

INTRODUCTION

A plot to Islamicise schools?

This is a book about multicultural Britain and its discontents. Some of the issues it raises were recently highlighted in the independent review by Dame Louise Casey into Opportunity and Integration. ‘Discrimination and disadvantage’, she wrote, is ‘feeding a sense of grievance and unfairness, isolating communities from modern British society and all it has to offer’.⁵ This is the general context for more specific concerns about underachievement in schools – most recently expressed about white working class boys, but also associated with ethnic minority pupils, especially those from Muslim religious backgrounds. Indeed, Dame Louise connected the issues, writing that she also found other, equally worrying things, ‘including high levels of social and economic isolation in some places and cultural and religious practices in communities that are not only holding some of our citizens back but run contrary to British values and sometimes our laws’.⁶

This narrative about disadvantage being self-produced within some communities has grown over the last decade. It is argued to derive from

⁵ *The Casey Review: a review into opportunity and integration*. An independent report for the Department of Communities and Local Government, 5 December 2016. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-casey-review-a-review-into-opportunity-and-integration, page 4.

⁶ *Ibid*, page 4.

segregation and a lack of commitment to ‘British values’ of opportunity, democracy, the rule of law and religious tolerance. It is a criticism that has been directed at Muslim communities, notwithstanding that they show a higher degree of commitment to those values than do other minorities, as we shall see in the next chapter. In part, this follows from a general anxiety following the 9/11 and 7/7 terror attacks in New York in 2001 and London in 2005, and increased emphasis on countering violent extremism, especially from groups operating in the name of Islam.

However, this narrative also received further impetus from events in Birmingham that came to the public attention in March 2014 involving an alleged plot by conservative and hardline Sunnis – ‘men of Pakistani heritage’, as one report put it⁷ – to Islamicise a number of state-funded schools where there were significant numbers of Muslim pupils. Attention was focused on one particular school, Park View Academy, and its associated Park View Educational Trust (PVET), incorporating two other schools, Nansen Primary and Golden Hillock secondary. The affair also drew in many others who were suspected of extremist activity – with 21 schools in Birmingham subjected to snap Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspections and included in the various inquiries into the affair. The government, as we shall see, cites the ‘plot’ in its argument about the need to develop a new counter-extremism strategy that confronts extremist ideology and not just threats of violence.⁸ Yet we will also see that the Kershaw Report and some other commentators argue that there was, in fact, no evidence of extremism. This was also the conclusion of the Parliamentary select committee that reviewed the different reports. It concluded: ‘we note once again that no evidence of extremism or radicalisation, apart from a single isolated incident, was found and

⁷ Ian Kershaw (2014) *Investigation Report: Trojan Horse Letter* (Kershaw Report). Prepared for Birmingham City Council and published by Eversheds LLP, page 9. Available at: www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/1579/investigation_report_trojan_horse_letter_the_kershaw_report.

⁸ Home Office (2015) *Counter-Extremism Strategy*, 19 October 2015. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-extremism-strategy.

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that there is no evidence of a sustained plot nor of a similar situation pertaining elsewhere in the country'.⁹

Tim Boyes, CEO of Birmingham Education Partnership, appointed by Birmingham City Council to oversee schools after the Trojan Horse affair, is similarly clear. He had expressed his concerns about possible extremism in Birmingham schools in 2010,¹⁰ but his later view is a little different. He writes, 'the problem that sits behind Trojan Horse is not about Islamic extremism, it's about schools unhelpfully locked into the closest parameters of their neighbourhoods'.¹¹ On this alternative account, the problems are attributed to poor governance at schools and failure to follow regulatory requirements, rather than extremism, albeit that it is the latter that grabbed the headlines.¹²

From the outset, however, there was an anomaly that disrupted both these narratives of 'extremism' and 'poor governance'. Park View had been a failing school as recently as 1996, but, over a short period of time, it had been transformed. Indeed, in 2006 it was deemed one of the most improving schools in England. By 2012, when it moved out of Local Education Authority (LEA) control to become an academy, it had examination results that placed it in the top 14% of schools in

⁹ Education Select Committee (2015) 'Extremism in schools: the Trojan Horse affair'. Available at: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmeduc/473/47302.htm.

¹⁰ Report by the Permanent Secretary at the DfE, Chris Wormald (January 2015), *Review into Possible Warnings to DfE relating to Extremism in Birmingham School*. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/396211/Review_into_possible_warnings_to_DfE_relating_to_extremism_in_Birmingham_schools.pdf.

