

Ofsted: Jewish school failing on safety, curriculum and tolerance

Posted: Tue, 26th Jun 2018

Ofsted has deemed a state-funded Jewish school inadequate after finding it deliberately undermined pupils' safety, taught a narrow curriculum and failed to promote tolerance.

A [report](#) published this morning severely criticised the leadership of Yesodey Hatorah Senior Girls' School, a Chasidic school in the Stamford Hill area of north London. The school has previously been caught censoring textbooks and questions on exam papers.

Inspectors said the school's leaders had restricted pupils' access to advice and guidance about how to keep safe, including by redacting helpline numbers from books.

Leaders had also "limited the range of books available to pupils" and stopped them from learning about particular topics. They had not fulfilled their statutory duty to provide sex and relationships education. The majority of the school's personal, social, health and economic education was taught through the religious curriculum.

The school redacted large sections of an English GCSE course text book and sections of texts such as *Sherlock Holmes* after deeming them inappropriate. Photographs portraying men and women on the same page were redacted, along with pictures in books about major artists such as Picasso.

Pupils were not allowed to study animal or human reproduction in science, while areas such as global warming were restricted. Leaders said extra-curricular activities were restricted and girls would not be allowed to visit an art gallery such as the Tate Modern in London.

Inspectors said the curriculum did not "prepare pupils adequately for life in modern Britain".

They also said the school's policies failed to "acknowledge the existence of all groups of people with protected characteristics", meaning they did "not encourage respect for all citizens living in modern Britain".

"While there is an ethos of respect and tolerance for each other within the school environment, pupils have few opportunities to explore how these would extend to those who do not share their beliefs or faith."

Ofsted rated the school 'inadequate' overall, on its leadership and management and on pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. It rated its quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for pupils as requiring improvement.

The report said the principal, Rabbi Avraham Pinter, had "an over-generous view of the quality of education the school is providing". The governors had "an over-inflated view of the school's strengths" and did not "hold the principal to account for the quality of education provided or robustly manage his performance".

"The principal and governors judge the school's effectiveness in terms of the school's own values, reflecting the expectations of their immediate community, rather than their statutory obligations as prescribed by the Department for Education."

Alastair Lichten, the National Secular Society's education and schools officer, called the details in the report "damning".

"It's scandalous that a school – particularly a school funded by the taxpayer – should be able to censor books, deliberately restrict pupils' knowledge, pretend LGBT people do not exist and undermine pupils' safety. Schools must put children's rights before the religious sensitivities of those who run them. And the government and Ofsted should get tough on those that do not."

The report is the latest damning revelation about Yesodey Hatorah. In 2013 the NSS [exposed](#) the school blacking out questions on GCSE science exam papers and asked an exam board to investigate. The practice was eventually stopped.

Earlier this year it was [revealed](#) that the school had censored sections of GCSE textbooks which mentioned homosexuality (including passages on LGBT targets of the Holocaust) and examples of women socialising with men. When it was criticised over this the school said Ofsted "continuously jumps to the tune of small pressure groups like the humanists [Humanists UK] and the National Secular Society that have a very clear anti-Jewish agenda".

In response the NSS [said](#) the school was "erroneously employing accusations of bigotry to hide from criticism".

Today Mr Lichten added: "The bigotry on display here is entirely from the school.

"For a Jewish school's disdain for LGBT individuals to be so great that it verges into Holocaust denial is shocking enough. But this school's approach also shows a prevailing bigotry of low expectations. Its leaders seem to assume girls from minority religious backgrounds are simply tools of religious leaders, not holders of independent rights, and deserve nothing better than an education that moulds them only into a narrow religious role.

"Those so desperate to defend the 'religious freedom' of such schools to impose this narrow education would you well to reflect on the religious freedom and right to open education all our children should deserve."

Last week almost 7,000 orthodox Jews in north London [gathered](#) for a communal prayer to show their opposition to secular requirements in education. One rabbi at the event warned of "influential secular forces seeking to impinge on our rights" and praised the prime minister for pledging to "safeguard religion and religious practice".

Yesodey Hatorah was rated 'good' at its last inspection. It has previously been rated 'outstanding'.

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