

Student enrolments more than double in recent boom at Victoria's Islamic schools

KATHRYN POWLEY, Herald Sun, August 04, 2015

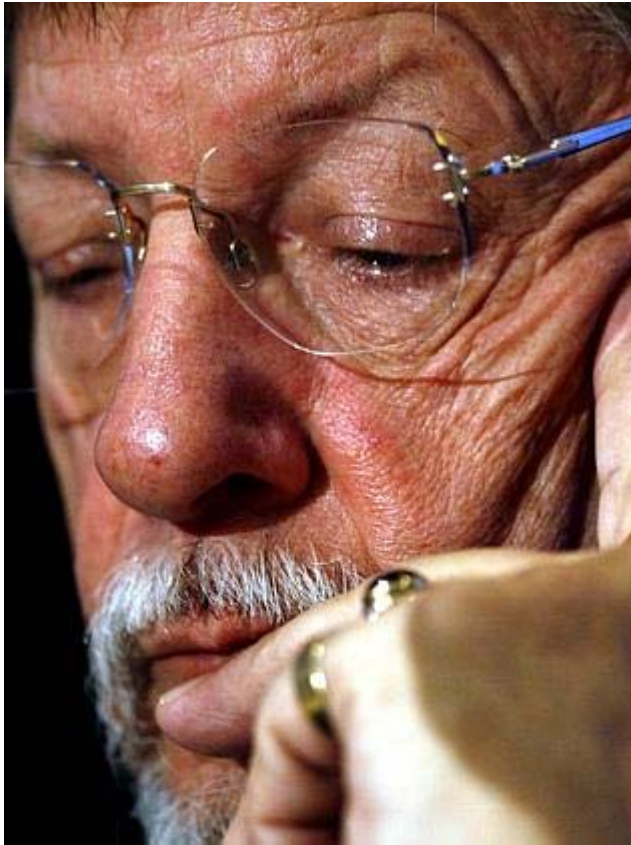


Source: News Corp Australia

THE number of students attending Victorian Islamic schools has more than doubled in eight years, with almost 8000 kids now attending the religious schools. In 2007, there were 3900 students enrolled in five Islamic schools. This year there are 7910 students in seven schools. That represents a 103 per cent increase, contributing to a 16 per cent overall increase in independent school enrolments.

A Herald Sun analysis of Department of Education and Training data shows during the same eight years, Victoria's entire school student population grew by just 9 per cent. Jewish schools grew by 4 per cent and Catholic schools by 13 per cent.

Islamic Council of Victoria general manager Nail Aykan said Islamic schools provide a one-stop shop of language, academic study and religious values. "The fact that these schools are growing is a good sign," he said.



Monash University sociology of religion professor Gary Bouma Source: News Corp Australia

Mr Aykan said the Muslim population was youthful and growing quickly, and that was contributing to the rapid growth. He said 2011 census data showed the Muslim population's annual growth rate was 8 per cent.

"Approximately a third of the Muslim population are children. The growth in demand for these schools is in the 0-14 range," he said.

Mr Aykan said primary level fees at his daughter's school were around \$2000 and rates for Year 12 were capped at about \$5000, making it within reach for many Muslims, Mr Aykan said.

He sent his daughter to an Islamic primary school partly because of his own childhood experience in the days when there were no Islamic schools. "I came to Australia as a 5 year old in 1973 from Turkey. My parents sent me to Turkish language school on a Saturday and to religious instruction on a Sunday. I was going to school seven days a week. I wouldn't want my kids to go through that," he said.

Monash University sociology of religion professor Gary Bouma said the rapid growth indicated a community establishing itself.

"That, for Australia, is totally normal. It's what Catholics and Protestants have done," he said, adding he was not surprised at the rise. "The Muslim community is young and therefore more likely to have babies," he said. Mr Bouma expected low-fee Christian schools were another fast-growing area.

The figures showed Islamic school enrolments at East Preston Islamic College, The Islamic College of Melbourne, Minaret College, Al-Taqwa College, Darul Ulum College of Victoria, Ilim College of Australia and Al Siraat College represented about 0.8 per cent of the 2015 Victorian school population.

kathryn.powley@news.com.au

Melbourne teacher receives threats and moves schools after being accused of 'teaching evil'

The Age, August 3, 2015, Henrietta Cook,
Education Reporter

A Melbourne primary school teacher received threats and had to quit his job after telling students that some of the Prophet Muhammad's companions were terrorists.

The state school teacher's comments triggered a massive backlash in the community, with a Muslim youth centre calling for the Education Department employee to be sacked.

It is understood that police patrolled the teacher's home after threats were posted on social media.

One source said the teacher was afraid to go to the local shopping centre due to the anger in the community.

The teacher made the offensive comments in response to a question from a student about beheadings.

An Education Department spokeswoman said the employee answered a question from a student three months ago that should have been referred to the child's parents because it was of a "religious nature".

"Victorian government schools are secular and the personal religious views of staff should not be discussed in class."

The spokeswoman said that parents had complained to the school, and the principal had dealt with the situation appropriately.

