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**The Telegraph**

## 'Leap' in attitudes as Saudi school textbooks lose anti-Semitic and hardline Islamist content

Removal of various conspiracy theories and messages of intolerance comes after a number of Arab countries normalised relations with Israel

By David G Rose

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Hardline Islamist and anti-Semitic content has been removed from Saudi Arabia's curriculum, according to a new report, in what researchers say marks a historic shift in attitudes in the Gulf Kingdom.

A study of the latest Saudi teaching materials found that official state textbooks—distributed to 30,000 schools in Saudi Arabia and abroad—no longer contained calls for non-believers and gay men to be punished by death, nor the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory that Jews control the world.

Also gone were predictions of an apocalyptic final battle in which Muslims would kill all Jews, found the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education ([IMPACT-se](#)), an Israel-based group that reviews teaching materials from around the world.

The news comes on the back of a spate of historic U.S.-brokered deals normalizing relations between several Arab nations and Israel.

Although Saudi Arabia is not among them, the study says the changes are part of a growing trend in Saudi Arabia, which has "started to allow space for the viewpoint that accepts a permanent Jewish presence in the region."

Saudi officials admitted last month that parts of the curriculum were “offensive,” and signalled that reforms would continue.

The state of Israel is still not officially recognised or represented on maps in Saudi schools, however. Zionism is presented as a "racist political movement" and Christians and Jews continue to be described in the new textbooks as the "enemies of Islam," according to the study.

The changes to the textbooks also saw extremist Islamist content removed, including the idea that Muslims must prepare for *jihad* (holy war) and martyrdom as the “climax” of their faith.

Marcus Sheff, Chief Executive of **IMPACT-se**, which has reviewed official textbooks since 2003, said that in previous years, lessons had been heavily influenced by Wahhabism, a puritanical form of Sunni Islam, including "very radical" content.

"The latest textbooks reflect a real leap forward and an institutional effort to remove some references to hate, including anti-Semitism, *jihad*, and homophobia," he said.

"There is more work to be done, but these revisions are a real cause for optimism."

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), which earlier this year agreed to formally recognise Israel and establish diplomatic and economic ties, changed its own curriculum in 2016 to make it less focused on conservative Islamic doctrine.

Saudi Arabia’s 35-year-old Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman is privately said to be open to the possibility of joining the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco in normalizing relations with Tel Aviv.

But his father King Salman, 84, is a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause and remains committed to the historic boycott of Israel.