



Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Radicalisation in schools, HC 352

Tuesday, 17 June 2014

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Members present: Keith Vaz (Chair); Ian Austin, Michael Ellis, Paul Flynn, Lorraine Fullbrook, Yasmin Qureshi, Mark Reckless, Mr David Winnick.

Questions 1 - 88

Witness: **Lee Donaghy**, Assistant Principal, Park View school, Birmingham, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Mr Donaghy, thank you very much for coming to give evidence to this Committee at such very short notice. This is a revisit of our recently published inquiry into counter-terrorism and our previous inquiry into the roots of radicalism. We are not today going to explore educational issues, which are matters for our sister committee, the Education Select Committee. We are very interested in the assumptions that have been made by Trojan Horse, namely that extremism has entered the education system in Birmingham and in particular Park View school, where you are the vice-principal. So it is a very narrow look at this issue. In all the evidence that we took—and we sat for a year to look at the two aspects of those two reports—nobody gave evidence to us and suggested that extremism was entering the school system. I know this is a wider issue, but we are concerned with this particular issue, not the issues to do with education in the school.

Various allegations have been made about the way in which the school is run. You are the vice-principal. You are not a governor. Can you just explain why the chair of governors and the principal are not here with you? We appreciate the fact that you have come at short notice, but if you can just tell us why they are not able to be here.

Lee Donaghy: First of all, I am assistant principal rather than vice-principal, which is one notch down from vice-principal. The Committee invited me and I came. It was clear to me that I could bring somebody with me; it was not clear to me whether that person could speak or whether that person would just be here for moral support. The chair of governors is out of the country on holiday at the moment, I believe, and the principal is at school running the school.

Q2 Chair: Indeed. We do not want to do anything on this Committee that disrupts the normal workings of the school.

These allegations about extremism in your school are very serious indeed and there has been a lot of public concern. As you said in the statement you made on television there has been a

lot of controversy, and you made this statement: “We have nothing to hide.” You suggested that we go and talk to parents and pupils and others. Do you recognise this description of extremism entering the school system in Birmingham, in particular in your school? Why should people make these very serious allegations about Park View?

Lee Donaghy: I would like there to be some consensus first of all about what we mean by extremism. To me that means there are practices that are imposed or forced on people against their will. I do not see any evidence of that at all. 99% of our pupils are Muslim and we have a community that wants the school to reflect that inside the school. Everything we do to reflect that is permissive, so we have lunchtime prayers if the pupils wish to pray and about 5% to 10% of them each day take that opportunity; a few more on Fridays. Girls are permitted to wear the hijab if they choose. We also have a part-determination to provide Islamic acts of worship, which happen once a week for all pupils, which pupils are free to withdraw from if their parents choose. We do have a very small number of Christian pupils and this year that number has grown so we have responded to that by providing a Christian act of worship for those pupils. So I do not see any evidence of any practices that are imposed on anybody. Really what the school does is it honours the faith of the pupils; it respects the faith of the pupils inside the school. I think Muslims generally, but certainly in our community, feel marginalised, feel not valued, feel that they somehow have to hide their faith. We allow pupils to express their faith in a way that is confident.

Q3 Chair: We understand that, but just to be clear, this is a state school, not a Muslim school. I do not know many state schools in my constituency where, for example, there is a call to prayer in the school hours or where pupils are segregated. This not of course extremism—this is perfectly fine in respect of faith schools—but is that what happens in your school?

Lee Donaghy: There is no segregation. This has become a kind of accepted truth now.

Chair: There is no segregation?

Lee Donaghy: There is no segregation at all. The EFA report that claims there is segregation was incredibly selective in its use of evidence. It found I think five classrooms where boys and girls were sat apart and boys appeared to be further towards the front than the girls. They equally could have found five classrooms where the opposite was true. They could have found five classrooms where boys were on one side and girls were on the other and if they had come to my classroom they would have seen boys and girls sat on the same tables.

Q4 Chair: It is a fact—I did not go to a mixed school—that when you have a mixed school, when they are much younger they tend to congregate together, but as they get into sixth form there is much more mixing. So it is like any other school in that respect?

Lee Donaghy: Absolutely, yes.

Q5 Chair: Do you have the call to prayer?

Lee Donaghy: The call to prayer is made on the loudspeaker system in the hall and in the area outside when the prayers are outside.

Q6 Chair: Is that because the majority of those at the school are of the Muslim faith?

Lee Donaghy: It is a notification for those who choose to pray. If you are outside playing football and you wish to pray you need to come in now.

Chair: That is a perfectly normal. I have the call to prayer in my constituency, outside in public, and that is a perfectly normal thing to do.

Lee Donaghy: Yes, yes. It is a notification. Because obviously the time varies very slightly each week or as the seasons change, it is just a notification that now is the time to come if you wish to pray.

Q7 Chair: Is it also normal to invite preachers into the school who are there to talk about jihad and other issues, not issues that one would recognise within a state school system, because that is what has been alleged about Park View and that is the interest of this Committee? It is not whether or not they pass their SATs or what qualifications they sit; it is whether or not you are importing in there issues that affect young people's minds. Is it right that you have invited preachers who have been supporting jihad into the schools?

Lee Donaghy: It is not true that we have invited anybody that has spoken about or in support of jihad, whatever you take that term to mean, because it obviously has very different meanings and a very benign meaning within Islam in one interpretation. It is true that we invite speakers from a range of faiths and have over the past few years heard from rabbis, from Christian ministers.

Q8 Chair: How many Christian ministers have been to the school?

Lee Donaghy: I do not have those figures.

Q9 Chair: How many rabbis?

Lee Donaghy: One that I know of, I think probably around the time I joined the school or just before.

Q10 Chair: Those that come from the Muslim faith, what do they come and talk about?

Lee Donaghy: I think there has been one in the last year that you are probably referring to and he spoke on the subject of time management, on the subject of preparing for exams and on the subject of being a responsible citizen, a good Muslim, and being responsible to your community and to your family.

