

Government warns Islamic independent school over sex segregation

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An Islamic independent school that segregates male and female pupils has been warned by the government almost two years after the practice was ruled unlawful.

The Department for Education (DfE) issued a [warning notice](#) to The Imam Muhammad Adam Institute School (IMAI) in May after it was [rated](#) 'inadequate' in its March Ofsted inspection.

IMAI, which is in Leicester, is registered to educate boys and girls aged five to 16.

Inspectors found pupils in Years 5 and 6 and in the school's secondary provision were "segregated by sex for both their lessons and their social time". The pupils "do not have the opportunity to mix", which "causes detriment" to pupils because it limits their social development and "prevents them from preparing effectively for life in British society".

Segregating boys and girls within the same school was [ruled](#) unlawful at the High Court in 2017. Al Hijrah School, a state-funded Islamic school in Birmingham, had segregated male and female pupils in all lessons, break and lunchtimes, school trips and school clubs.

At IMAI inspectors said pupils' opportunities to widen their learning beyond the classroom and develop their understanding of cultural differences were also impeded by "limited extra-curricular activities" and "insufficient off-site visits".

Inspectors also highlighted safety failings at the school, including "unacceptable" conditions in the science room on the primary and secondary girls' school, and inappropriate fire exits. They also said checks on the suitability of new staff to work with pupils were "not in line with national guidance".

A total of 23 independent schools were issued warning notices in May following poor Ofsted ratings. They included five Islamic, three Church of England, two [Seventh Day Adventist](#), one Jewish and one Roman Catholic school.

[Gateshead Jewish Primary School](#) in Tyne and Wear, which previously segregated male and female pupils and has since divided into two separate schools, was unable to meet a standard requiring schools not to discriminate against pupils contrary to the Equality Act of 2010.

Inspectors said leaders were not "able to identify to their pupils groups of people who are gender reassigned or have sexual orientation other than heterosexuality" because they believed this "contravenes some aspects of the community's Jewish faith".

An "emergency inspection" took place in April at the Islamic [Al-Noor College](#) in Birmingham promoted by "several complaints of several complaints received about the welfare, health and safety of pupils".

The inspector found pupils were not well supervised at the beginning of the day, and she was able to access the building "without being challenged". Two fire exits were inaccessible.

There were inconsistencies in records of staff members employed at the school, and leaders had not made sufficient checks on the suitability of staff to work with children. Additionally, some pupils said "inappropriate" rewards and sanctions had been used to manage behaviour.

Safety concerns were also raised at the Islamic [Al Huda Girls' School](#) in Birmingham, where the inspector found toilets and washing areas "in a poor state" and "unhygienic". Some fencing panels on the playground were broken, exposing "nails and sharp edges". The inspection was prompted by information received by the DfE which "raised concerns about aspects of the school".

An inspection had also been commissioned at [Avecinna Academy](#), an Islamic school in Birmingham, following "concerns raised about the quality of education". The inspector noted a number of failings in health and safety, including in the procedure of administering medicine to pupils that could result in over-administration of medicines.

At [Oakwood Primary School](#), an Islamic school in Luton, inspectors found monitoring of the school's work was "not sharp enough", assessment was not used "consistently effectively", and staff training was "underdeveloped".

Three Church of England schools and one Catholic school were inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate. Safeguarding issues were identified at all four schools.

Schools that receive warnings must improve within a specified period or they will be removed from the independent schools register.

The National Secular Society campaigns for all schools to be held to consistent standards, regardless of religion.

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