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Faith schools to get own vetting

Some private Muslim and Christian schools in England are to have their own joint inspection body.

The government has approved the setting up of a new independent inspectorate which will mean the schools involved will not be checked by Ofsted.



The two groups say they represent a wide range of schools

The body - called The Bridge Schools Inspectorate - will check 110 schools in the Christian Schools Trust and in the Association of Muslim Schools.

The government says the new service will contribute to community cohesion.

England's schools inspectorate Ofsted will regularly vet the new body to check on standards.

The Bridge joins two other independent inspection services, which are also overseen by Ofsted.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate vets most of the 1300 private schools which are affiliated to the Independent Schools Council.

The other body is the Schools Inspection Service which inspects 26 schools affiliated to Focus Learning Trust (FLT), an umbrella organisation of a Christian group known as the Exclusive Brethren.

The remaining other independent schools in England - about 1,000 - are inspected by Ofsted every six years, although there are plans to make checks every three years.

The government says the Education Bill passing through Parliament at the moment will ensure that in future no inspectorate is single faith.

Community cohesion

A joint statement from the Association of Muslim Schools and the Christian Schools Trust said: "Our aim is to ensure that our schools are the best that they can be so that our students can achieve well academically and become well-adjusted citizens

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"We desire our inspections to be rigorous, objective and transparent. We believe this inspectorate can be a model of how different faiths and cultures can come together to serve a common purpose and contribute to greater community cohesion."

The groups say they represent a wide range of schools. They had pressed for their own inspectorate because they wanted checks carried out by trained and informed inspectors who were familiar with their styles of schools.

Last month the chairman of the Commons schools select committee Barry Sheerman told MPs some councils were finding it difficult to know what was going on in some faith schools - especially Muslim schools.

A spokeswoman for the DCSF said: "This is not the first time we have approved an independent inspectorate. Each time the secretary of state has carefully considered the make up of the inspectorate, and the quality assurance arrangements that are in place.

"The new Education and Skills Bill currently passing through Parliament will increase the transparency of the process of approving independent inspectorates.

"It will ensure that in future no inspectorate is single faith. We believe that this is an important safe guard to ensure that inspectorates have a breadth of experience of different types of school, and will help to promote cohesion and integration."

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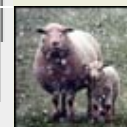
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