Q11 Chair: It has been put in the public domain and put to me before this evidence session that you have had people there who are supporters or advocates of the Salafi and Wahhabi

sects, as far as the Muslim community is concerned. Is that correct? Do you know what those terms mean?

Lee Donaghy: My understanding of those two terms is probably partial. I do not fully understand what they mean. There is one speaker that I presume you are referring to who is external to the school and who came in in November 2013.

Q12 Chair: Who was that?

Lee Donaghy: Sheikh Shady al-Suleiman, who spoke on the topics I just said to you.

Q13 Chair: What? Salafi and Wahhabi?

Lee Donaghy: No, no. The topics of time management, preparing for exams and responsibility to community and family.

Q14 Chair: So where have these rumours come from? What is it that people have against Park View? What are you doing that nobody likes?

Lee Donaghy: I think there are various different things. One is just plain old Islamaphobia, either witting or unwitting. So people are deliberately twisting things that have happened or casting aspersions that there is somehow no difference between a Muslim and a terrorist, an extremist. Perhaps unwitting as well—people who do not understand the Muslim way of life, the things that Muslims do and believe.

Q15 Chair: So you are telling this Committee very clearly that this is not about extremism or promoting extremism in schools? It is not even about long-term grooming of children to become extremists in the future?

Lee Donaghy: Absolutely not.

Chair: This is just old fashioned prejudice?

Lee Donaghy: I think that is part of it, yes.

Q16 Chair: What is the other part?

Lee Donaghy: I think the overall concern of the people who have become involved in the governance of the school in the last 20 years since the school was placed into special measures in 1996 by Ofsted and the people who have come to work at the school has been the achievement of its pupils. When Ofsted came in 1996, 6% of pupils achieved five A* to C, not including English and maths, at GCSE. Last year 75% of our pupils did, with English and maths.

Q17 Chair: What is your subject?

Lee Donaghy: History.

Q18 Lorraine Fullbrook: Can we just be clear here: are you saying that the Ofsted report on your school has been prejudiced in some respect?

Lee Donaghy: Yes.

Lorraine Fullbrook: You are?

Lee Donaghy: Yes.

Q19 Lorraine Fullbrook: The Ofsted inspection said there was a culture of fear and intimidation that has developed in some schools, not necessarily yours, since the previous inspection and that head teachers have been marginalised: “These schools have been previously outstanding. Head teachers have been marginalised, forced out of their jobs. There was a high level of staff turbulence, low staff morale and a rapid decline in overall effectiveness.”

Would you say that was true of your school?

Lee Donaghy: First of all, we are straying into something we apparently were not going to talk about, which is education. This is about extremism, I believe.

Q20 Lorraine Fullbrook: I am asking specifically about head teachers being marginalised and forced out of their jobs as a result of schools being previously judged good or outstanding, and experiencing high levels of staff turbulence and low staff morale. Forget the overall effectiveness, but would you say that the other things are true?

Lee Donaghy: No.

Chair: You can answer Ms Fullbrook even though it has strayed into education—we are not trying to silence you in any way—because her questions are fully relevant to our discussion.

Lee Donaghy: I do not recognise that at Park View anybody has been sidelined or that anybody has taken on new positions with anything other than full co-operation. We were outstanding in 2012 and then we were invited by the Government to sponsor two other schools. Necessarily, therefore, that means the trust grows; people move into different positions so a few positions have changed. Certainly nobody has been sidelined or forced out of a job at Park View.

Q21 Lorraine Fullbrook: Have you had high levels of staff turnover?

Lee Donaghy: No higher, I believe, than in usual years. We are an inner-city school in a poor area and we have high staff turnover anyway.

Q22 Lorraine Fullbrook: So no different than previously?

Lee Donaghy: Not that I have noticed.

Q23 Lorraine Fullbrook: In the Ofsted report, some of the recommendations refer to school governance. Particularly, “Review the current arrangements for school governance giving serious consideration to mandatory training of all governors; the introduction of professional governors where governance is judged to be weak; requiring all schools to publish a governors’ register of interest; ensure governors in all schools are bound by and follow the prescribed procedures if they wish to change a status or character of a school; and further investigation where there is organised infiltration and manipulation of governing bodies.” Would you recognise that in your school?

Lee Donaghy: Is that a quote from a report?

Lorraine Fullbrook: That is the recommendation from the inspectors.

Lee Donaghy: From Michael Wilshaw. No. I have not noticed a change in the school in terms of the role of religion in the school or in terms of its ethos since 2012.

Q24 Lorraine Fullbrook: I am just talking about the governance of the school. I am not talking about religion here. I am just talking about the governance and the current arrangements and how they need to change with serious consideration given to the recommendations in the report. From what I am hearing from you everything in your school is hunky-dory and you have been victimised. Is that correct?

Lee Donaghy: If you want to boil it down to a single sentence, no, not everything is hunky-dory; not everything is hunky-dory in any school.

Q25 Lorraine Fullbrook: So governance is not a problem in your school? Staff turnover is not a problem in your school? You have not seen anybody marginalised or lose their job in your school? So what, then, is the problem? What do you perceive the problem is?

Lee Donaghy: Staff turnover is no worse than it ever was.

Q26 Lorraine Fullbrook: As you said. So what exactly is the problem? We have eliminated those things. You do not have a problem with your governing body or the governance of the school and you do not recognise any of the recommendations in the report for the governance of the school. That does not apply to you, it would appear. So what is it that you take objection to with this report about your school? If you do not think your school is hunky-dory, what exactly are the problems?

Lee Donaghy: Like any school there are things that you want to do differently. I do not think I am prepared to go into the nitty-gritty of what internally we would discuss about what things we would like to do differently within the school. I do not recognise the criticisms that are made in the Ofsted report.

Q27 Lorraine Fullbrook: So you must have been victimised, then?

Lee Donaghy: Yes, I would say so. Yes.

Lorraine Fullbrook: Thank you.

Q28 Chair: Thank you. You have no objection to people coming to visit the school? Ofsted have been in there, presumably?

