

Independent faith schools being allowed to fail children, says NSS

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The government is allowing independent faith schools which have taught creationism as science, unlawfully segregated children by sex and censored resources to repeatedly fail inspections, the National Secular Society has warned.

In a letter to education minister Elizabeth Berridge, sent this week, the NSS said the government was "falling short on its obligations to young people".

The NSS's letter highlighted six examples of schools that have consistently failed to meet expected standards and asked what action ministers intend to take in response.

All six schools have failed multiple inspections in recent years, and their most recent Ofsted inspection reports were all published in 2020.

The schools' failings

Among the failings noted in the schools' most recent reports were that they:

- Taught creationism as science
- Unlawfully segregated children by sex
- Didn't enter pupils for GCSEs because exam regulations don't allow leaders to censor papers
- Censored resources
- Limited their curricula or placed insufficient focus on secular subjects
- Failed to undertake adequate safeguarding procedures or safety checks
- Left children struggling to communicate in English
- Refused to make pupils aware of sexual orientation and gender reassignment.

At least one of the schools, Bnois Jerusalem Girls School in north London, refused to allow inspectors to talk to pupils during its latest inspection, apparently at the request of parents.

Inspectors reported that they were unable to judge whether the school safeguarded children effectively as a result.

The Department for Education has previously issued at least four of the schools with warning notices, giving them notice to improve and threatening deregistration if they failed to do so.

NSS letter

The NSS's letter highlighted "growing concerns and evidence" that "some pupils' human rights are being perpetually breached when schools are permitted to consistently fail".

The society's chief executive Stephen Evans wrote: "We hope you will share our view that children in these schools have been failed for too long and that appropriate action must be taken to ensure this situation cannot arise at other schools across the country."

"We believe the government is falling short on its obligation to young people and therefore call on you to ensure that children's fundamental human right to a quality education is properly respected and protected, regardless of their religious or cultural background."

NSS comment

NSS chief executive Stephen Evans said: "It's unacceptable that children are being allowed to languish in schools which make active efforts to restrict their access to knowledge, fail to perform basic safeguarding procedures or break the law on sex segregation.

"When schools effectively refuse to meet their obligation to provide children with an education worthy of the name, the government must be prepared to protect their rights – regardless of religious sensitivities."

The schools highlighted

[Bnois Jerusalem Girls School](#), London

- Rated 'inadequate' in June 2018. Failed to meet some standards in March 2019. Rated 'inadequate' in all categories in December 2019.

[Bnei Zion Community School](#), London

- Rated 'inadequate' since 2016. Has failed to meet standards in three inspections since – two standard and one additional.

[Lubavitch Senior Boys' School](#), London

- Rated 'inadequate' since its first inspection in 2018. Has had four inspections since opening.

[Redstone Educational Academy](#), Birmingham

- Rated 'inadequate' in 2017 and has been since, including in a standard inspection in December 2019.
- Subject to an emergency inspection in 2014, when it was deemed "not suitable for the numbers on roll admitted".

[Talmud Torah Chaim Meirim Wiznitz School](#), London

- Rated 'inadequate' in standard inspections in 2018 and 2019.
- Did not meet all standards checked during an additional inspection in 2017.

[Wiznitz Cheder School](#), London

- Has failed to ensure compliance with all standards during the last five inspections (one standard and four additional), dating back to 2016.

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