

Ofsted denies 'bullying and traumatising' Jewish pupils

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Ofsted has denied claims that it acted inappropriately after an association of Orthodox schools accused it of leaving young girls "traumatised" following a school inspection.

The National Association of Jewish Orthodox Schools (NAJOS) said it was "appalled" at reports that inspectors has asked female students how babies are made and whether they knew that two men could marry.

Last year the National Secular Society uncovered evidence of questions on human reproduction being censored on GCSE science exam papers at Yesodey Hatorah – an Orthodox Jewish state secondary girls' school in London.

A NAJOS spokesperson told Jewish News that three schools had received surprise inspections in recent weeks, including a school in Manchester, where most of the complaints are believed to have originated.

NAJOS expressed "grave concerns" after other headteachers reported that girls "felt bullied into answering inspectors' questions" and the pupils and staff were left feeling "traumatised and ashamed".

In a statement the Association said: "Ofsted inspectors have been asking pupils inappropriate and challenging questions, many of which fall outside the religious ethos and principles at orthodox Jewish faith schools."

However Ofsted's Chief Operating Officer HMI Matthew Coffey denied the charge of inappropriate questioning, saying: "Inspectors must ask questions which probe the extent to which pupils are prepared for the next stage in their education, or employment, or for life in modern Britain."

He added: "I am sorry if these questions seemed insensitive or offensive. Inspectors use age-appropriate questions to test children's understanding and tolerance of lifestyles different to their own."

"Ofsted is not looking for answers to questions which are contrary to their faith, simply that they are able to express views which are neither intolerant nor discriminatory towards others. This is vital if we are to make sure young people are ready for life in modern Britain."

Jonathan Rabson, director of NAJOS said the organisation feared Ofsted's approach suggests a "shift in policy towards faith schools". In a letter to both Ofsted and Nicky Morgan, Secretary of State for Education, the organisation argued that Jewish schools are being "disproportionally targeted" and that "Jewish values and ethos are being questioned by inspectors in a climate of hostility designed to unsettle the pupils at member schools".

However, Stephen Evans, National Secular Society campaigns manager, said it was an encouraging sign that children's independent interests were at last being given the recognition they deserve.

"Particularly in religious schools, the rights of the individual can get lost in the forced homogeneity of 'community' and 'cultural' identities – and for too long, the education some young people receive has been compromised by religious communities enforcing their own values and traditions on children", said Mr Evans.

He said it was particularly important that young people's sexual and reproductive health rights aren't compromised when scientific facts are incompatible with the ethos of particular schools.

"Children are entitled to be taught about these issues as part of a broad and balanced education. A failure to do so leaves them ill-equipped for life outside of a religious community. That should not be allowed to happen in any British schools".

[Source: Jewish News](#)

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