its position as being in service of peace, safety or justice. Helping pupils notice that shared underlying goal, even where the proposed paths to a political solution are opposed, is often more productive than debating who is "right."

It is also worth stressing explicitly that **support for and action on justice for Palestinian rights is not the same as hostility to Jewish people**, and **support for Israel's security and/or existence is not the same as support for settlement expansion** — collapsing either distinction is where classroom discussions can cause the most harm.

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Guidance for the Classroom

Before the discussion

- Check in on your own neutrality of language — try to describe positions ("those who welcomed the sanctions," "those who are concerned about the sanctions") rather than labelling groups or identities.
- Anticipate that some pupils may have personal or family connections to this issue or may already have witnessed strong reactions at home or online. Consider a brief pastoral check-in before opening the topic to the whole class.
- Set (or reset) ground rules together: no assumptions about what a classmate believes because of their faith, background or name; disagree with ideas, not people; it is fine to say "I don't know enough yet."

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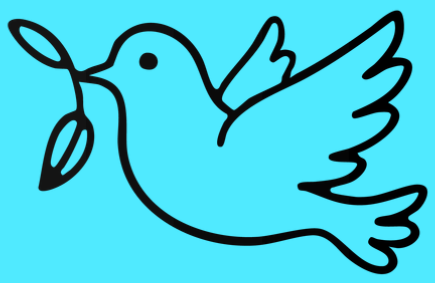
Guidance for the Classroom cont...

During the discussion

- Start from shared facts (what was announced) before moving to reactions and opinions — this reduces the chance of the conversation starting from assumption or rumour.
- Use paired or first-person accounts where possible rather than abstract debate — hearing how the news might land for different people in different circumstances builds empathy more effectively than a policy debate.
- Ask pupils to identify the underlying fear or need behind a statement, not just the position — for example, what is the Board of Deputies worried about? What is the Council for Arab-British Understanding worried about?
- Avoid asking pupils to vote on or debate whether the sanctions are “right” as a class exercise; this can pressure pupils into publicly declaring a side on a live, sensitive issue or create the expectation that there should be an official position taken by the school.

After the discussion

- Signpost where pupils can go for support if the topic has affected them personally — form tutor, pastoral lead, school counsellor, or a trusted adult at home.
- Consider whether a paired Israeli–Palestinian speaker session (of the kind SNS's Empathy Leaders deliver) could deepen this work later in the term.



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Guidance for the Classroom cont...

Sources referenced in this briefing

- UK Govt: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ukto-bring-forward-new-powers-to-respond-to-moral-emergency-in-palestine-and-targetillegal-settlement-activity-in-the-west-bank-to-protect-the-viabili
- Al Jazeera, Al Arabia — coverage of the announcement, reactions and analysis of what the measures do and do not cover
- Middle East Eye — parliamentary and campaigner reactions
- The Jewish Chronicle and Jewish News — Jewish communal and rabbinic reactions
- Times of Israel, Jerusalem Post, Haaretz — official statements
- The Guardian, The Times, The BBC, The Telegraph etc. — announcement details and international reaction

This guide reflects reporting available in the days immediately after the announcement (8–11 September 2026). As this is a fast-moving story, organisational positions may shift — it is worth checking for updates before teaching this material.

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Thank you

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