

21 November 2014

Rt Hon. Nicky Morgan MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
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Sir Michael Wilshaw
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

Dear Secretary of State

Advice note from Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, to the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon. Nicky Morgan MP, on school inspections in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Background

Her Majesty's Inspectors carried out inspections of seven schools in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets between 8 and 17 October 2014. Six were independent Muslim faith schools (four secondary and two primary) and one was a state-funded, voluntary-aided Church of England secondary school.

The six independent school inspections were commissioned by the Department for Education. Four of these schools were subject to standard inspections under section 162a of the Education Act 2002 (as inserted). The remaining two schools were subject to emergency inspections under the same Act.¹

The state-funded, voluntary-aided school was inspected at the request of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 following concerns received by Ofsted relating to the activities of a sixth form society at the school. Because these concerns were validated, the inspection was deemed to be a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Five of the six independent schools are located in Whitechapel. The other independent school and the state-funded secondary school are in Stepney Green.

This advice note draws on evidence from all seven inspections.

¹ These two schools were subject to standard inspections in 2013.

Main findings from the independent school inspections

- In all six independent schools visited:
 - inspectors had serious concerns over the safeguarding and welfare of pupils
 - a significant number of the independent school standards were not being met
 - pupils were not provided with an appropriately broad and balanced curriculum
 - teaching and achievement were inadequate
 - leadership and management, including governance, were inadequate.

- In all four standard inspections, all aspects of all four schools were judged inadequate.

In all six independent schools visited, inspectors found serious concerns over the safeguarding and welfare of pupils

- In four of the six schools, inspectors found that statutory background checks on staff had not been completed. These included references from previous employers and checks on staff members who had previously lived or worked overseas.

- In all six schools, policies relating to welfare, health and safety were missing, out of date or inconsistently applied. In one school, members of staff were unaware who the designated child protection officer was and the officer himself was unaware that he held the post.

- The physical condition of all six schools' accommodation was found to be unacceptable. Three of the schools are sited within mosques. In all three, access to the school was insecure because it was shared with the mosque. In another, the school shared an entrance with a café, giving members of the public open access to the school. In two schools, boys were confined to an indoor hall at break times and lunchtimes. This led to noisy, unacceptable behaviour and little regard for the safety of others.

- None of the schools provided suitable changing facilities for physical education. Some had no showers or changing rooms. In one secondary school, students had to change for physical education in the dining hall.

- All of the schools either lacked proper facilities for the care of sick or injured pupils or had unsuitable policies relating to first aid and medical matters.

- Inspectors found that one of the schools had moved premises without permission from the Department for Education.

- Inspectors found four of the schools' buildings to be dirty and poorly maintained. In one school, electrical sockets and switches were hanging off walls. In another school, stairwells were filled with broken furniture and rubbish.

All six independent schools were not providing pupils with an appropriately broad and balanced curriculum

- All six schools were providing a narrow curriculum that failed to promote pupils' understanding of other faiths and cultures. All schools focused intensively on developing Islamic knowledge and understanding at the expense of other important areas of the curriculum.
- In all schools, inspectors noted very limited opportunities to learn about history and geography other than those aspects relating to Islam. Music, drama and art were rarely taught and pupils were not given adequate opportunities to develop their creativity and aesthetic appreciation.
- The lack of an appropriately broad and balanced curriculum was preparing pupils poorly for life in Britain today.
- Inspectors found evidence that pupils in some schools believed that they should not be studying particular subjects. In one school, pupils said that it would be wrong for them to learn about other religions. In another, a Year 1 pupil said he believed that participating in music or dance was wrong.
- Notwithstanding pupils' strong development within the context of the Islamic faith, other aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development were weak in all six schools. This was a direct result of the schools' failure to provide an appropriately broad and balanced curriculum.

