

A response to Ofsted's consultation: Introducing a new framework for inspecting non-association independent schools

By the National Secular Society

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/introducing-new-framework-for-inspecting-non-association-independent-schools-consultation-document>

Question 1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the same judgements should be made on independent school inspections as those made on inspections of maintained schools, non-maintained special schools, academies and free schools?

1. We share the view that the same judgements should be made on independent school inspections as those made on inspections of maintained schools, non-maintained special schools, academies and free schools.
2. Religious schools are the fastest growing sector of independent schools with around 80 new registrations a year. We are deeply concerned that the proliferation of such schools may prove to be detrimental to future community cohesion, and increase the potential for radicalisation of young people.
3. We note the proposal for there not to be a separate judgement about pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. To achieve consistency of judging criteria across all schools this makes good sense, and is acceptable provided that inspectors continue to closely monitor how well schools meet the standards in part 2 of the (amended) Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010.¹ The consultation document states that this will now form part of the judgement for the leadership and management of the school. **Despite the lack of a separate judgment, we consider it to be of paramount importance that there must be no downgrading or dilution of this area of inspection.**
4. In addition to ensuring the best educational outcomes for students, we believe an important objective of state and independent education should be the promotion of engaged citizenship and good community cohesion. We believe that education policy and practice need to be underpinned by a commitment to universal human rights.
5. The National Secular Society therefore very much welcomes Ofsted's commitment to report on how well non-association independent schools equip young people to understand and take their place in modern British multi-cultural society.
6. We also fully support proposals to report on how well schools enable young people to "acquire the knowledge, values and skills to develop independence and confidence, participate in society and choose their path in life".
7. More robust inspections in this area may help to address some of the concerns we have over the education provision Orthodox schools such as Yesodey Hatorah Girls'

¹ The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010
http://www.isi.net/images/271112_web%20consolidated%20version%20-%20independent%20school%20standards%20regulations%202010_001.pdf

School, which we believe fail to adequately develop independence to enable young people to choose their own path in life.

8. Although now in the state sector, Yesodey Hatorah operated as a private school until 2005. According to a *Telegraph* report in 2011², no students at Yesodey Hatorah go on to study at a university. Instead, most go on to study at a seminary. According to the school's principle, Rabbi Pinter: "Our experience, is that the better educated girls turn out to be the most successful mothers. For us, that's the most important role a woman plays." According to Ofsted, provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development at Yesodey Hatorah is "outstanding" and "a major strength of the school."
9. This same school has admitted to redacting questions on exam papers that it believes are inconsistent with its religious ethos, denying its pupils the opportunity to answer questions on evolution.
10. Given that there are approximately 60 Ofsted inspected schools with an Orthodox Jewish character (although only 40 of these have sought official designation as faith schools), we are concerned that this situation is repeated across many schools in the independent sector. We therefore strongly urge Ofsted to diligently carry out its duty to uphold the standards set out in part 2 of the independent school standards regulations.

Countering extremism and radicalisation

11. There is a wealth of evidence to show that a number of independent schools are involved in the promotion of separatist ideas.
12. The 2011 Home Office report on the Prevent Strategy³ highlighted specific allegations that a minority of independent faith schools have been actively promoting views that are contrary to British values, such as intolerance of other cultures and gender inequality.⁴ There have also been reports that some independent faith schools have allowed children to be exposed to extremist preachers and other fundamentalist groups.⁵
13. We are deeply concerned that a number of religious independent schools teach the superiority of their belief system of other and denigrate non-believers. In 2009, Ofsted's own report found that 8 out of 51 independent faith schools surveyed were found to be displaying teaching materials that had a bias in favour of one particular group.⁶ Some teaching materials were also seen to contain biased or incorrect information about other religions and beliefs.
14. The 2011 Report from the Prime Minister's Task Force on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism, found: "Extremists take advantage of institutions to share their poisonous narrative with others, particularly with individuals vulnerable to their messages. The government must do more to address extremism in locations where it can exert control,

² Inside the private world of London's ultra-Orthodox Jews. *Telegraph*, 25 February 2011.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/8326339/Inside-the-private-world-of-Londons-ultra-Orthodox-Jews.html>

³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf

⁴ Bald, J. et al (2010), *Faith Schools we can believe in*. London: Policy Exchange and MacEoin, D. (2009), *Music, Chess and other Sins: Segregation, Integration and Muslim Schools in Britain*. London: Civitas.

⁵ BBC Panorama (2010), *British Schools, Islamic Rules*. 22 November, and Channel 4 Dispatches (2011), *Lessons in Hate and Violence*. 14 February.

⁶ Ofsted (2009), *'Independent Faith Schools: Is the standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils, together with the five regulations underpinning it, fit for purpose?* Manchester: Ofsted.

such as prisons, and increase oversight where it is needed, such as some independent and religious schools".⁷ We wholeheartedly concur with this recommendation.

15. The Government has a duty, which is discharged via Ofsted, to protect children and young people from harm, including exposure to intolerant or extremist views in schools. We firmly believe that all schools in England, whether in the state or independent sectors, including those with a religious ethos, should be assessed on their measures to protect their pupils from extremist views and material.

Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that an independent school judged as requires improvement or inadequate should be re-inspected within two years of its previous inspection?

16. More frequent inspections of schools judged as requires improvement or inadequate may lessen the need for emergency inspections, such as those ordered by the DfE in 2012/13⁸, a number of which are known related to concerns over the "spiritual" and "moral" development of students, primarily in independent Muslim schools.

⁷ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/263181/ETF_FINAL.pdf

⁸ <http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6339834>