

Ofsted recommends allowing failing private Jewish school to expand

Posted: Thu, 23rd May 2019

The education watchdog Ofsted has recommended allowing an independent Jewish school to expand, despite leaders being "open and honest" that they will continue refusing to meet the independent school standards.

Beis Chinuch Lebonos School in the London borough of Hackney was rated 'inadequate' in an inspection last summer after inspectors said the school was restricting the curriculum, particularly in Science. The school was [issued](#) with a government warning notice in October.

The school had officially banned references to reproduction and evolution and inspectors said its practice of redaction was "far more widespread than this" in practice. Leaders had redacted photographs of men and women with bare skin, information on animals, the properties of rocks and the dangers of alcohol.

In an [additional inspection](#) in April, Ofsted found that there had been improvements in terms of the quality of education, governance and safeguarding. However significant failings remained, as school leaders were apparently refusing to meet the independent school standards.

Ofsted's report said leaders were continuing to redact information relating to "reproduction, the age of the universe, theories that contravene biblical teachings and images which could be interpreted as sexually inappropriate or crude".

It said they were continuing to avoid teaching topics including reproduction and evolution.

It added that the school had "a clearer policy in relation to redaction" than it had previously but leaders were "open and honest" with inspectors that their actions were "non-negotiable".

"They know that the requirements relating to the Equality Act, the preparedness of pupils for life in modern Britain, and leadership and management will not be met until this approach changes."

The Equality Act of 2010 protects people from discrimination on the grounds of protected characteristics, such as their sexuality or religion or belief.

Earlier this month the Department for Education (DfE) [watered down](#) requirements on independent schools in England to promote respect for difference, in an apparent sop to religious groups. The National Secular Society responded by [warning](#) against further concessions.

In response to the news of Beis Chinuch's likely expansion, the NSS's head of education Alastair Lichten said: "This is a worrying sign that hard-line independent faith schools are exploiting the prevarications of the DfE over whether they can 'pick and choose' which standards apply.

"Leniency where an independent school is failing one or two of the standards but working towards them is one thing. But it's disgraceful that an independent school's leadership can simply refuse to follow legal requirements.

"Allowing this to stand will undermine the DfE's and Ofsted's efforts to hold independent schools accountable, encourage other schools to behave similarly and most unforgivably fail children. Time and again we are seeing schools which deny children access to knowledge and which seek to restrict their choices in life and limit their opportunities. The government must recognise these as a threat to children's rights."

In a separate development Ofsted [reported](#) that Yeshivah Ohr Torah School, a Jewish boys' school in Greater Manchester, was continuing to leave pupils not "fully prepared for life in modern Britain".

Yeshivah Ohr Torah, which is in Salford, received a warning notice at the same time as Beis Chinuch Lebonos.

At the time of the last inspection the curriculum was "solely based" on Jewish studies with no secular curriculum and only "limited opportunities" for students to learn how to speak, read and write in English.

While the school had made some progress towards meeting failed standards since then, Ofsted found "there had been no significant changes made to the curriculum". It also said there were "still few opportunities for pupils to experience linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education".

The report said pupils were "still not learning enough about people from different faiths and cultures or being fully prepared for life in modern Britain".

The school refused to allow inspectors to ask pupils questions about people with different protected characteristics and had no information on how it intends "to meet the specific requirements of these standards". Its position was apparently based on the wishes of parents.

The report said pupils do not receive independent careers advice or "work towards recognised relevant qualifications that would open the doors to career or further educational opportunities".

The school was also found to be more than 50% over its registered capacity.

In recent months the DfE has issued a significant number of independent faith schools with warning notices. In the most [recently-published round](#) of notices, in March, 10 of the 16 schools warned were faith schools.

Alastair Lichten said: "In this growing crisis we must not forget that the children denied a proper education in these 'schools' are the real victims. We cannot allow zombie schools to keep shambling on through failed inspection after failed inspection. Some of these schools have very little prospect of improvement or willingness to improve and are leaving children unprepared for anything more than a narrow pre-decided religious role in society."

Beis Chinuch is currently in breach of its registration agreement with the DfE as it has 28 pupils more than its registered capacity. But the DfE has agreed to increase this limit subject to Ofsted agreeing that this would not raise health and safety concerns.

[Discuss on Facebook](#)

While you're here

Our news and opinion content is an important part of our campaigns work. Many articles involve a lot of research by our campaigns team. If you value this output, please consider supporting us today.

- [Support us from just £1 a month](#)

- [Share on What's App](#)
- [Share on Facebook](#)
- [Share on Twitter](#)
- [Share on Email](#)
- [Subscribe to RSS Feed](#)

Tags: [Faith schools](#)

Related Campaigns

-

[**No more faith schools**](#)

We need inclusive schools free from religious discrimination, privilege or control.

[Read More](#)

Related Articles

[**NSS announces major conference on protecting liberal values**](#)

Kenan Malik, Joan Smith and more speaking at NSS Secularism 2024 conference in London. [Read More »](#)

[**Allowing more religious selection in schools would be a big mistake**](#)

Abandoning the 50% admission cap would exacerbate the discrimination, disadvantage and division inherent with faith schools, argues Stephen Evans. [Read More »](#)

[**NSS joins open letter against faith school discrimination**](#)

Education experts, politicians, religious leaders and public figures unite to call on Education Secretary to keep the faith school admissions cap. [Read More »](#)

Faith school found inadequate for ten years fails inspection again

Jewish school where teachers slapped children criticised for poor secular education in latest inspection. [Read More »](#)

NSS urges PM to retain cap on faith-based admissions

Supporters of inclusive schools encouraged to tell MPs to protect the 50% cap. [Read More »](#)