

Headteacher sentenced for continuing to run illegal faith school

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The National Secular Society has welcomed the [second prosecution](#) of two people for continuing to run an unregistered faith school.

Nadia Ali was convicted on Monday for running Ambassadors High School, an Islamic institution in south London, as headteacher despite it failing a pre-registration inspection. Her father Arshad Ali was named as the proprietor.

They had been previously convicted of the [same criminal offence](#).

Nadia was given an eight weeks' imprisonment suspended for 12 months. This is the first time a prison sentence has been imposed for running an unregistered school.

She was also sentenced to 120 hours of unpaid work and ordered to pay costs of £500. Arshad was fined £300 and ordered to pay costs of £200.

Ofsted inspectors visited Ambassadors High School in 2018 and warned Nadia they believed the school was operating illegally.

Following an application from the school to register, Ofsted carried out a pre-registration inspection in February 2019. The inspection [found](#) the school was "unlikely to meet all the independent school standards".

According to the inspection report, the school had not prioritised the safety and welfare of pupils. They had not checked staff were suitable to work with children, and neither the admissions register nor the daily attendance registers met legal requirements.

The school had no strategy for teaching British values or for checking that pupils would not encounter "the teaching of partisan political views". It also failed to provide pupils with careers education.

Despite failing the inspection, the school continued to operate. Nadia and Arshad Ali were found guilty of running an unregistered school in September 2019.

Following their conviction, Ofsted found the school was still open when inspectors made return visits. Inspectors were informed that children attending the setting were home-educated. But they found evidence the school was continuing to provide full-time education to at least five pupils of compulsory school age, meaning it was legally required to register.

Ofsted's chief inspector Amanda Spielman called Nadia and Arshad Ali's decision to continue running Ambassadors High School "breathtaking arrogance".

She said: "Unregistered schools deny children a proper education and put their safety and well-being at risk."

She added that the case demonstrates the need for "legislation to be strengthened so that we can take action against these places quickly and conclusively."

The NSS's head of education, Alastair Lichten, said: "When so called 'schools' actively seek to evade registration and any oversight, it is clear they are placing ideology before pupils' welfare or right to an education.

"The action Ofsted have initiated reflects their growing seriousness in addressing unregistered schools, after years of campaigning by the NSS.

"However, far more needs to be done, to ensure known perpetrators are tackled, legitimate home-schooling isn't used as a front, and no child is denied a genuine education and the associated life chances, by their religious community."

Notes

- Under section 96 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 a person must not conduct an independent educational institution unless it is registered.
- Since January 2016, Ofsted's unregistered schools taskforce has inspected around 390 settings where inspectors had reasonable cause to believe an unregistered school was operating.
- Approximately 25% of inspected settings have a faith ethos. Twelve per cent are Muslim, 5% are Jewish and 5% are Christian.
- Safeguarding concerns were found in around a third of inspected settings, while health and safety concerns were found in around a quarter.
- To date, there have been 5 successful prosecutions for running an unregistered school.

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

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