Lee Donaghy: No, no. Michael Wilshaw came in 2012. One of Michael Gove's advisers came in the same year. The Schools Commission came.

Q29 Chair: Which adviser?

Lee Donaghy: Sam Freedman.

Q30 Yasmin Qureshi: Mr Donaghy, I read your article in *The Guardian* newspaper and I think you more or less have said today what you said in your article. I know this Committee is looking at the issue of extremism and so on. Do you sense that the way the media has been reporting this whole so-called Trojan Horse, for the last God knows how many weeks, represents the issues that are happening in Birmingham at all?

Lee Donaghy: Not at all. No. There has been a huge amount of anonymous allegation. Some of the things that the Chairman referred to confuse—I am sure not deliberately—some of the allegations that were made about things said in assemblies. There have been allegations that things were said in assemblies, but we are not given a date, not given the member of staff who said it, not naming the member of staff who is claiming that they heard it. Nobody at the school knows when or if these things were said. None of the pupils can tell you that these were said. There have been a lot of anonymous, undated, very vague allegations. The two people who have spoken out publicly left the school more than 10 years ago and both left under disciplinary procedures.

To address something that the Chair asked, I did not manage to say what the other part of what is going on here is. In 1996, the school achieved 6% five A* to C GCSE. Then the community in that part of the city said that was not good enough for their children; other people thought that was good enough for their children, but the people in the community felt it was not good enough. They made an effort to get involved in the running of the schools. They wanted those schools to improve and they were impatient about it. People who were challenged by that, who had previously let down a generation of young Muslim Pakistani people in that part of the city, were quite discomfited. When you challenge somebody's low expectations and you are saying that these people can achieve as highly as any other, then some people are going to fall by the wayside; they are going to be discomfited by that and perhaps then will have motivation to make spurious allegations.

But, no, the way the school has been painted in the media bears very little, if any, resemblance to the school I work at.

Q31 Yasmin Qureshi: Are you surprised? We know that there have been articles written—front-page headlines in the *Daily Mail* and *Express* and *The Sun* and some of the other

papers—that have often attributed things to Muslims and have turned out to be complete lies. Is this sort of exercise happening here as well in Birmingham?

Lee Donaghy: Yes. I feel there has been a wilful misrepresentation of things we have done and, yes, some things have been outright lies. To turn to the issue of the Ofsted inspections, there is absolutely no way that Ofsted inspectors could have come into the school in that atmosphere and have made a judgment on a school in an impartial way. It just was not possible for them to do that. So while we would agree with the spirit of a lot of what is said in the report—there is nothing that they say we need to do better than we would say we do not want to get better at—there is absolutely no way that the school represented in that report is the one I work at, no way.

Q32 Michael Ellis: Mr Donaghy, just going back to something you said in answer to an earlier question, you said you thought that Ofsted was prejudiced against your school. Don't you think that is a rather extraordinary allegation to make? After all, there are 20,000 schools in this country and Ofsted have an oversight of all of them. Why would they have a prejudice against your school and not some other school? Is it not more likely that what is happening is that they are painting a picture that you do not like and therefore it is convenient to accuse them of being prejudiced against you as opposed to giving an accurate picture?

Lee Donaghy: No. As I said to the previous question, the climate in which they came into the school, with the whole Trojan Horse allegations swirling around in the media, gave those inspectors an impossible job. They could not have been impartial and certainly their lines of questioning were not impartial. They followed very narrow agendas. Their use of evidence was very selective.

Q33 Michael Ellis: I notice you have blamed Ofsted and you have blamed the media. I want to go into a couple of things that you have said.

First of all, when asked, I think by the Chair but certainly one of my colleagues, about extremism, your personal definition of extremism was more akin to the issue of permissiveness or imposition. You said in answer to the issue about extremism that no one was forced to do anything; there was a permissive environment and people could do as they chose. What about the issue of what has been described in some quarters as the promotion of British values? What do you want to say about that? Do you consider that your school promotes what are loosely called British values: respect for others, justice for all, the rights of minorities and women, and so on?

Lee Donaghy: I think the big issue here is one of definitions. I would say that the definition or facet of extremism I gave, which is about forcing people to do things, is clearly only one facet of it. Perhaps another facet is doing things that are considered to be outside the norm, towards the fringes of acceptability. I do not recognise that we do anything that is at the fringe of acceptability.

The other problem with your question is British values. The things you have just said there are not British; they are universal and also they are reflected in Islam. If we respect the pupils' faith and we give them a proper appreciation of their faith, then they will recognise that those values are absolutely aligned with British values.

Q34 Michael Ellis: Yes, those are universal values. I am just interested in one of the things that you said about how Ofsted inspectors went into five classrooms and apparently saw female students at the back of the class and male students at the front. I am not an Ofsted inspector and I do not know how prevalent that is, but clearly it was of some concern to the Ofsted inspectors, whom I presume do go into schools on a regular basis and who found that to be unusual. Do you not think that going into five classrooms and finding that state of affairs to be the case is unusual or of concern?

Lee Donaghy: It was not the Ofsted inspectors who found that. It was in the Education Funding Agency report, which is an altogether different and even more horrendous experience.

Q35 Michael Ellis: That report, then. Do you accept that that was correct? Or do you not accept that?

Lee Donaghy: Do I accept that they saw boys and girls sitting apart? Yes, I do. They made mention of the fact that they saw five classrooms where boys sat at the front and girls sat at the back. They did not make mention that they went into dozens of other classrooms and saw the opposite or completely different configurations of seating. If they had come into my classroom—I was teaching during the inspection—they would have seen boys and girls sat on desks together. It is a selective use of evidence. They said that could—and note the word “could”—constitute less favourable treatment of girls. If girls were being less favourably treated at Park View they would not be achieving more highly than boys, which is the case.

Q36 Michael Ellis: You talked about a 6% A* to C grade. What are your stats now?

Lee Donaghy: 75% with English and maths in 2013.

Michael Ellis: You are to be commended for that.

Lee Donaghy: There is no school in the country with our intake that gets better results.

