

Ofsted reveals “serious risk” to students’ physical and educational welfare in faith schools

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A series of Ofsted investigations have exposed serious failings in six Islamic schools. The head of Ofsted, Sir Michael Wilshaw has warned the Education Secretary that pupils "may be vulnerable to extremist influences and radicalisation."

According to Sir Michael Wilshaw: "All schools focused intensively on developing Islamic knowledge and understanding at the expense of other important areas of the curriculum." Ofsted found that "pupils' physical and educational welfare is at serious risk."

At Mazahirul Uloom School inspectors found pupils were unable to tell the difference between sharia law and English law.

The six independent Muslim Schools, all in Tower Hamlets, are failing to provide pupils with "an appropriately broad and balanced curriculum." In one school the curriculum was focused "entirely on Islamic themes."

Commenting on the findings, Stephen Evans, National Secular Society campaigns manager, said: "For too long the rights of young people have been neglected by the willingness to allow religious communities to use schools to impose their own values and traditions on children."

"These findings demonstrate that there is an urgent need to apply a rights based approach across all educational settings, with every school recognising each individual pupil's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and their right to a broad, objective and balanced education."

The National Secular Society has [previously](#) urged the government to do more to tackle "extremism in areas where it has control, such as in independent and religious schools."

Inspectors were concerned that the schools' narrow curriculum and intense focus on Islamic studies were not preparing pupils for life in modern Britain. The schools "failed" to develop pupils' understanding of faiths and cultures other than Islam and creative subjects were "rarely taught" in some schools and entirely absent in others. In one school pupils told inspectors they believed it would be wrong to learn about other religions.

In the same series of visits, carried out between 8 and 17 October, Ofsted also inspected a state-funded voluntary-aided Church of England secondary school, following concerns about the activities of social media sites related to an Islamic sixth form society at the school.

Four of the six independent schools were found not to be completing statutory background checks on staff and other welfare concerns were raised in all six, including their child protection policies and physical condition. Three of the schools were found to have insecure access as they were based in mosques open to the public, another school shared access with a public café. Facilities, including for proper first aid, were lacking in all six schools and one of the schools had moved

premises without approval from the Department for Education (DfE).

Inspectors noticed a marked difference between the "quality" of Islamic teaching and that of other areas, such as English and Maths, in all six schools. Inspectors noted that "pupils were making good progress" in memorising the Quran but that, "errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar were left uncorrected by teachers."

At the Al-Mizan school, teachers accepted "that their information about pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science is inaccurate", but in contrast, Ofsted found that "a rigorous system is in place to track pupils' progress, homework and fluency in memorising the Qur'an."

At the East London Islamic School, "A pupil in Year 1 explained to inspectors that he would 'go to hell' if he participated in music or dance." The inspection also found that "male teachers and boys make a daily visit to The East London Mosque. The girls are required to wait for their return before lessons can resume. Girls do not have equal opportunities and some learning time is lost."

The Ebrahim Academy was said to have a "relative strength" in "the progress made by students in learning to read, recite and memorise the Qur'an."

Ofsted's inspection of Sir John Cass's Foundation and Red Coat Church of England Secondary School found the school to be inadequate and requiring special measures. The "behaviour and safety, leadership and management" and the sixth form were all judged inadequate. Many pupils from the six independent schools inspected attend sixth form at Sir John Cass's Foundation and Red Coat.

According to the inspection report: "Leaders have organised separate boys' and girls' entrances and exits to the school. Although there are mixed dining and study areas, segregated boys' and girls' outdoor and indoor spaces are provided at breaktimes and lunchtimes. As a consequence, boys and girls do not have equal access to the school's facilities."

Inspectors were particularly concerned about the school leadership's "failure to respond appropriately to serious concerns raised about social media sites relating to the sixth form Islamic Society."

Sir Michael's advice note to the Secretary of State, Nicky Morgan MP, can be read [here](#).

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