

Raft of fundamentalist Christian schools downgraded by Ofsted

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Nine faith schools which teach the fundamentalist Accelerated Christian Education curriculum have been downgraded, following Ofsted inspections ordered by the Department for Education.

Ten schools were inspected in total by Ofsted, after an investigation into Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) schools by the *Independent*.

ACE schools have taught that homosexuality is unnatural, and they promote Creationism. The schools have faced significant criticism from former pupils, and historic allegations of exorcisms and "ritual corporal punishment".

The [*Independent*](#) obtained an ACE teaching manual published in the 1990s which demonstrated how to "Administer correction" by hitting children if they sinned.

Former ACE pupil James Ridgers, who now campaigns to expose fundamentalism in Accelerated Christian Education schools, [said](#) their curriculum was "possibly the worst and most dangerous educative curriculum I could imagine" and that schools "indoctrinated" pupils with "complete and utter nonsense".

Mr Ridgers said that during his time in an ACE school in Oxfordshire pupils were told "evolution is false".

The Greater Grace School of Christian Education, which was recently downgraded from 'satisfactory' to 'inadequate', tells pupils that evolution is a "commonly held" "belief" in society, but it teaches its own pupils Creationism. "Pupils' context for all of their learning is the teachings of the Bible," the inspectors said in their recent inspection report of the school.

Mr Ridgers said that Ofsted inspectors were raising concerns about things that "have been happening for decades. For years, Ofsted and the Government have turned a blind eye to miseducation and abuse in religious schools.

"I would like to understand why this has been allowed to go on for so long. I would welcome a specific inquiry into this. In my view, some of the reports do not go far enough. In future, Ofsted inspectors should be briefed on the specific known problem areas in the curriculum, including political bias and sexism, and on the shortcomings of the schools that survivors have been campaigning about for years.

He told the *Independent*: "It is very gratifying to be taken seriously. I just wish more had been in done in 1984, when the first public reports of abuse in ACE schools in England surfaced. That would have saved a generation of children from a damaging schooling."

The Oxford Christian School was previously rated 'good' but is now deemed to be inadequate in all criteria, and inspectors said there were "insufficient opportunities for pupils to learn about religions other than their own" and that pupils were presented with unbalanced views. The inspection report

added that pupils were not prepared "well enough for life in modern Britain". Pupils did not feel safe and teachers lacked knowledge to deliver proper education, the inspectors said.

Another ACE school, the Luton Pentecostal Church Christian Academy, was rated as 'good' in its previous inspection but is now deemed to be inadequate. Inspectors said school leaders "do not actively promote" respect for different minorities protected by equality law.

NSS campaigns director Stephen Evans said: "Religious dogma has been allowed to distort young people's education in these types of school for many years. It has taken far too long for action to be taken, but these reports do offer some sign that the Government has started taking children's educational rights more seriously.

"We welcome that the tougher standards are identifying problem schools so that action can be taken now, as it should have been much sooner."

Ofsted told the *Independent*, "We recently inspected a number of independent schools that use the Accelerated Christian Education curriculum at the request of the Department for Education and found some of them to be failing to meet the Government's standards in a number of areas, including safeguarding, leadership and governance, and the quality of the curriculum. In addition, a number of these schools were not promoting British values effectively enough.

"It is common practice for Ofsted to carry out focused inspections of a group of schools that, for example, are in the same local authority area or academy trust or, which follow the same type of curriculum.

"We will, through commission by the DfE, continue to monitor schools that have not met the Independent Schools Standards."

The Government said that ACE schools must "improve or close" if they have failed to meet the "new, tougher" Independent School Standards.

Correction an earlier version of this article misattributed Mr Ridgers' quotes to education activist and expert on ACE Jenna Scaramanga.

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