

Christian School 'Downgraded' for Refusing Interfaith Worship Leader

A Christian school has been told by inspectors that it will be downgraded because it didn't invite a representative from another faith group, such as an imam, to lead school assemblies.

The independent school in the Home Counties was told that it breached new rules which require the promotion "British values". The policy was introduced in the wake of the "Trojan Horse" schools scandal in Birmingham.

Along with a number of other cases involving schools with a religious ethos, this latest case has prompted criticisms that the rules are having unintended consequences.

It is understood that Ofsted inspectors informed the head of the small Christian school that it would be downgraded from "good" to "adequate" for failing to "actively promote" harmony between different groups. This is because the school had not invited in representatives from other religions to lead collective worship.

They further warned that unless the school could demonstrate it is meeting the new requirements, there would be a further inspection that could result in the school being closed.

According to a government paper that explains the guidelines, even taking children on trips to different places of worship would not be enough to meet the requirements.

Anglican, Roman Catholic and Jewish schools have all been challenged by Ofsted since the new guidelines came into effect earlier this year. This has led to criticism of the guidelines

themselves for having an unforeseen negative impact, particularly on faith schools.

'Deep irony'

Andrea Williams, chief executive of Christian Concern, said: "We want to see the problem of Islamic extremism in schools dealt with. But these guidelines haven't been worded carefully enough which means schools such as this one are being unreasonably chastised for reflecting their Christian ethos.

"This case goes way beyond teaching children about other religions. The inspectors seem to require that collective worship be led by leaders of other religions. This is an assault on the integrity of the Christian identity of the school and a challenge to freedom of belief.

"There is a deep irony here that Christianity—the faith which gave rise to so many treasured British values such as individual freedoms, tolerance and respect for others—is being portrayed as 'un-British'. The guidelines must be revised to tackle the real problem without penalizing others."