

# Ofsted investigated over 100 unregistered faith schools since 2016

Posted: Thu, 16th Jan 2020

Over 100 unregistered faith 'schools' were investigated in England between January 2016 and August 2019, inspectors have said, although there was only one successful prosecution in that time.

Religious instruction was the "core purpose" at 107 unregistered schools investigated between 1 January 2016 and 31 August 2019, according to [figures](#) published by Ofsted on Thursday.

The report also said Ofsted inspected other unregistered schools whose core purpose was to provide non-religious education but which nonetheless had a "faith ethos".

It is a criminal offence to operate an unregistered independent school in England because there is no formal external oversight of safeguarding, health and safety or the quality of education provided, which puts children at risk.

Unregistered faith schools often teach restricted faith-based curricula, denying young people a decent education. [Physical abuse](#) has also been uncovered at some unregistered schools.

But there was only one successful prosecution relating to unregistered schools in that time. This related to an Islamic school in west London.

There have subsequently been two more successful prosecutions. One of these concerned a school which was also Islamic in character.

**In response to the data, National Secular Society spokesperson Megan Manson said:**

**"These figures are concerning. Religious organisations may operate unregistered schools precisely because they want to avoid oversight.**

**"This enables them to indoctrinate children into fundamentalist religious ideology at the expense of their education. Children in such settings may receive little or no education in the secular subjects they need to prepare them for adult life in UK society.**

**"In many cases, they may also endure squalid, dangerous surroundings and even physical abuse at the hands of their so-called 'teachers'.**

**"While it's positive news that there have been closures and prosecutions, the figures show that there's still much work to be done in rooting out and tackling illegal faith schools."**

## **Recent NSS lobbying**

The NSS has been a leading organisation lobbying education ministers over many years to tackle the growing [problem](#) of unregistered faith schools.

In 2018 the NSS met Theodore Agnew, the minister in charge of faith schools, to discuss efforts to tackle unregistered faith schools. In May 2019 it [called for](#) a home school register to protect child rights and tackle unregistered schools in response to a government consultation.

## Notes on Ofsted's investigations

Ofsted handled a total of 641 referrals regarding unregistered schools between January 2012 and August 2019, and investigated 618 establishments between 2016 and 2019.

Inspections were carried out at 293 unregistered schools, including 72 identified as having a faith ethos. Thirty-nine of those schools were Islamic, 19 Jewish and 14 Christian.

Sixty-four unregistered schools investigated had health and safety concerns, and 83 had safeguarding concerns.

Following Ofsted investigations, 12 establishments were closed and 10 became registered. Sixty changed their service provisions in order to comply with legislation. Ofsted is currently investigating seven unregistered schools.

## Successful unregistered school prosecutions

- Nacerdine Talbi and Beatrix Bernhardt were [convicted](#) of running Al-Istiqamah Learning Centre without registration in Ealing, west London in 2018. The centre had an Islamic ethos.
- In September 2019 Nadia Ali and Arshad Ali were [convicted](#) of running another school with an Islamic ethos.
- In October 2019 three people [pleaded guilty](#) to running an unregistered school for looked after children with highly complex physical and mental health needs.

Image by [Juraj Varga](#) from [Pixabay](#).

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