

NAJOS *National Association of Orthodox Jewish Schools*

Protecting and Advancing the Interests of Orthodox Schools in the UK

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NAJOS Raises Concerns about Inspections of Jewish Schools

NAJOS, the National Association of Orthodox Jewish Schools, has expressed grave concern about recent Ofsted inspections of Jewish schools with schools reporting a campaign to challenge their religious ethos and attempts by inspectors to impose secular culture and values on students. Ofsted inspectors have been asking pupils inappropriate and challenging questions, many of which fall outside the religious ethos and principles at orthodox Jewish faith schools.

In a letter to The Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP, Secretary of State for Education and to Sir Michael Wilshaw, Ofsted's Chief Inspector of Education, NAJOS has asserted that Jewish values and ethos are being questioned by inspectors in a climate of hostility designed to unsettle the pupils at member schools.

The letter states: "Unfortunately, during these inspections, Jewish schools now have the sense that our Jewish values and ethos are being questioned. We have experienced a campaign to discredit Jewish schools and to challenge the values we espouse... We ask you to take this matter extremely seriously."

Mr Jonathan Rabson, Executive Director of NAJOS said: "We fully respect and welcome Ofsted inspections with high grades being achieved by many of our schools; however this confrontational approach by inspectors is a worrying trend that has never been seen before in the history of the UK Jewish community and we fear that this suggests a shift in policy towards faith schools."

Mr Rabson adds: "Jewish schools have always upheld the importance of a broad, thorough education, and Jewish values exceed the British values that DfE have been asking all schools to promote. Unfortunately, during some recent inspections, Ofsted inspectors have asked hugely inappropriate questions and bullied the pupils into answering insensitive and anti-religious questions which have no place in a strictly orthodox faith school."

Pupils at strictly orthodox schools do not interact socially with members of the opposite sex, and are not exposed to same-gender marriage. Without access to the internet at school or home they would not know about social media nor would they be in possession of iPads or Smartphones. NAJOS members were appalled by reports of Ofsted inspectors asking girls in a maintained orthodox secondary school whether they have a boyfriend, and what they know about two men being married to each other. They quizzed the girls on their views about Facebook and queried how they managed without a Smartphone.

The Headteacher of the school in question reported to NAJOS that the girls felt bullied into answering inspectors' questions and the pupils and staff were left feeling traumatised and ashamed. One girl in Year 9 reported that the inspectors asked if

they had lessons on sexuality and started telling them that a “woman might choose to live with another woman and a man could choose to live with a man - it’s up to them”. The girl said: “We felt that Ofsted asked inappropriate questions and we felt uncomfortable and upset having to answer them and the words they used.” Another girl from Year 11 commented: “They made us feel threatened about our religion. They asked ‘Do you have friends from other religions?’ They asked this many times until we answered what they wanted us to say. We felt very bullied.” In another recent inspection, 9-year old girls in an orthodox Jewish primary school were asked whether they know how babies are made and whether they know any gays.

In his letter to Nicky Morgan, Jonathan Rabson concludes: “Our experience is that Ofsted are specifically trying to catch our pupils out and somehow prove that Jewish schools are non-inclusive. We fear that this is prompted by recent statements from DfE about faith schools and the associated media hype fuelled by the Accord Coalition and British Humanist Association who appear to have significant influence over government policy.”

There is increasing concern that Inspectors do not respect the rights of a school of religious character to promote its own religion. Following the visit to one orthodox Jewish school, Ofsted reported “school leaders have chosen to limit religious education to the study solely of the Jewish faith. As a result, students have little opportunity to reflect on spiritual issues from another perspective.”

Rabbi David Meyer, Executive Headteacher of Hasmonean High School in North London commented: “We are seeing a worrying trend of Ofsted inspectors showing a lack of respect for the values and traditions of our community. Multiculturalism should not be about conforming to one standard, but celebrating the differences of perspectives, and so long as they are founded on tolerance and mutual respect, should be valued and protected. Rather than promoting these values, our schools are feeling that our ethos is being undermined and we are being treated in a very harsh fashion.”

About NAJOS

NAJOS (National Association of Orthodox Jewish Schools) represents the interests of a wide range of primary and secondary schools across the orthodox Jewish faith sector, from mainstream/modern orthodox to strictly orthodox, including both maintained (VA, Free Schools and Academies) and independent schools whose combined pupil numbers now exceed 30,000 - 85% of all the Jewish pupils in schools across the UK.

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For more information about this Press Release or the work of NAJOS, visit www.najos.org, email info@najos.org or contact:
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