Teaching and achievement were found to be inadequate in all six independent schools

- In all six schools, there was a clear difference between the quality of teaching in the Islamic curriculum and teaching in other areas. Typically, teachers gave good instruction in Arabic studies, Hifz (memorisation of the Qu'ran) and Islamic studies. In these areas, pupils were making good progress.
- Some good teaching was observed in English and mathematics, but this was not consistent. In three of the schools, it was noted that errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar were left uncorrected by teachers. In one primary school, inspectors noted that teaching in mathematics was limited to basic number questions. Teaching did not develop pupils' understanding in other mathematical areas of knowledge, such as shape and space.

- Other weak features of teaching included the failure to assess pupils' progress accurately and a consequent failure to provide them with work that helped them to improve.
- Inspectors reported that teaching resources were of poor quality. Examples included poorly photocopied worksheets that pupils could not read and a library where most of the books were in Arabic and could not be borrowed by pupils. There was a distinct lack of resources for practical subjects such as design and technology.

Leadership and management, including governance, were judged inadequate in all four schools subject to standard inspections

- Inspectors noted many failures to meet the independent school standards. They also noted a lack of development planning, failure to undertake statutory duties and little regard for providing pupils with an appropriately broad and balanced curriculum beyond Islamic studies. These findings gave little confidence in the capacity of any of these schools' leaders and governors to bring about the necessary improvements.
- Governors had some awareness of their schools' relative strengths and weaknesses but relied too heavily on information provided to them from the headteachers and senior leaders. Consequently, governors were unable to hold leaders objectively to account for the overall quality of provision.
- Governors showed little awareness of the current independent school standards. In all four schools, governors were failing to ensure that statutory requirements for staff recruitment were being followed or that statutory policies and procedures for pupils' welfare and safety were in place.

Inspection of Sir John Cass's Foundation and Red Coat Church of England Secondary School

I have today published a report setting out inspectors' findings for the above school, including the judgement that the school is inadequate overall and requires special measures. Behaviour and safety, leadership and management and the sixth form were all judged inadequate. Central to inspectors' findings was the school leadership's failure to respond appropriately to serious concerns raised about social media sites relating to the sixth form Islamic Society. I draw your attention to the fact that a significant proportion of students join the sixth form at Sir John Cass's School from other local state-funded and independent schools.

Recommendations

I am extremely concerned about the large number of failings in each of the six independent schools inspected. I am not convinced that the leaders of these schools have sufficient capacity to bring about the necessary improvements to safeguarding, the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning. I believe that, in all six schools, pupils' physical and educational welfare is at serious risk.

Given the evidence gathered from these inspections, particularly in relation to the narrowness of the curriculum, I am concerned that pupils in these schools may be vulnerable to extremist influences and radicalisation.

It is therefore my strong recommendation that you take urgent action to address the key issues highlighted in this advice note using your powers under section 165 of the Education Act 2002.

I also recommend that you ensure that the London Borough of Tower Hamlets fulfils its statutory responsibility to tackle the serious safeguarding issues in these schools as a matter of urgency.

In respect of Sir John Cass's Foundation and Red Coat Church of England Secondary School, I will ensure that the school and local authority action plans, required by Ofsted within 10 days of the section 5 report's publication, are evaluated robustly. I will also ensure that an initial special measures monitoring visit takes place within six weeks of publication.

Yours sincerely

Sir Michael Wilshaw

Annex: the schools inspected

School	Date inspected	Age range	Number on roll	Type of inspection	Overall Effectiveness
Al-Mizan School	8-10 October	7-11 Boys	90	Standard inspection	Inadequate
East London Islamic School	16-17 October	5-11 Mixed	35	Emergency inspection	Unmet independent school standards identified
Ebrahim Academy	15-17 October	11-16 Boys	97	Standard inspection	Inadequate
Jamiatul Ummah School	8-10 October	11-19 Boys	185	Standard inspection	Inadequate
London East Academy	8-10 October	11-16 Boys	150	Standard inspection	Inadequate
Mazahirul Uloom School	16-17 October	11-16 Boys	102	Emergency inspection	Unmet independent school standards identified
Sir John Cass's Foundation and Red Coat Church of England Secondary School	9-10 October	11-18 Mixed	1,598 (623 in the sixth form)	S8 deemed S5	Inadequate – special measures