

Ofsted to prepare prosecution cases against staff of unregistered religious schools

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Ofsted is preparing prosecution cases against the founders of unregulated religious schools after warning the Government of a "serious and growing threat" to children's safety.

The head of Ofsted had called for a much tougher response to the growth of unregistered religious schools, which he said posed a threat to children's safety and undermine the drive to promote British values in schools, and the Department for Education has confirmed that prosecutions will go ahead for those found to be running illegal religious schools.

In a [letter](#) to the education secretary on 11 December, Sir Michael Wilshaw, the head of Ofsted, wrote that there was a threat to children's safety for "hundreds of children in several English regions."

Sir Michael warned that the number of children studying in illegal schools which are not registered was "far higher than is currently known."

Work to ensure that "all maintained and independent schools promote British values" is being "seriously undermined" by the proliferation of unregistered religious schools, Sir Michael said.

In response to the concerns a new team of inspectors has now been commissioned by Ofsted to "focus exclusively on identifying, investigating and supporting the prosecution of those found to be operating unregistered schools."

NSS campaigns manager Stephen Evans commented: "We are very pleased to see the Government taking these concerns from Ofsted seriously. These are issues we have been [raising](#) for a very long time.

"Children are being denied a well-rounded and balanced education on a large scale, and it is time their independent interests became everyone's primary consideration.

"The problem is not just one of extremism. Children have a right to education; but instead they are being failed and left to languish in appalling conditions in these so called 'schools' which teach narrow curricula based almost exclusively on religious dogma."

In November three unregistered schools in Birmingham were closed after inspectors carried out no-notice inspections and found a "narrow Islamic-focused curriculum", and "inappropriate books and other texts including misogynistic, homophobic and anti-Semitic material".

As well as concerns about the curricula taught at the sites, Ofsted inspectors found "serious fire hazards, including a blocked fire escape and obstructed exits", "unhygienic and filthy conditions" in one school and that staff were not checked or cleared to work with children.

The three schools were still operating on 30 November and inspectors remained on the sites until "they were satisfied that the settings had ceased operating and alternative arrangements, in registered schools, had been made for all of the children."

Sir Michael blamed Nicky Morgan's officials for providing "confusing and unhelpful advice to the proprietors" of the three unregistered schools which led them to believe that they "could continue to operate, without registration, while their respective applications were submitted and considered."

Further investigations of the schools were announced to "support the prosecutions of the individuals suspected of operating unregistered schools" and the Secretary of State has now [tasked](#) Ofsted with preparing prosecutions in eighteen cases.

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