

Failing faith school harming pupils' wellbeing, says Ofsted

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An independent Jewish faith school in north London has been found 'inadequate' in all areas in an Ofsted inspection which could trigger its deregistering and closure.

The no-notice [inspection](#) of Talmud Torah Yetev Lev in the Stamford Hill area found that the school was teaching a narrow curriculum and responsible for a litany of safeguarding failures. Inspectors had previously warned the school of its failures in 2014 and 2017.

The latest inspection was carried out at the school's five premises in the Stamford Hill area at the request of the Department for Education (DfE). This included one site the school had not informed the DfE was in use.

The school is registered to admit 567 pupils and had 1,213 on roll. However, because of "disorganised and unreliable" records, it is not clear how many were attending regularly. Ofsted's report said leaders had not "rectified" the issue, "despite knowing that the admissions register contains inaccurate information".

Inspectors said methods of discipline were being used which were "harmful to pupils' physical and emotional well-being", including "cheek punching, smacking and slapping". These are now being investigated by appropriate bodies.

The inspection was launched as the DfE considered deregistering the school, after it had been found 'inadequate' in two previous inspections.

Ofsted found that the school's leaders had continued to fail to meet the independent school standards. Inspectors said leaders "have given too little effort and attention to addressing" the school's failures and "underestimate the scale of work required to make sure the school complies with the regulations".

Pupils are taught mostly religious studies, with only an hour and a half in the afternoon for other subjects. As a result, the inspectors found that the curriculum was narrow and that pupils do not receive "sufficient experience in scientific, technological, human and social, and creative education".

There were a number of health and safety or safeguarding failures, and one site in use was found to be "unsafe". The institution fails to provide "impartial and up-to-date careers guidance" and as a result pupils "are not able to make well-informed decisions about the opportunities available to them when they leave the school".

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development did not encourage respect for other people by paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010. Inspectors agreed not to ask pupils about this, but they noted that "leaders were not able to provide any evidence to show that the relevant standards in this respect are met".

Inspectors added that "too little emphasis" was given to pupils' spoken, reading or written English

skills and many pupils "struggle to understand and communicate in English". Classes were taught in Yiddish, which is permissible provided schools also prepare children to speak English and for life in British society.

Reacting to the inspection report, National Secular Society education and schools officer Alastair Lichten said: "Over the last few years we have seen mounting concerns and failures in independent faith schools, but this reaches a new level.

"The inspection was commissioned by a secretary of state giving consideration to deregistering this 'school'. On the basis of this catastrophic litany of failures, that decision must be clear. This 'school' must be deregistered, it must close and the children whose education and welfare have been so callously disregarded must be safeguarded. The record of the trustees involved must be taken into consideration if they ever attempt to get involved in independent schools again and the Charity Commission should consider disqualifying them as future trustees.

"It is clear that inculcating a narrow religious role took precedence over any education that might have widened pupils' horizons.

"The DfE, London Borough of Hackney and Ofsted should work together on a clear action plan to ensure these 1,200 boys are protected and moved to a suitable educational environment. In particular they must ensure these properties and these pupils do not fall into the unregistered (illegal) school sector.

"We are also alarmed that Ofsted accommodated the unreasonable demand not to ask pupils about how they learnt about pupils with different protected characteristics. We will write to Ofsted seeking clarification on why this happened."

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