

# Al-Madinah Muslim free school threatened with closure

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Derby's Al-Madinah Muslim free school has been ordered to take "swift action" to address concerns over the way it is run or face closure.

In a [letter to the Al-Madinah Education Trust's Chair of Governors](#), the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools, Lord Nash, said: "The Trust has manifestly breached the conditions of its funding agreement by failing to ensure the safety of children at the school; delivering an unacceptably poor standard of education; discriminating in its policies and procedures towards female staff; and failing to discharge its duties and responsibilities in respect of the governing body."

The Education regulator Ofsted carried out an emergency inspection after concerns were raised that female staff were being forced to wear head coverings, and girls and boys were being segregated in classrooms. It also emerged that lessons were routinely being scrapped to make way for prayers, and that singing was banned.

In the letter to the school, Lord Nash says he will not tolerate breaches of the commitments the school gave when entering into the funding agreement.

The school has been given seven days to carry out specific actions points required to remedy the breaches.

These include providing confirmation that the school ends any practices and procedures that lead to women and girls being treated less favourably than men and boys. The school has also been ordered to provide written confirmation that it is in compliance with equality legislation. Staff are to be notified they are not required to cover their hair if it is contrary to their religion or beliefs.

In addition, the school has been told it must satisfy the Department for Education that its curriculum is "broad and balanced" and provide documentation setting out how the school will ensure that it is welcoming and attractive to students of all faiths and none.

According to the [school's prospectus](#):

"In each and every department, all efforts will be geared towards ensuring the books and resources conform to the teachings of Islam. Sensitive, inaccurate and potentially blasphemous material will be censored or removed completely. If and when teachers are required by the curriculum to convey teachings that are totally against Islam (such as Darwinism), the Director of Islamic Studies will brief the relevant teachers and advise accordingly."

Stephen Evans, campaigns manager at the National Secular Society, said "While we welcome the Government's robust response, it is alarming that this situation was allowed to arise in the first place.

"The Government itself must find ways to more effectively regulate free schools, particularly those with a religious character.

"The reality is that the new freedoms given to free schools coupled with their lack of accountability creates an ideal environment for religious groups seeking to impose religious dogma on pupils.

"The integrity of our state education system risks being undermined by the growing presence of faith groups, some of which seem more interested in religious inculcation than they are in education."

[Read the letter from Lord Nash to the Al-Madinah Education Trust](#)

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