

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 687#

Do Some ‘Christian’ Schools place Children at Risk?

It is the job of a democratic government to provide an education for every child is is public in purpose and outcome; public in access for *all* children, teachers and employees; public in ownership and control and publicly accountable.

If governments fund and give preferential funding to sectarian schools they undermine, not just egalitarian values, but a harmonious society which recognises the ‘common good’ and the necessity of fair taxation.

A half century of State Aid to sectarian schools in Australia has proved the dangers of State Aid to private schools. This policy has

- Encouraged divisiveness and undermined the democratic social contract
- Created greater inequalities;
- Undermined the public system of education which underpins a free, democratic and egalitarian polity;
- Undermined proper accountability for public moneys and created blatant corruption scandals
- Created a cancer in the body politic.

But now, there is evidence that some private religious schools actually place children at risk. Here in Australia we have been outraged by sexual predators within some of the Catholic, Anglican and Jewish religious schools and corruption within the Muslim administration. But Christian fundamentalist schools are also mistreating children. Marion Maddox attempted to warn Australians of the activities of these schools in 2014 with her books, articles and interviews on the ABC . See <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2014/03/20/3968199.htm> But her warnings were counteracted by the work of Jennifer Buckingham from the Centre of Independent Studies right wing think tank at www.cis.org.au

Nothing has been done in Australia, but in England there is an Inspectorate – OFSTED Finally, in that country, OFSTED has downgraded some Accelerated Christian Education Schools after former pupils told the *Independent* that some schools within the network ‘mistreated children’. See <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/accelerated-christian-education-europe-ofsted-dfe-inspection-report-a7502616.html>

IT IS TIME SUCH SCHOOLS WERE ALSO DE-REGISTERED IN AUSTRALIA!

The following are excerpts from a report by [Siobhan Fenton](#) Social Affairs Correspondent from the *Independent* in the UK

Children 'at risk' in Christian fundamentalist schools in the UK, warns government watchdog:

Following a strictly fundamentalist interpretation of Christianity, children at ACE schools spend most of the school day teaching themselves by reading textbooks in silence Getty

A number of Christian fundamentalist schools have been downgraded by government inspectors following an investigation by *The Independent* which revealed children at some schools that follow the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum [are taught that LGBT people are inferior and girls must submit to men](#).

The investigation also uncovered historic allegations [of corporal punishment, exorcisms being performed on children and schoolgirls being “groomed” for marriage to much older men](#).

Inspectors say they fear “children are at risk” at some schools after finding in some ACE institutions safeguarding plans to be flawed or non-existent and that staff who come into contact with children sometimes have not undergone background checks to see if they are safe to work with children.

The Independent previously revealed allegations by former pupils that children were subject to serious mistreatment at some of the schools, which are operated by fundamentalist Christian communities and teach more than a thousand pupils at 26 different ACE schools in the UK

[Christian fundamentalist schools ‘performed exorcisms on children’](#)

Former pupils of some schools said the insular nature of the communities and pressure to not speak out meant the abuse had been hidden for decades. One warned: “No one outside the schools knows about what happens inside them, that’s why they’ve been able to go on like this for so long.”

Following *The Independent’s* investigation, 10 ACE schools were visited by Ofsted inspectors in October and nine of the schools have now been downgraded from “good” or “outstanding” to “inadequate” or “requires improvement”. In inspection reports seen by *The Independent*, the watchdog raises serious concerns about child protection failures, warning they are failing to meet official safeguarding regulations to protect children. A damning report of one of the schools concludes that “children are at risk”.

However, former pupils have told *The Independent* that the reports do not go far enough and say the Government must be held to account for allowing the schools to operate for so long. They have called for a government inquiry into how “generations of children were failed”.

[Christian fundamentalist schools teaching girls they must obey men](#)

ACE originates from an education system developed in southern Baptist states in the US that has developed offshoots around the world, including in Britain. Between 20 and 60 pupils aged between four and 18 attend each one.

There are 26 ACE schools registered in the UK. The claims relate to some of the schools and there is no suggestion that the allegations of mistreatment relate to all of them, including those inspected by Ofsted.