Q37 Michael Ellis: That is an extremely impressive turnaround and I want to take the opportunity of congratulating you, the student body and the staff on that.

As far as you are concerned, though, I want to absolutely make this clear. You say all of the concerns expressed in the funding agency report, the Ofsted report and the media reports are entirely unfounded, based on prejudice. You have no concern about the values in that school and you think they are properly reflective of any school in the country, on average?

Lee Donaghy: Absent of us being able to go through absolutely every single allegation or finding that is made—I can’t make a blanket statement to say that I disagree with absolutely every single one of them—if you read the Ofsted report and the recommendations it makes about what we need to improve, we would agree with the spirit of those. Nobody at the school would say we do not want to get better in those things, but

to label any of that as extremism is wrong. There is no evidence of extremism being promoted or tolerated at the school.

Q38 Ian Austin: Teaching pupils in a school in which 99% are from one particular faith that is not the majority faith in the country as a whole, what challenges does that present in terms of preparing pupils for life in Britain generally in a multicultural, multid denominational community?

Lee Donaghy: The school is multicultural. It is 80% Pakistani, 10% Somali, a mix of Bangladeshi, North African, Arab. It is multicultural and multi-ethnic. It presents the same kinds of issue, I imagine, as working in a school on an estate where the majority of the pupils are white working class. Clearly we want to take pupils beyond their everyday and immediate experiences and give them other experiences, give them knowledge and understanding of other faiths, other people and other opportunities that there are in Britain. We do that first of all through equipping them to go on to the next stage of their education; we do that by providing extra-curricular activities and trips and all sorts—all manner—of things that, if you look at our school newsletters, you will see pupils are able to do.

Nobody at school, and certainly not the parents, not the governors and not the staff, is content, as has been alleged, to isolate our pupils, to close them off, to somehow make them withdraw and be separate from society. We want them to achieve as well and have the same opportunities as any pupil in any school. We know that there are things we need to do that are different to the challenges in other schools. That relates to, if you want to use the term, “cultural capital”, absolutely, and we do that.

Q39 Ian Austin: One of the important things that should happen at school is that children mix and meet kids from other backgrounds and are educated alongside those children. I am not saying schools should be 99% white working class either, but I would have thought the experience of a child in a school that would be 99% from the white working class would be closer to what they are likely to experience in wider society having left school than life in a school that is 99% Muslim. Is that right?

Lee Donaghy: I do not know.

Q40 Ian Austin: Let’s leave that to one side. On the specific allegations that were made, it has been reported that at an assembly Monzoor Hussein described the US as the root of all evil. Is that true?

Lee Donaghy: To my knowledge, categorically untrue.

Q41 Ian Austin: Has it been investigated since that allegation has been made? What attempt has been made to find out if that is true?

Lee Donaghy: I am not familiar with any investigation that has taken place. I don’t know.

Q42 Ian Austin: How do you know it is not true?

Lee Donaghy: Because he has told me it is not true and I believe him.

Q43 Ian Austin: Sheikh al-Suleiman apparently has expressed extreme ideas such as stoning homosexuals and sympathy for al-Qaeda. You said he came to talk about time management, but is it true that he has expressed those views? Did the school check what religious views he espoused before it invited him in to do an assembly?

Lee Donaghy: He was recommended to speak to the school by a member of staff. First of all, the Home Office has given him permission to enter the country, restricted I believe, dozens of times in the past 10 years. So straightaway there is an expectation that this is not a person who is a person of concern. He has spoken at numerous other establishments and we had evidence of that. He was met with and he was briefed that he was addressing a majority-Islamic audience, but not totally Islamic, and so must not say anything controversial or talk just about Islam. He spoke, as I said, about individual responsibility, about timekeeping.

So at the point where he came and spoke to our pupils we were not aware of his having expressed any extreme views. Subsequently, it emerged that he has. I don't know the context in which he said these things, but there are things you read in the newspapers that are attributed to him—and I think Michael Gove said them in the Commons last week—that are clearly unacceptable. There is absolutely no way that we would have invited him in had we known he had said those things. Clearly, we could have done more to vet him, but we did vet him and we subsequently checked with Prevent, who told us that he was not a person of concern. Had we known he had said those things, then we would obviously not have put him in front of our pupils.

Q44 Ian Austin: All right. An ex-teacher told Channel 5 that some pupils had complained that they had been told in sex education that girls could not refuse sex to their husbands once they were married. Is that true?

Lee Donaghy: It is not, no. Again, I am not 100% familiar with the entire story, but my understanding is that there was a misunderstanding among pupils when an historical reference to cultural practices was made. As soon as it became clear to us that some pupils had taken that and were being a bit silly with it, and the girls felt uncomfortable, we had an assembly with the whole year-group of boys and we made clear to them that sex without informed consent is rape.

Q45 Ian Austin: Did a biology teacher tell pupils that evolution is “not what we believe”?

Lee Donaghy: I don't know.

Q46 Ian Austin: Has that been looked into since the allegation was made?

Lee Donaghy: I don't know. Again, that is one of the allegations where we do not know who is supposed to have said it, so it is very difficult to investigate.

Q47 Ian Austin: It was supposed to have been a biology teacher.

Lee Donaghy: We don't know who. It was in a biology lesson, but we have nine or 10 science teachers now and we have had numerous science teachers. We do not know when it was supposed to have happened and we do not know who was supposed to have said it.

Q48 Ian Austin: More broadly, has teaching in biology or sex education been restricted or altered, as has been reported or suggested, to comply with "conservative Islamic teaching"? That is what Ofsted suggested.

Lee Donaghy: No.

Chair: Thank you.

Q49 Ian Austin: I just have a couple of other questions. Has Tahir Alam ever tried to influence the content of the curriculum?

Lee Donaghy: Not to my knowledge. Not in an improper way, anyway, because it is set in certain policies.

Q50 Chair: Can you just explain who this gentleman is?

Ian Austin: He is the chair of the governors.

Lee Donaghy: The governors set policy. They set, for example, sex and relationships education policy. So the governors clearly influence that because they set the policy and we then follow the policy.

