

Cameron announces plans to regulate religious supplementary schools

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Prime Minister David Cameron has announced plans for Ofsted to inspect madrassas and other supplementary religious schools and to close down those that preach "hate".

Delivering his speech to the Conservative Party Conference, Mr Cameron expressed his concern that some supplementary schools are helping to "incubate divisions" within society and announced that if a supplementary school is teaching children for more than eight hours a week then it will be required to register with the Department for Education.

Around [250,000 students](#) attend religious supplementary schools in England alone, and there are thought to be up to 2000 madrassas.

The Prime Minister said, "in some madrassas we've got children being taught that they shouldn't mix with people of other religions; being beaten; swallowing conspiracy theories about Jewish people. These children should be having their minds opened; their horizons broadened, not having their heads filled with poison and their hearts filled with hate."

Some Muslim 'leaders' complained about the allegations and claimed that a "securitised approach" would "feed into a grievance narrative".

The Muslim Council of Britain said: "We would hope that these serious allegations can be substantiated and the evidence brought forward, so that appropriate action can be taken."

The National Secular Society, which has long [called for registration](#) and regulation of supplementary schools, cautiously welcomed the Prime Minister's words and said the proposal, if properly and fairly implemented, would be good news for anyone who wants to see a better integrated Britain.

Stephen Evans, NSS campaigns manager, said: "There is clearly a danger in allowing madrassas and other supplementary schools to operate unchecked. There's no good reason why children and young people attending religious educational institutions shouldn't receive the same level of protection as those attending mainstream nurseries and after school clubs.

"Even in religious schools already inspected by Ofsted we've seen numerous examples of narrow hard-line teaching and extremism, including children from Muslim backgrounds being banned for '[socialising with outsiders](#)'.

"There are ample warning signs to indicate that young people attending supplementary schools need to be safeguarded and protected from all forms of harm, including the kind of separatist and intolerant teaching that risks poisoning young minds and causing lasting damage to the fabric of British society."

The move to better regulate supplementary schools, which will include madrassas, Sunday schools and Jewish yeshivas represents a change of heart from the Government, which in 2012 rejected calls from the NSS for better regulation. The then Children & Families Minister, Tim Loughton MP,

told the NSS that he was not convinced of any need to regulate such 'schools', despite clear evidence of abuse.

Undercover filming of some madrassas in 2011 [revealed](#) the teaching of intolerance towards non-Muslims, criticism of more moderate Muslims, ridicule of other religions and violence against pupils.

Also in 2011, a [BBC investigation](#) revealed that over 400 allegations of physical abuse (and 30 of sexual abuse) were made at madrassas in Britain in the preceding three years. A senior prosecutor told the BBC that these figures were likely to represent only the 'tip of an iceberg'. Nazir Afzal, the chief crown prosecutor for the North West of England, said the figures were "a significant underestimate".

In his speech to Conference the Prime Minister insisted that there would be no more "passive tolerance". He said such an approach had turned Britain into a less integrated country and "put our children in danger". He said he wanted people who organise forced marriages to be prosecuted and parents who take their children to have their genitals mutilated to be arrested.

Mr Cameron also used his speech to reiterate his vision of turning every school an academy. However, the National Secular Society warned that plans to take every school in the country out of local authority control was likely to result in religious organisations [gaining much greater control](#) of publicly funded education with insufficient accountability.

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