Following a strictly fundamentalist interpretation of Christianity, children at ACE schools spend most of the school day teaching themselves by reading textbooks in silence, while facing the classroom walls in specially designed booths, which mean they cannot see children around them or interact with them.

Former pupils say this is due to the schools' belief in individualistic self-salvation, whereby people must actively accept God's salvation to enter heaven.

By extension, it is believed that children must teach themselves in order to get closer to God. Children are therefore expected to spend the first half of each school day teaching themselves by reading textbooks in silence, while facing the classroom walls in specially designed booths, which mean they cannot see children around them or interact with them. Adults are there to guide them and instil discipline, but no formal teachers are present.

Pupils said the learning style meant some children received a poor education and often felt socially isolated.

[An investigation by *The Independent* in June of this year](#) found ACE textbooks are teaching children that girls must obey men and their primary role in life is to get married and have children.

One textbook said of the role of women and girls and society: "God has given both the husband and the wife certain areas of responsibility in the home. The husband is to be the leader of the home, loving his wife even as Christ loved the church ... The wife is to obey, respect and submit to the leadership of her husband, serving as a helper to him ... She is available all times day or night

Other material stated LGBT people are inferior and unnatural. One textbook said: "Homosexual, adjective: having unnatural sexual feelings towards one of the same sex ... Homosexual activity is another of man's corruptions of God's plan."

Pages from an Accelerated Christian Education textbook, which former pupils say are used in the schools

Textbooks also taught creationism, instead of evolution, as fact.

[A further investigation in September revealed allegations of historic abuse](#) at some of the schools including that some pupils who attended in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s had been subject to ritualised corporal punishment. Former pupils told *The Independent* they had been beaten by teachers using canes and sticks and being told it was God's will as punishment would stop them from sinning again.

A teaching training manual published in the 1990s obtained by *The Independent* showed an illustrated guide to hitting children alongside theological justification and bible passages to cite during the "correction".

Other former pupils claimed exorcisms were performed on children in school assemblies at some institutions by teachers who said they needed to cleanse their souls from the devil.

It was also alleged that at some schools teachers would "groom" girls for marriage while they were still young schoolgirls, by isolating them and pressuring them to marry much older men in the fundamentalist Christian community. One former pupil, who attended a school as a young girl in the 2000s, told *The Independent*: "You were told from a young age that your role is to support a man and God will lead you to him. The role of women in these religious groups is quite clear. You're told God has chosen a husband for you and God will lead this man to you. But in reality, pastors and church leaders guide men to you. In my view, it's grooming."

Students do not sit GCSEs or A-levels but instead receive certificates in "Christian education", which former pupils say severely limits their opportunities to gain employment or university education, thereby ensuring they remain in the fundamentalist Christian community.

When the allegations emerged, a spokesperson for Christian Education Europe, which operates ACE schools in the UK, told *The Independent* they were not aware of the claims and said they were "shocked by the allegations". They added that they facilitate training for ACE schools to ensure safeguarding procedures are in place.

Prior to *The Independent's* investigation, the ACE schools had been rated "good" or "outstanding" for children's education, welfare and safety. However, the new inspections commissioned in October say they now have serious concerns about the welfare of children at some of them.

One school was inspected in 2013 by Ofsted and deemed to be "good" but has since been downgraded to "inadequate" following a re-inspection in October 2016. An Ofsted inspector warned the school "has breached the conditions of the school's registration. Statutory safeguarding requirements are not met. The school's approach to the safer recruitment of staff is not rigorous enough."

It continues: "Leaders do not actively promote harmony with other cultures and respect for people with protected characteristics well enough. Pupils' attainment is below expectations for their age, particularly in writing." Inspectors have ordered the school to improve safeguarding standards "as a matter of urgency".

The report found the school's health and safety policies were next to non-existent. A 7ft-long boa constrictor as well as a number of tarantulas were kept in the school as pets, without due consideration being made as to whether they are safe to be around children. No first-aid policies existed, or strategies for fire safety.

Textbooks seen by The Independent depict biblical passages and advice among science and maths worksheets .

