

Hackney fails to act over vast number of illegal faith schools

Posted: Fri, 18th Nov 2016

A senior Hackney Council education official has admitted that there are more illegally operating schools in the borough than legal ones.

Andrew Lee, the Assistant Director of Education Services of the Hackney Learning Trust, said that the council had identified as many as 35 unregistered ultra-Orthodox Jewish schools which are operating illegally, the [Independent](#) reported.

This figure compares with 33 schools which are operating legally in the borough.

Mr Lee said the illegal schools "are establishments where our officers have passed by on a number of occasions at various times during the day and have seen a significant number of young people entering and leaving.

"Perhaps 13 of those settings may be linked to some of the 33 registered settings, which would bring the number down somewhat."

However in response to a recent freedom of information request from the National Secular Society, Hackney council said that it had launched a total of just three investigations into unregistered schools operating in the borough.

In the last three years, five referrals have been made to Ofsted or the Department for Education by the borough and despite the very high number of 'schools' believed to be operating illegally, just one has been shut down.

Councillor Abraham Jacobson claimed there were a "maximum" of 12 illegal schools which "tend to move from place to place."

NSS campaigns director Stephen Evans commented: "The right to education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. All children and young people deserve an education that promotes their individual freedom and empowerment.

"Rather than equipping students for life in modern Britain, these schools are indoctrinating young minds and preparing youngsters only for life in insular religious communities. Local authorities, Ofsted and the Department for Education must act to protect the interests of the welfare of children, irrespective of the religion of their parents. That means ensuring that illegal faith schools are identified and closed down and that pupils currently being left to languish in them are instead provided with a proper education."

Lord Nash wrote to the National Secular Society earlier this month that the Government was "committed to safeguarding children and young people from the risk of harm in out-of-school education settings."

The schools minister said that "there is still more work to do" but added that the "current system is now more robust" and that there had been a "significant escalation in Ofsted investigations of

settings and the closure of many of them."

He said that the DfE was "working closely with the Crown Prosecution Service to support the prosecution of individuals, where appropriate."

A former pupil of one unregistered school told the *Independent* that he was subject to "physical and psychological abuse" and that the school "went to extreme length to stop us learning English" and sought to "isolate people from secular society."

Thousands of children are 'missing' from the education system in Hackney – something the National Secular Society has raised with the Government.

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