

Further crackdown on illegal schools

The Education Secretary Gavin Williamson has pledged to continue to crack down on dangerous illegal schools to make sure children are safe and not exposed to risky practices or extreme influences.

Ofsted will be given an extra £400,000 to help investigate unregistered independent schools and support the regulator in bringing together evidence for prosecution. The Secretary of State has also reiterated the Department for Education's commitment to bring forward new legislation to strengthen the watchdog's powers.

This latest funding injection will build on the £3million invested since 2016 to fund a joint Department for Education and Ofsted team that has seen 72 illegal settings stop operating unlawfully and resulted in three prosecutions – leading to convictions on all three cases.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Unregistered schools present a serious risk to children. They often do not offer the kind of balanced, informative curriculum all schools should, and can expose pupils to dangerous and extreme influences.

That's why I am determined that anyone found to be running one faces the full force of the law. This extra investment in Ofsted will build on the £3 million we have already committed – and send a very strong message to illegal schools which continue to operate.

We remain committed to strengthening Ofsted's powers to make sure they can shut down illegal settings, and helping legitimate settings to make sure they know the rules.

In 2016, the Department for Education established a joint team with Ofsted to tackle unregistered schools.

Between 1 January 2016 and 31 August 2019, Ofsted has undertaken 362 inspections of 293 suspected unregistered independent schools, 83 settings were issued with a warning notice and Ofsted made sure 72 of these stopped operating illegally. There have also been three successful prosecutions so far. This additional funding will allow Ofsted to continue this critical work and ensure illegal activity is uncovered and justice is delivered.

To further address these issue and make sure Ofsted has the legal powers it needs to tackle unregistered schools, the Government intends to review and strengthen the legislation in place at the next opportunity.

The government is also launching a consultation today, seeking views on legislation which will require any setting attended full-time by children of

compulsory school age to be registered with the Department for Education and meet the independent school standards.

In addition to this, the department will soon be publishing a new out-of-school safeguarding code of practice, to ensure legitimate out-of-school settings such as part-time tuition centres, sports clubs and religious settings offering education in their own faith know how to create a safe environment for the children in their care; and supporting guidance for parents – setting out key questions to consider, and red flags to look out for, when choosing a setting for their child.