Q51 Ian Austin: Could we see the policy? Could you send it to us?

Lee Donaghy: I am sure I could.

Q52 Ian Austin: I would be interested to see how it would compare with policies on similar subjects in other schools. Just out of interest, why are none of the governors available? You said the chairman of governors was abroad.

Lee Donaghy: None of the governors were invited. I was the only person invited.

Q53 Ian Austin: One final question. It has been suggested to me that governors are using, or are able to use, school resources to fund a judicial review into the reports. Is that true? Are the governors planning to use school resources for that?

Lee Donaghy: I don't know.

Q54 Chair: You were telling this Committee, Mr Donaghy, that there is no evidence that you have seen of extremism in any way entering the school system in Park View, in your

school. What would happen if you did find out that this was happening in the school, that people were attempting to influence young children and pupils at your school to be involved in not extremism as such, but grooming them for extremism in future? What would you do? What would the governors do?

Lee Donaghy: They would investigate and they would deal with it, if it was brought to their attention. The example your colleague mentioned about the teaching of creationism in science, the person who made that allegation did not see fit to make it at the time, did not think it was serious enough at the time. If issues are brought to our attention as a leadership team, as a governing body, then they would be investigated and people would either be spoken to or disciplined or dismissed. We would use the disciplinary procedures.

Q55 Chair: You know how serious it would be if there was extremism in our schools, primary or secondary. This Committee has received no evidence of this in our past two inquiries, hence your presence before us today. You would also regard that as being very serious?

Lee Donaghy: Absolutely. I have been there for four years. The careers of the people that have built up this school are dedicated or founded upon entering teaching precisely to stop people going into extremism. The acting principal, Monzoor Hussein, entered teaching because he saw the Bradford riots in 1995 and he did not want Muslim young people going into extremism. He entered the profession to stop that happening. There is absolutely no way that we would tolerate that at all.

Q56 Chair: Are you aware that the local MP, Mr Byrne, was at a meeting on Sunday when the parents of pupils at your school voted overwhelmingly for the governors to resign and a new governing body to take its place?

Lee Donaghy: I was not aware there was a vote. His version of the events at the meeting is slightly different from the version I have heard from one or two members of staff who were there. My understanding is that there is a consensus among parents, according to Liam Byrne, that the position of the governing body is untenable. I think that is a great shame, a great tragedy. This governing body that is in place now is the same governing body that was in place in 2012, the same governing body that was invited by Michael Gove and his Department for Education to sponsor other schools. I think they have to be part of the solution.

Q57 Chair: Thank you very much for coming here today. We are very grateful to you for coming at such short notice. I am sure you will be eager to go back and continue to teach your history to your pupils.

Lee Donaghy: Thank you very much.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Mark Rogers**, Chief Executive, Birmingham City Council, and **Councillor Brigid Jones**, Birmingham City Councillor, Cabinet Member for Children and Family Services, gave evidence.

Q58 Chair: Mr Rogers, Councillor Jones, thank you very much for coming to give evidence to this Committee on this subject. This is a very narrow and very brief look at our previous inquiries into counter-terrorism and the roots of radicalism. There is no reason why you should have read these great tomes. I think all Select Committees believe everyone commits them to memory, but they are an investigation into those two very important areas. The reason why we have you here before us, and I know that the leader of the council was not able to come because of a long-standing commitment in Liverpool—

Councillor Jones: He does send his apologies for that.

Chair: Thank you. We are here just to look at this narrow point about extremism. Obviously, we have heard evidence—Councillor Jones, if I could start with you—from Park View school. Do you have evidence of extremism entering the education system, specifically in that school but more generally in other schools in Birmingham?

Councillor Jones: I have heard the allegations, as I believe we all have, over the last few weeks and months. From the Ofsted reports, any direct evidence of extremism has yet to be presented to me, but, of course, we are still waiting for Ian Kershaw's inquiry, which was set up by the city council to investigate this, to report back and we are waiting for Peter Clarke's inquiry set up by the Secretary of State as well, so I would not like to prejudice the outcome of those.

Q59 Chair: As far as we are concerned, we want to differentiate between what happens in a school and the issue of extremism and grooming of young children. That is what this Committee is interested in. Obviously, if the standards are not up to scratch that is not for us; it is for others.

Mr Rogers, you have taken over as chief executive of the largest local authority in Europe and this must come as a bit of a shock to you that people regard— The Secretary of State and Parliament are not quite up in arms about it, but are very concerned about it and it is why you are here before us today. Have you seen any evidence of extremism in schools in Birmingham? Real hard evidence?

Mark Rogers: No, I haven't. No, Chairman, I haven't and in fact I am concerned and maybe slightly more robust in my concern that a delineation has not been properly drawn between issues of governance and issues of extremism as defined by Prevent. So I have been presented with no evidence hitherto, just as my councillor colleague here hasn't, of extremism if you define extremism in terms of Prevent, which is the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism.

Q60 Chair: Councillor Jones, there is no party political issue here regarding the governance of schools in Birmingham because two administrations have run Birmingham from 2004 to the present day and you took over recently as the chair of the children's services. Parliament was told that the letter warning the Secretary of State—the famous presentation by the local headmaster who said that there was extremism in schools in Birmingham—was written to the then leader of the council in 2010. What have you done as Chair of Education and Children's Services in order to create mechanisms to deal with the issue of extremism. Bearing in mind we accept what you have said, you have not seen any yourself, but in anticipation, what are the structures you have put in place?

Councillor Jones: With respect to the presentation that was passed, allegedly, to the former leader of the council, I was not made aware of this until I read about this in the press. I took over this role in May 2012 as Cabinet Member for Children and Family Services. Until October 2013, I had heard nothing regarding the types of allegation that we are talking about. As such, there had been nothing specific put in place in response to the presentation because it had not been brought to my attention. However, the council has been engaging in Prevent since its inception several years ago.

Our role in it is much reduced compared to what it has been—

Q61 Chair: To what extent?

