

# Police probe into child beatings at mosques

EXCLUSIVE

DAVID LEASK  
INVESTIGATIONS REPORTER

POLICE have launched child assault probes at three of Scotland's most prominent mosques, The Herald can reveal.

Detectives last night confirmed they are investigating claims boys have been beaten in madrassas – or Islamic schools – in Glasgow.

Their probe is understood to be focusing on madrassas at Glasgow Central Mosque, Scotland's biggest place of worship of any faith, the influential Masjid Noor in Pollokshields and the smaller Zia ul-Quran nearby.

A spokeswoman said a report on a 49-year-old woman has already been sent to the procurator-fiscal.

The investigations came after prominent Scottish Muslims raised concerns about teaching methods and child safety regimes at the mosques and their associated madrassas.

Scottish-born parents are understood to have complained that some teachers in the madrassas recruited from Pakistan were using corporal punishment against their children.

Ali Khan, the chairman of Roshni – a charity that focuses on child abuse in ethnic minority communities – last night stressed there was no excuse for hitting children at madrassas.

Mr Khan said: "Corporal punishment is completely unacceptable in Scotland.

"And it is also totally unacceptable in Islam, which does not condone the beating of young children.

"Ignorance of the law is no excuse. Organisations must take the time to find out what the rules on child protection are. Roshni and several other groups are ready to help."

Roshni has spent much of the past two years on a major campaign to sign up mosques, madrassas and minority faith and other groups to Scotland's system of vetting for people who work with children.

The charity is already working with some 40 bodies and has helped about 200 members of staff and volunteers to get Disclosure Scotland checks.

As recently as 2009 it emerged 40 out of Scotland's 50 main mosques and madrassas had not complied with the Disclosure Scotland regime. However, there is no way for authorities to force organisations to do so.

Sources last night stressed at least some of the allegations were of the kind of physical punishments meted out to children in Scotland until 25 years ago.

However, corporal punishment, including the infamous Rooster or Murga where youngsters are expected to adopt a painful yogic pose, is still frequently used in Pakistani madrassas.

"This is a cultural thing, not a religious thing," explained Salim Aslam, chairman of the popular Taleem ul-Islam, also in Pollokshields. "But it is totally wrong to use corporal punishment.

"Scottish children and their parents will not put up with it. We believe we should avoid all

## Parents criticise Islamic schools and violence is condemned by minority charity

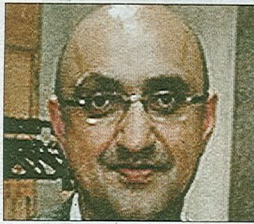
such extremes at our madrassa because they will only drive children away from our faith."

Mr Aslam's madrassa – based in a landmark former synagogue built by Alexander "Greek" Thomson in Nithsdale Street, Pollokshields – has had all its staff and volunteers vetted with the help of Roshni and has put in place exactly the same kind of child protection procedures as in Scottish state schools.

Mr Aslam said: "I think our parents would expect us to be as good if not better than their local schools."

Hundreds of children go to Taleem ul-Islam, where they learn their faith and the Arabic language.

Child protection experts have long expressed concerns about some of the other 3000 children who regularly attend madrassas in Scotland.



**Corporal punishment is unacceptable in Scotland. It is also totally unacceptable in Islam, which does not condone the beating of young children**

Ali Khan

"They have no idea what they are doing," said one concerned parent about her son's madrassa. "They have hundreds of children but haven't even ever organised a fire drill. Sometimes you don't even know who the teacher is."

Today's revelations come after Channel 4 last night aired a documentary showing pupils being hit and kicked at a mosque school in Birmingham.

Teenagers and a teacher were caught on a hidden camera assaulting children as young as six and seven in a Dispatches documentary.

The programme also revealed evidence of extremist views being taught at Muslim schools.

A class of 11-year-olds at the school were told not to

trust more liberal Muslims. Their teacher said: "The person who's got less than a fistful of beard, then you should stay away from him the same way you should stay away from a serpent or a snake."

Another group of pupils are told in an assembly at the school: "The disbelievers, they are the worst of all people."

A Strathclyde Police spokeswoman said: "We can confirm we are investigating allegations of assault at three religious centres in Glasgow.

"A 49-year-old woman is subject of a report to the procurator-fiscal. Inquiries are ongoing and it would be inappropriate to comment further."

No-one was available for comment at the Central Mosque, Masjid Noor or Zia ul-Quran.

Leader comment: Page 14