"The staff member did not intend to offend the student's religious beliefs and he agreed that he could have handled the situation in a more appropriate manner."

The spokeswoman said they could not comment on whether police were contacted.

The Department has counselled the employee to prevent a similar situation from occurring, she said. "The employee now understands he is not to answer questions about his own religious beliefs, but should suggest that students ask their parents questions regarding religious beliefs."

A Facebook post accused the teacher of "teaching evil". Concerned parents said the teacher should have "stuck to the subject" and had no right to impose his beliefs on students.

Many of the threats were removed from social media following a request from the Department.

Fairfax Media has chosen not to name the school or the teacher, who has moved to a new school.

Earlier this year the Education Department appointed an adviser to work with government and non-government schools to promote racial and religious tolerance and social cohesion.

In February, the Australian Principals Federation told Fairfax Media that schools were grappling with the radicalisation of students and parents.

Principals said they did not feel confident in dealing with the radicalised behaviour of students and parents.

Under a new plan, nominated Education Department staff in regional offices work with a Victoria Police counterpart to provide advice and support to schools.

Not one, but all Man Haron Monis letters to Attorney-General's Department ministers overlooked

The Age, August 3, 2015, Jane Lee, Legal affairs, industrial relations and science correspondent

Attorney-General's Department secretary Chris Moraitis (left) with his minister, George Brandis, in Senate estimates in February. Photo: Andrew Meares

The Attorney-General Department's failure to alert a review into the Lindt Cafe siege of a letter from the gunman to George Brandis about contacting Islamic State was not its only mistake, it has emerged. The department also neglected to send any recent letters between Man Haron Monis and its ministers since 2010 because it overlooked them in a spreadsheet, a Senate inquiry has revealed.

Three senior department staff apologised to a Senate inquiry into the oversight on Monday for taking four days to correct the public record on this. But they denied a rebuff from the Prime Minister's office that they had been "ducking for cover" during that time.

Monis – who was killed along with two of his hostages at the end of the 17-hour siege at Sydney's Lindt Cafe last year - wrote to hundreds of government ministers and parliamentarians for years before the siege.

Sydney siege gunman Man Haron Monis, pictured here in 2011. Photo: AAP

In one of the letters, Monis asked Attorney-General Brandis, QC, whether it was legal for him to contact the head of Islamic State in October 2014. The department discovered in February, after an Australian Federal Police request, that the letter was not sent to a joint Commonwealth-NSW review into the siege, because a bureaucrat did not realise there was a second tab on a spreadsheet of evidence.

Department deputy secretary Tony Sheehan told the Senate inquiry on Monday that the second tab contained all ministerial correspondence with Monis since 2010, while the first tab contained documents from a separate filing system.

Four other letters in the tab – including correspondence with Justice Minister Michael Keenan – which were considered relevant were also not passed on to the siege review by the Attorney-General's department. The review was later discovered to have received them from other sources.

"That's the significant issue. That's not one letter ... All recent correspondence had not been provided [by the department]," senator Jacinta Collins said.

Senator Joseph Ludwig said it was "extraordinary" this was only being aired at the Senate inquiry's third hearing: "So a systemic error ... failed to provide all correspondence to the review."

Mr Sheehan, who had been acting department secretary at the time, replied: "It's not a systemic failure, it was a specific error." "It was a human error that led to this," he said.

Asked why he had not clarified what was in the two spreadsheet tabs at a previous hearing, Mr Sheehan blamed his own understanding of spreadsheets.

A bureaucrat who discovered the missing letter in February failed to report the omission to senior staff, instead contacting staff at the siege review directly. They were told the review had been

finalised, so the letter was not handed over. Bureaucrats conducting the review have noted the letter would have made no difference to its findings. The bureaucrat remained in the department, Mr Sheehan said.

Another deputy secretary, Katherine Jones, first discovered the mistake in late May, during a lunch she had with Allan McKinnon from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet – two days after she appeared before a Senate estimates hearing.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop quoted Ms Jones' evidence to Senate estimates that the letter had been provided to the review, but went on to correct the record in a post question time statement at the end of that sitting fortnight.

This was days after the Prime Minister's office confirmed, on Monday June 1, that the letter did not go to the siege review. Mr McKinnon, the deputy secretary of the Prime Minister's Office, wrote an email about the letter that day, saying "I have rung and spoken to AGD [Attorney-General's department] again. They are ducking for cover." The email's recipient was redacted.

Department secretary Chris Moraitis denied this, saying staff were "running around like headless chooks" looking for answers. Instead of correcting the record, Mr Moraitis decided to conduct a full inquiry to ensure other letters had not been omitted. He had since reviewed the error carefully and said in hindsight he would have gone public immediately: "I didn't realise you could half correct the record."

Senator Ludwig said that observers may have viewed the delayed response as a "cover up".

Mr Moraitis said he was "mortified" by the mistake and had "bent over backwards" to minimise the chance of it happening again, creating new protocols for handling documents, which were now on the staff intranet. He said it was not an excuse but the error had occurred during a "busy time regarding national security ... to put it in context people were extremely overworked ... that division has been working pretty hard on national security issues".