



UPDATED: Board suspends Toronto Islamic school's operating permit after row over anti-Jewish curriculum

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TORONTO — An Islamic school that had been using teaching materials that disparaged Jews and encouraged boys to keep fit for jihad has lost its license to use Toronto District School Board property.

The board suspended a permit issued to the Islamic Shia Study Centre, which operated the East End Madrassah out of a Toronto high school until an outcry last week over the content of its curriculum booklets.

“The Islamic Shia Study Centre will not be able to permit TDSB property until the police investigation is complete and they are able to demonstrate that they comply with board policies and procedures,” Ryan Bird, a TDSB spokesman, said Wednesday.

“Pending the outcome of the police investigation, we are willing to meet with the permit holder to discuss TDSB policies and procedures. As soon as we became aware of this complaint, we started to review the permit and the information that was available.”

The school said in a statement Thursday morning it was disappointed by the decision. “Our curriculum is not intended to promote hatred towards any individual or group of people; rather, the children are taught to respect and value other faiths and beliefs, and to uphold Canada’s basic values of decency and tolerance.”

But the school’s curriculum, which it has now taken off its website, referred to “crafty,” “treacherous” Jews and contrasted Islam with “the Jews and the Nazis.” The passages were from two books published by Iranian foundations.

The booklets also told children that Islam was the “best” religion, and provided a list of “unclean things,” including pigs, dogs and “a person who does not believe in Allah.” It said boys should be “healthy and strong” so they would be “ready for jihad whenever the time comes for it.”

Girls, meanwhile, were told to limit their involvement in physical activities and to instead engage in hobbies that would prepare them to become mothers and wives.

The York Region Police hate crimes unit launched an investigation after receiving a complaint from the Friends of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre. The school apologized and promised to review its materials. The Islamic school had been teaching classes on Sundays at David & Mary Thomson Collegiate.

“We are pleased to note the TDSB has taken action in response to the alarming antisemitic hate taught to Muslim schoolchildren at Toronto’s East End Madrassah,” said Avi Benlolo, President and CEO of Friends of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre.

“We hope the school board will now go one step further and put a plan in place to ensure no group is ever targeted as the Jewish community has been, and that ancient hatreds are never again endorsed and encouraged in Toronto classrooms.”

The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, which had complained to the school board, called the suspension “an excellent first step” but said it wants the ban made permanent.

“Given the presence of antisemitic passages in the curriculum, and the dubious activism of its religious leadership, it is clear that the madrassah has disqualified itself as a partner with the School Board on any level,” it said in a statement. “We are hopeful that the board comes to this conclusion in due course and that the madrassah is not welcomed back into our public schools.”

Neither the school principal nor the cleric affiliated with the centre could be reached for comment. Last week, Imam Syed Muhammad Rizvi told reporters the passages in question had been wrongly copied from two websites.

But they are actually excerpts from two books published by the Al Balagh Foundation in Tehran and the Mostazafan Foundation of New York, which the FBI alleges was a front organization controlled by the Iranian regime — whose president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is widely known for his antisemitism, Holocaust denial and threats to wipe out Israel.

“As we have said before, the excerpted material at issue should never have been a part of our curriculum,” said the statement, signed “Principal, East End Madrassah.” In a video posted online, Imam Rizvi dismissed as “absolutely baseless” concerns that school teaching materials were written in Iran.