

Three convicted for running illegal faith school

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Two people and a charity who wanted to operate "under the radar" have pleaded guilty to running an illegal unregistered faith school.

An [Ofsted investigation](#) found the Aysha Tuition Centre (ATC) had enrolled up to 28 children full-time, while claiming to be a tuition centre. Deputy Senior District Judge, Tanweer Ikram, found that the defendants in charge "wanted to carry on under the radar without the requirement of regulation".

Settings providing full time education are required to register with the Department for Education (DfE) and adhere to independent school standards.

Some unregistered settings such as tuition centres may be operating illegally due to poor record keeping or ignorance of the law. However, many are ideologically driven to avoid independent school standards which include learning about other religions and beliefs, as well as those with different protected characteristics, and preparing pupils for life in modern Britain.

Chair of trustees Shahjan Yasmin Hussain and manager Dr Shatheha Zamzam were sentenced to unpaid work and a community order. The Yorkshire Tuition Centre charitable trust was fined £500.

The ATC operated on the Yorkshire Muslim Academy site, previously home to the [Oak Tree High](#) independent Islamic school. The school was deregistered in 2020 for failing the independent school standards, according to Ofsted.

Gathering evidence of settings operating as illegal unregistered schools can be difficult, and Ofsted treat prosecution as a last resort. The inspectorate will normally seek to work with providers to bring unregistered settings into legal compliance first.

Comments

The National Secular Society, which [campaigns to protect children's rights in independent and unregistered schools](#), welcomed the convictions.

Alastair Lichten, head of education at the NSS, said: "After years of inertia, it is welcome to see progress in tackling illegal schools, and those who run them, to the detriment of children's rights. The large number of pupils falling out of the registered education system into unsafe, unregulated, and dogmatic 'schools' is scandalous.

"A joined up, safeguarding led response is necessary to end the menace of unregistered settings operating illegally. Legislation must be strengthened to prevent home education being used as a cover for illegal schools, and to prevent failing registered independent schools re-opening as unregistered settings to avoid scrutiny."

Ofsted Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman said: "This case shows the length some people will go to side-step the law and mislead parents into believing they can provide their children with a good

education.

"Many of the children at this illegal school were allegedly being home educated. But in fact they were receiving all of their education at the Centre.

"Cases like this are why I have long called for a register for children who are being home educated – so we can know where they are and that they're getting a good education. We also urgently need legislation to be strengthened so that we can take strong action against illegal schools and close them down."

Notes

- The NSS works to [protect children's rights from religious abuses beyond the state education sector](#) including in unregistered, supplemental and independent, faith schools and home education.
- The NSS has played a key role in raising awareness of the problems of unregistered schools, and pushing for improvements in the independent schools standards for registered settings.
- Earlier this month, the Ofsted director charged with clamping down on unregistered faith schools [warned](#) that the hundreds they know about are only the "tip of the iceberg".
- Last year the NSS [welcomed](#) a new government service allowing the public to report unregistered schools.

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