Councillor Jones: We have received very significant cuts in funding since 2011, to the tune of around £2 million over the last three years, to our Prevent programme. So a number of things that we had previously done we have had to roll back on. However, the things that we have prioritised have been in line with what West Midlands police have advised and we do engage with the boards there. We have what we call the Tapestry programme, which is a theatre production that runs in schools that counters both right-wing extremism and potential Islamic extremism. We also make sure that Prevent is included in all DSP—designated senior practitioner—training. It is worth noting that of the 21 schools that were inspected by Ofsted, all their DSPs had undertaken that training that we had set out. In addition to that, Prevent is included in our fCAF—that is our common assessment framework—and our Pre-CAF procedures, which are standard child safeguarding procedures that we use in the city council, and anybody who uses those procedures will be aware of Prevent.

Q62 Chair: Mr Rogers, what is very interesting in looking at the debate that has followed the Secretary of State's comments—which we of course take seriously, because when the Education Secretary comes before the House and talks about extremism in Birmingham we get worried about it, and I am sure you are worried and concerned about it—is the absence of the voice of the Muslim community. I have not seen the community, as such, come forward either to defend the existing arrangements or to criticise and ask for change. Of course, the local Members of Parliament have done so very articulately and eloquently, but who do you engage with as the chief executive of the council when you are countering radicalism and extremism?

Mark Rogers: I think it works at a number of levels. The mosques between themselves clearly can convene community and faith leaders and elders and do so. That is one place to engage with them, but most of the activity does go on at a more grass-roots level. I have to say that I am relatively new to this particular post. I can't claim to have found my way into all of the community structures yet, but what is clear is that both councillors and local MPs are in fact using their democratic mandate to go and have the dialogues, to go and find out what people think on the ground. My school improvement officers are out there and very active in the schools and in the school communities as well, trying to provide reassurance.

Q63 Chair: Thank you for that. The local MPs seem to be divided on this issue. In the same party they seem to be divided. There is no clear line as to whether, "Yes, we should look into this and this is an issue of extremism," or, "No, we should not because it isn't and just keep away." Do you find that?

Mark Rogers: That is a leading question about our local MPs, isn't it? What I would like to say is that we are not divided about this in the city council. We are clear that there are probably three questions that are emerging and they are not questions confined to Birmingham either. Whatever the truth—

Q64 Chair: What are the three questions?

Mark Rogers: The first one for me is, where do we draw a reasonable distinction between what Michael Wilshaw has defined as a narrow faith-based ideology finding its way into schools inappropriately from extremism, as in the radicalisation with the intention of becoming a violent extremist? The first debate is, can we get some clarity that distinguishes those things, because our communities are most upset by the lack of definition and the conflation of those? I think the second issue that we have goes back to the 1944 Education Act, which is, what is the role of faith in non-denominational schools? As you were asking your previous witness, there is a very serious question to be asked about how faith plays out in mono-cultural or mono-denominational communities. I think that is very important. Then the third issue for me is the one that has been referred to by one of your colleagues already—

Chair: Mr Ellis.

Mark Rogers: Mr Ellis, which is this vexed question of British values. On the back of what very clearly, for me, started out as questions about governance, what has now occurred is a national debate has risen to the surface—and it is appropriate that it is a national debate because, frankly, it is not about Birmingham; it includes Birmingham, but it is not just about us—about those three things. As the new chief executive coming in with, I hope, a relatively fresh pair of eyes, what I am seeing is that we have lost sight of what the Trojan Horse letter prompted.

Q65 Chair: Do you think it was a fake?

Mark Rogers: I have been asked that question before. I have yet to be convinced that it is an authentic letter from one plotter to another. I think what it sets out is a set of issues that somebody had some concerns about and wanted action over.

Q66 Chair: Yes. Finally from me, Councillor Jones, you have no problems, as chair of the education and children's committee, with state schools as opposed to faith schools having a call to prayer in the middle of the day and segregation of boys and girls? Do you have any issues with that?

Councillor Jones: I have an issue with segregation of boys and girls, of course. I think that is unacceptable under any circumstance. Birmingham is the city that Malala Yousafzai fled to. Having been denied an education as a woman, she fled to our city because it was a place of tolerance in a nation of tolerance and a nation where men and women and boys and girls are treated absolutely the same, whoever they are. To think that that might have been going on in our classrooms is absolutely abhorrent to me. Should evidence be presented that that has been happening, I think that is wholly unacceptable, but Park View, of course, is an academy and I think you would have to ask the Secretary of State what he intends to do about that particular instance.

Q67 Chair: What about the call to prayer?

Councillor Jones: The call to prayer? We are in a multicultural society in Birmingham. Birmingham is an incredible city, which is why I live there. More than 1 million people have come there from all over the world over the last 200 years to make their lives there. We are incredibly diverse. You will find religions in Birmingham and you will find practices in Birmingham you will not find in other areas of the country.

Q68 Chair: But it is fine to have it in a state school?

Councillor Jones: I think we have to accommodate for all those religions that we find in the city.

Mark Rogers: Chairman, can I just add I have just recently changed authorities? I have moved from Solihull, which is next door to Birmingham, and, as I left, there was a small controversy raging at St George and St Teresa Roman Catholic voluntary-aided school about the tolling of the mass bell during the day because it was annoying the neighbours, but the tolling of the mass bell during the day was to call the faithful to mass held during school hours. I think another important issue for me is that the call to prayer in a school with predominantly Muslim children is not being seen in the broader context of other calls to prayer by other faiths. What is happening here is the need to understand why it is that only one faith is being discussed.

Q69 Michael Ellis: Can I go back to the Trojan Horse—as it is called—letter? When was Birmingham City Council first aware of the allegations that are the subject of this whole inquiry? When was it first aware as a council?

Councillor Jones: The Trojan Horse letter itself was sent in a brown envelope, unsigned, to the leader of the council at the very end of November 2013.

Michael Ellis: Six months-plus ago?

Councillor Jones: Yes.

Q70 Michael Ellis: Why was no action taken until the Trojan Horse letter was passed to the Department for Education, who then asked Ofsted to inspect the schools in question?

