

Mail on Line

Four teenagers arrested over arson attack at Islamic boarding school as police appeal for calm in wake of Woolwich killing

- Muslim boarding school in Chislehurst attacked on Saturday night
- Two 17-year-olds and two 18-year-old arrested in connection with fire
- Around 130 people were inside the building when it was attacked
- Two boys treated for smoke inhalation but were not taken to hospital
- Met Commander says attacks on Muslims are up from one to eight a day
- British mosques have been advised to install safe rooms and panic alarms
- By Sara Malm and Simon Tomlinson

Four teenagers have been arrested on suspicion of arson in connection with a fire at an Islamic boarding school in south east London, Scotland Yard said.

About 130 children and staff were evacuated from Darul Uloom, a Muslim madrassa or religious school, in Chislehurst, Kent, just before midnight on Saturday.

Two 17-year-olds and two 18-year-olds were detained late last night and taken to a south London police station, where they remain in custody.

School principal Mustafa Musa said today the fire was started in the teaching area and damaged about 10 per cent of the building.

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On alert: A police officer stands guard on a road next to Islamic boarding school Darul Uloom in Chislehurst, Kent, today, after it was the target of a suspected arson attack on Saturday



Alarm: About 130 children and staff were evacuated from Darul Uloom (pictured today), a Muslim madrassa or religious school, just before midnight on Saturday

Two boys received treatment for smoke inhalation, but were not taken to hospital.

The attack happened only days after an Islamic centre in London's Muswell Hill was burnt to the ground amid allegations it was a racist attack.

The building was daubed with the letters 'EDL,' apparently referencing the English Defence League.

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- That blaze prompted fears that the fire may have been a reprisal attack in the wake of the Woolwich murder of Drummer Lee Rigby.

A senior officer in the Metropolitan Police said there had been a sharp rise in the number of attacks against Muslims.

Commander Simon Letchford said abuse of Muslims may be more widespread than figures suggest as a result of under-reporting and the force had stepped up security at some Islamic centres.

Four arrested over Islamic boarding school fire





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Arrests: Police stand outside Darul Uloom School in Chislehurst, Kent which was subjected to a suspected arson attack over which four teens have been arrested



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Under fire: Servicemen and women stand near the school, which only suffered minor damage from the attack which occurred just before midnight on Saturday



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Attacked: Darul Uloom, a Muslim madrassa or religious school, set in the pretty Kent village of Chislehurst, was target of suspected arson

He said around eight Islamophobic incidents a day were taking place in the capital every day, up from the usual rate of a single daily incident.

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme, he said: 'We have put additional police resources outside a number of premises which we think are vulnerable.'

'Clearly this is a time for Londoners to come together after the tragic murder of Lee Rigby and we would encourage people to remain calm, to provide information to us on anybody who they believe is carrying out these criminal acts.'

'We will do everything we can both to protect premises but also to bring to justice those who break the law.'

In the wake of drummer Rigby's death, British mosques have been receiving advice from an American Islamic group on extra security measures such as the installation of safe rooms and panic alarms.



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The fire comes four days after an Islamic centre, with graffiti saying 'EDL' daubed on it, was burned to the ground in Muswell Hill, north London

ATTACKS ON MUSLIMS UP FROM ONE TO EIGHT A DAY, SAYS MET CHIEF

There has been a sharp rise in the number of attacks against Muslims, a senior officer in Britain's biggest police force has said.

Commander Simon Letchford said abuse of Muslims may be more widespread than figures suggest as a result of under-reporting and the Metropolitan Police had stepped up security at some Islamic centres.

He said around eight Islamophobic incidents a day were taking place in the capital every day, up from the usual rate of a single daily incident.

Mr Letchford urged Londoners to 'stand shoulder to shoulder' in response to the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby in Woolwich.

Four teenagers have been arrested on suspicion of arson in connection with a fire at an Islamic boarding school in Chislehurst, south east London on Saturday evening.

The fire happened just days after an Islamic centre in London's Muswell Hill was burnt to the ground amid suggestions it was a racist attack.

Mr Letchford told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: 'We have put additional police resources outside a number of premises which we think are vulnerable.'

'Clearly this is a time for Londoners to come together after the tragic murder of Lee Rigby and we would encourage people to remain calm, to provide information to us on anybody who they believe is carrying out these criminal acts.'

'We will do everything we can both to protect premises but also to bring to justice those who break the law.'

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) has discussed its revamped security regulations with the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), which also include the construction of transparent fences around mosques, wire screens on windows, designated security officials and three-inch-thick doors.

Ibrahim Hooper, a spokesman for CAIR, told The Observer: 'From the outside, it definitely seems UK mosques are more at risk than anywhere, including the States.'

'There have been a number of recent incidents targeting UK mosques, groups like the English Defence League marching on mosques and a spike in violent right-wing groups.'

Sunday night, Metropolitan Police commissioner Bernard Hogan-Howe said: 'These are difficult times for London's communities.'

'The Met is now investigating suspicious fires at two locations within the Islamic community which have happened in the past few days.'

School principal Mustafa Musa said intruders started the fire in the school teaching area but did not say how the fire was started or if the culprits broke into the building.

London Fire Brigade said the fire was under control in less than an hour after being called.

The £3,000-a-year boarding school was established in 1988 with the purpose of producing 'great scholars and Huffaz (people who have memorised the Koran) to preserve and transmit the eternal message of Allah'.

Its website says: 'The institution helps children to explore and develop their Islamic identity as a natural part of their mental, emotional and personal development.'

The school was built in 1974 and comprises 130 boarding rooms in addition to classrooms, dining hall, assembly hall, prayer hall, gym, playing fields and car parking with 100 spaces, over a 10 acre site.

An extension was built in 2007 consisting of 18 classrooms, a science laboratory, a prayer hall and wudhu (ablution) facilities.