

THE TIMES

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Lawyer of the week Jason Coppel KC

Jason Coppel KC of IIKBW chambers successfully defended Michaela Community School in north London against a High Court challenge by a Muslim pupil over its ban on “prayer rituals” in school hours.

What were the biggest hurdles you had to overcome in this case? The school’s defence was founded on the particular ethos, organisation and logistical constraints of what is a unique and successful institution. Collating and presenting detailed evidence on those matters in a simple and attractive way, and maintaining the court’s focus on that evidence, was key to its success.

What is the best decision you have taken as a lawyer? To study and

specialise (initially) in EU law, which led ultimately to my beautiful daughters, lifelong friendships and a fulfilling practice.

Who do you most admire in the law?

The criminal Bar, which provides an immensely valuable public service in difficult circumstances, and is underappreciated. My working life is a picnic by comparison.

What is the best advice you have received? Two gems from my pupil supervisor, Alistair McGregor KC: “Beware the opponent with one

authority” — simple arguments are best — and “only worry about the law when the facts are against you” — whatever the law might appear to say, judges are heavily influenced by what feels just.

What is the funniest thing that has happened in your job?

Alistair and I narrowly avoided being arrested while attempting amateur detective work between days of a disciplinary hearing. He had to own up the next morning when our opponent complained that his key witness

had been harassed by persons unknown. Very funny, in hindsight.

What are the best and worst elements of being a lawyer?

The best: the freedom and variety of self-employment and — sorry — my mum seeing my name in the newspaper. The worst: losing.

What law would you enact? A universal basic minimum income, funded by progressive taxation.

What is your favourite film?

My Cousin Vinny — a courtroom dramedy with Joe Pesci that has much to teach the advocate.

Frances Gibb

francesgibb@gmail.com