Councillor Jones: That is not an entirely correct statement. If I just go through—

Michael Ellis: It is not a statement. It is a question.

Councillor Jones: Okay. Action was taken when we received the Trojan Horse letter. It was passed to me initially because I am responsible for schools. What I did then was I forwarded it to the head of legal services and the then chief executive of the council—Mark has only been with us a few months—and suggested that we take it to the police. We did that immediately. A strategy meeting was held in mid-December, I believe, with the police to look at what action should be taken, if any, regarding it. The police were very clear with us that they did not believe there was any basis for further involvement in the letter. It contains many contradictions and many inaccuracies about things that we know to be fact in Birmingham.

Q71 Michael Ellis: Were you objecting with the police to the letter or to its content? Was your focus with the police on, “This is a letter that we don’t like,” or was it something that you asked the police whether it was an issue that they would get involved in as far as the schools were concerned?

Councillor Jones: The reason we did not put it straight in the bin, as people often do with anonymous letters, is because it referred to some things that we know to be true and know to have happened. However, the difference with the Trojan Horse letter is it alleges that those things happened as part of a co-ordinated plot and that was the aspect that was new to us. We passed it to the police because obviously that is of concern to us. The police believed that the letter itself lacked any credibility. You would have to check this with West Midlands police. What I understand is they believe it lacked credibility and, therefore, it did not warrant further investigation.

When it came to the allegations within it, however, we did then conduct an audit investigation at the city council with regards to some of the allegations made against the city council within the letter. An audit returned a verdict that there was nothing for us to be concerned about. We then became concerned about the community cohesion implications because there was a threat within the copy of the letter that we received to forward it to the press should we fail to take action. The copy we received also asked us to inform the person that we were taking action, but, it being anonymous, we were unable to fulfil that request. We held strategy meetings with the police on an almost weekly basis.

Q72 Michael Ellis: About the school or about the schools, plural?

Councillor Jones: About the situation, substantive. That would be about the letter itself, about some of the concerns within it—

Q73 Michael Ellis: Sorry, Councillor Jones, I just want to clarify. If you are objecting with the police to the letter and the police take the view, “Well, there is nothing about the letter that we think is actionable,” that is one thing, but I am asking you now about the issue of the schools and action that you may or may not have taken in respect of the schools, irrespective of the letter. It was something that brought an alleged issue to your attention.

Councillor Jones: With those schools, all of those were on our radar for some issue or another. We were already aware of some of the issues that had been going on. For instance, some of the allegations regarding SATs results had already been investigated. Some of the allegations about forgeries were the subject of a police investigation. We had already taken action with most of those schools.

Q74 Michael Ellis: My final question, Mr Rogers, is to you. Ofsted criticised Birmingham City Council’s oversight of the local authority running schools in Birmingham. I appreciate that you may not accept that criticism—I don’t know—but Ofsted criticised the oversight. Why do you think oversight failed?

Mark Rogers: You are right, I do not necessarily agree with Ofsted and, therefore, I do not necessarily agree that oversight has failed. What I think is very interesting, and having directly asked Sir Michael the question myself as to why we had not been inspected by them, it is because Ofsted had no concerns about the performance of Birmingham schools to the extent where it would trigger their inspection interests. I then have to work out why it is that our oversight comes into question. I think our oversight comes into question because the nature of the 21 inspections, 18 of which the Secretary of State commissioned and three of which Ofsted commissioned off its own bat, took a particular turn. We have already discussed that particular turn, which was, were they failing in their responsibilities to protect children from radicalisation and extremism? One of the reasons that I take very mild exception to what Ofsted has found at this stage is that in many ways a new agenda was retrospectively fitted into Birmingham.

Q75 Michael Ellis: Thank you. One thing that has not received much attention is the fact that the pupils of that school have received 75% grades and that is an achievement that has gone unremarked in many quarters and I think that should be noted.

Mark Rogers: Chairman, if you would indulge me: 21 inspections, three schools outstanding, one school good, 11 requiring improvements but safeguarding standards met, six schools in special measures, one already in special measures that the council is taking action over. The whole picture is rarely presented, 21 schools from 436.

Chair: I am glad to give you the opportunity to do so and time does not permit me to hear a discourse from Leicester about our inspections.

Q76 Mr Winnick: You referred to the recent history of Birmingham, Councillor Jones. Would it not be right to say, looking at the broad picture and following on the replies Mr Rogers has given to Mr Ellis, that, like other boroughs in the West Midlands including my own of course, Birmingham has a remarkable history of tolerance and diversity and something to be proud of, Councillor Jones?

Councillor Jones: That is the reason I choose to live there.

Q77 Mr Winnick: Including, of course, the reaction in 1974 when the atrocities occurred and the determination of the council and so many others that the Irish not be penalised because of the actions of a few criminals.

Councillor Jones: We have an incredibly rich history within the city, which is why I am very proud to represent it.

Q78 Mr Winnick: As you say, you can be very proud of it, as indeed my borough. The Chair referred previously to the differences—to the previous witness at least—between some of the Members of Parliament over the issue, the reason you are both here today. Is that not an understandable part of the democratic process—that Members of Parliament, even of the same party, can take different approaches to what has occurred pretty recently over the controversy in schools?

Councillor Jones: I would agree with that statement. I think it is also worth referring back to the Chairman's earlier question about the Muslim community, which, of course, is not one community but many different communities from several different backgrounds within Birmingham, which does not speak with one voice in the same way the white community does not speak with one voice.

Q79 Paul Flynn: Is extremism in the eye of the beholder in this case?

Councillor Jones: Prevent has a very clear definition of extremism. I think there has been some confusion between extremism and religious conservatism and those are different things. There has also been some confusion between extremism and bad governance, in my opinion, and I think there are some actions taken because of people's religion, but also some actions taken by people who happened to share one religion. Within the long ongoing dialogue about this, much has been confused between those different things.

Q80 Paul Flynn: Is the ideal that we should all be working towards a school community that is as homogenous as the rest of the local community and that schools of this kind are likely to concentrate into mono-ethnic and mono-religious groups?