Another school which had previously been deemed to "provide a good quality of education" in a 2012 Ofsted inspection has also now been downgraded and told it must urgently improve. Government staff who visited in October of this year said they found the school fails to meet independent school standards. The report states: "The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective and do not meet the independent school standards. Leaders and trustees have not established a strong culture of safeguarding at the school.

"Staff were unaware of the essential role they play in keeping pupils safe from harm. They have not completed recent specialist training."

Inspectors added that on some occasions the school had failed to make "all the required pre-employment checks" to ensure staff were safe to work with children.

Another school has been found to have poor safeguarding policies that "do not ensure that children are safe". A further school has been downgraded from "good" to "inadequate". With Ofsted inspectors warning: "Safeguarding is not effective. The required checks on adults' suitability to work with children are not all conducted as a matter of course. The quality of teaching is inadequate ... standards in reading and writing are low."

Jonny Scaramanga is a former pupil of an ACE school and has recently completed a PhD thesis on the issue at the UCL Institute of Education. He told *The Independent* the re-inspections did not go far enough and called for an inquiry into how the schools managed to operate for so long without Ofsted intervention. He said: "As someone who survived an ACE education, I feel let down by the inspectors, because the things they are raising in these reports have been happening for decades. For years, Ofsted and the Government have turned a blind eye to miseducation and abuse in religious schools.

"I would like to understand why this has been allowed to go on for so long. I would welcome a specific inquiry into this. In my view, some of the reports do not go far enough. In future, Ofsted inspectors should be briefed on the specific known problem areas in the curriculum, including political bias and sexism, and on the shortcomings of the schools that survivors have been campaigning about for years."

He added: "It is very gratifying to be taken seriously. I just wish more had been done in 1984, when the first public reports of abuse in ACE schools in England surfaced. That would have saved a generation of children from a damaging schooling."

David Waldock, who says he was subjected to corporal punishment while attending an ACE school in the 1980s, said: "I welcome Ofsted holding independent schools to a standard which protects and develops children currently going through the ACE curriculum.

“The Government in general, and Ofsted in particular, have been negligent in failing to ensure that students attending ACE schools are appropriately safeguarded, given a sufficient quality of education and prepared emotionally to enter into the adult world. Indeed, in some of these schools, significant failings have been systematically overlooked, and children have been failed for more than 30 years.”

[UK news in pictures](#)

Jay Harman, faith schools and education campaigner at the British Humanist Association, said the news was welcome but expressed disbelief the schools have been able to operate for so long without government intervention. He said: “We have been working with former pupils of these schools to raise concerns about Accelerate Christian Education for years, and we’re glad that the authorities are finally beginning to realise how badly the children subjected to it are being failed. The line Ofsted has taken here is absolutely right, and it is frankly astonishing that any school could accuse inspectors of unfair treatment while providing children with such a narrow, doctrinaire, and homophobic curriculum.”

A spokesperson for Ofsted said: “Ofsted inspects all independent schools against the Government’s Independent School Standards. All schools have a responsibility to prepare pupils for life in multifaith Britain and are expected to provide a broad and balanced curriculum, which teaches respect and tolerance towards those from cultures and faiths that may not be represented within the school.

“We recently inspected a number of independent schools that use the Accelerated Christian Education curriculum at the request of the Department for Education and found some of them to be failing to meet the Government’s standards in a number of areas, including safeguarding, leadership and governance, and the quality of the curriculum. In addition, a number of these schools were not promoting British values effectively enough.

“It is common practice for Ofsted to carry out focused inspections of a group of schools that, for example, are in the same local authority area or academy trust or, which follow the same type of curriculum.

“We will, through commission by the DfE, continue to monitor schools that have not met the Independent Schools Standards.”

A Department for Education spokesperson said: “All schools must promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect for different faiths and beliefs.

“We commissioned these inspections following concerns about these schools, which had previously been rated good by Ofsted. ACE schools, like all other independent schools, are inspected against the new, tougher Independent School Standards. Where independent schools fail to meet the standards they must improve or close.”

**DOGS SUGGEST IT IS TIME THAT SECTARIAN SCHOOLS LIKE
THIS IN AUSTRALIA SHOULD BE DEREGISTERED!**

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ON 3CR**

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