Councillor Jones: I personally think that schools should reflect the community they come from, mono-cultural communities of any sort, if they have a reason behind them. Often within Birmingham that is related to poverty and deprivation over many years and this administration has made it its founding principle to break the cycle of poverty that many communities are trapped in. That does drive a lot of the segregation within the city and a lot of the segregation that you see within our schools. It is no coincidence a lot of the poor

schools are located in areas that are highly deprived. I think, until we break some of those underlying structural things within our society, we are going to struggle to see the truly mixed schools that we would all want to see within our city.

Q81 Paul Flynn: Perhaps it is as reasonable to expect the Bullingdon Club in Eton to become homogenous, which they have lamentably failed to do, but don't you think the example of what I would call a—

Chair: I think that is a bit beyond our terms of reference.

Councillor Jones: They are not within my purview.

Paul Flynn: The experience in Northern Ireland was the religious segregation in schools entrenched prejudice rather than eliminated it, and that is something we should bear in mind in planning school communities.

Chair: Indeed.

Paul Flynn: Okay.

Q82 Ian Austin: I have a couple of questions for Councillor Jones and a couple of questions for Mr Rogers, if that is okay. The first thing I would like to ask is, what observations do you have about the limitations of the LEA's role in scrutinising schools or, in fact, the absence of any local oversight in respect of academies when concerns like this are raised, given that, first, they are academies; secondly, the LEA is much smaller; and, thirdly, there is no one between the chair of governors and the Secretary of State?

Councillor Jones: As a former teacher, Mark may like to comment after myself as well. It is an ongoing frustration for me. We have 436 schools in Birmingham. Of course, within this we are talking about just five that have been of concern. Roughly a quarter of those are academy within the city, but over the last few years we have seen a rollback across the whole school sector in the expected role of the local authority and in some of our responsibilities, mostly to academies but also to maintained schools as well to some extent. It is a problem for me in terms of meeting parents' expectations that they have for education in our city and in terms of responding to them and taking action on schools when we need to.

My predecessor in the role did not have a belief in issuing IEBs on schools when they fall into difficulty. Since I took office, in the last two years, I have issued more than 20 where I think schools have problems, but my ability to do so is limited by the Department for Education, whose approval we must solicit before we can impose an IEB, for example. That has limited our ability to intervene in at least one school where we have been very concerned.

We also have budgetary problems. Birmingham City Council is losing two-thirds of its controllable budget over an eight-year period. When a school goes academy it takes with it a top-slice of money from the local authority. Much as I would love to do more things with schools, our ability to do so financially is being massively curtailed by the cuts that we are facing, mainly from central Government.

I do believe we need more local oversight of schools. I think it is a very confusing picture for parents in Birmingham, particularly over recent times. The fact that four of the schools that have caused the greatest concern are academies has been rarely reported and that has meant that a lot of people have come direct to us looking for help. Of course, we desperately want to help because we are their elected representatives, but we have had to redirect them to the Secretary of State.

Q83 Ian Austin: Just very briefly, setting aside the issues we have been discussing, by any measure, taking a school from 6% five A* to C, excluding English and maths, to 75% is an impressive achievement.

Councillor Jones: It is exceptional. Yes.

Q84 Ian Austin: But should it be exceptional? I think that is the level we ought to be aiming at. I am an MP in Dudley. We have one school that does 86%. I say to the other heads, “If we can do it why can’t you? There is nothing special about this school particularly.” What lessons do you draw from their academic track record? What do you think other schools in Birmingham should be aiming to achieve? What can you do to help them get there?

Councillor Jones: In Birmingham we have recognised we have some fantastic country-leading head teachers with amazing skills within the city and we have some other schools that are not performing so well. Until last year, I believe we were bucking the national trend in terms of schools results across the board. We have set up primary school to school improvement partnerships across the city, which have been evaluated independently as achieving excellent results in terms of turning around schools. We did have a similar set up in secondary that we are looking at strengthening in the future. We are changing the way we do school improvement in the city, away from sending in local authority advisers to brokering partnerships between schools so excellent practice can be shared.

There is a strong sense of family within schools within Birmingham as well. We have set up the Birmingham Education Partnership with the aid of two outstanding head teachers in the city to provide co-ordination, a single voice for schools and leadership where the local authority either is not the best place to do that, as quite often we are not, or where we are not able to because of new legislation. The Birmingham Education Partnership contains around 300 of our 400 schools at present and is still expanding. They have a strong focus on school improvement and we are looking to support that to get all schools to a standard we would like them to be and our children deserve, quite frankly.

Q85 Ian Austin: Mr Rogers, I just have two very quick questions. Do you think it would be appropriate for school resources to be available to fund a judicial review mounted by the governors at Park View? I know it is an academy, so it is not a matter for you.

Mark Rogers: Although it is not confined to academies to challenge inspection results, is it? I do not think it is appropriate, to use a cliché, to take books out of the classroom, no. I think if there a good cause to mount a challenge then other means need to be found to fund that, but, no, I could not support the funding of a challenge through resources that should be in the classroom.

Q86 Ian Austin: Finally, apparently, staff who left—I may be wrong on this, but I think—before the school became an academy have confidentiality agreements, more commonly termed gagging clauses. Is that right? Is the council in a position to lift them?

Mark Rogers: I do not think that we will need to lift them. I think we have an agreement that people are entitled, if they have something to whistle-blow, to whistle-blow. Confidentiality clauses do not override an individual's right and responsibility to speak out.

Q87 Ian Austin: As far as you are concerned, the council is doing nothing to prevent people coming forward and saying whatever they think they might need to say in relation to this school or other schools?

Mark Rogers: I hope this does not sound like the usual bureaucrat's qualification, but I have no reason to believe that we are doing anything that would prevent people speaking up and speaking out.

Q88 Chair: Thank you very much for coming in. You have no evidence to give us of extremism in Birmingham schools today?

Mark Rogers: No.

Chair: Thank you very much.