¹¹ See 'Trojan Horse one year on: headteacher who warned the government five years ago reveals plans to create "families" of schools', *Birmingham Mail*, 23 April 2015. Available at: www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/trojan-horse-one-year-on-9095037.

¹² Sara Cannizzaro and Reza Gholami conducted a content analysis of media reports on the Trojan Horse affair between March and August 2014 and discovered that a significantly higher proportion were focused on 'Islamist ideology', rather than 'poor governance' at the schools. Sara Cannizzaro and Reza Gholami (2016) 'The devil is not in the detail: representational absence and stereotyping in the "Trojan Horse" news story', *Race, Ethnicity and Education*. First online, 19 July 2016. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2016.1195350>.

England. At the time, Park View was a small, mixed gender, secondary school for pupils aged 11–16. It had a school roll of approximately 600 pupils. The community in which it was located – Alum Rock – was, in Dame Louise’s terms, deprived and segregated, with a high proportion of Muslims, but its school was providing an exemplary education. Its pupils, including girls, were well prepared for life in modern Britain, in particular for jobs and for further and higher education. We will also see that Ofsted, in its January 2012 report, had judged its students to be ‘very thoughtful, independent and confident young people’.¹³ It is hard to see that these outcomes could have been achieved in a school with poor leadership.

It is worth emphasising the context of this success. According to data presented in the Clarke Report,¹⁴ Park View Academy had a pupil intake that was 98.8% Muslim, with 72.7% on free school meals (an indicator of social deprivation) and just 7.5% of pupils with English as a first language. There are no separate data on the proportion of Muslim pupils in Birmingham schools, but the BME (Black and minority ethnic) school population in Birmingham is 66.6%, compared with 28.9% nationally, while the proportion with English as a first language in Birmingham is 64.2% and 82.7% nationally, and the figure for free school meals is 28.9% in Birmingham and 15.2% nationally.¹⁵ In addition, the school had a higher than average number of pupils with special needs. Moreover, its ‘feeder’ primary school, Nansen – a school directly across the road from Park View – was a failing school,

¹³ Park View Business and Enterprise School Inspection report, reference number 105324 (January 2012), page 4. The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills is a non-ministerial department of government reporting to the DfE. Inspection reports since 2014 are available from the Ofsted website: <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>. Rockwood Academy is the successor school to Park View. Earlier reports for schools at the centre of the Trojan Horse affair are no longer available online.

¹⁴ Peter Clarke (2014) *Report into Allegations concerning Birmingham Schools arising from the ‘Trojan Horse’ Letter*. London, House of Commons. HC 576 (Clarke Report). Available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/340526/HC_576_accessible_.pdf.

¹⁵ Information provided by Education Service, Birmingham.

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so that the pupils entering Park View had attainments that were well below the national average. At the same time, the Ofsted report of 2012 described Park View Academy as, ‘a truly inclusive school in which there is no evidence of discrimination and students, sometimes with major disabilities, are welcomed as members of the school community’.¹⁶ Rather than being a school ‘unhelpfully locked into the closest parameters of their neighbourhoods’, it would seem to be a school that transcended those parameters. Its place in the top 14% of schools nationally was in the context of ‘parameters’ that make such success highly unusual.

Unsurprisingly, the school’s success had earlier been taken up by politicians and by the Chief Inspector of Ofsted, Sir Michael Wilshaw, who affirmed that all schools should be like it.¹⁷ Its head teacher, Lindsey Clarke, was awarded an OBE for services to education in January 2014, and its chair of governors, Tahir Alam, was equally celebrated. Park View Academy was designated as a ‘National Support School’.¹⁸ How it had achieved its success was of particular interest to other schools with a high proportion of Muslim pupils, an interest that would later be seen as an indication of suspicious links and a wish to ‘Islamicise’ them. More significantly, its ‘takeover’ of other (underperforming) schools – Golden Hillock and Nansen – was at the behest of the Department of Education (DfE) together with the Birmingham Education Services department as part of its school improvement programme.

In February 2014, the situation changed dramatically. This was when an anonymous letter – the so-called ‘Trojan Horse letter’ – sent to Birmingham City Council in November 2013 was leaked to the press. The letter enclosed a document, ‘found when clearing my bosses

¹⁶ Park View Ofsted Report, 2012.

¹⁷ See the report by Jeevan Vasagar, ‘An Inspector calls: the day the Head of Ofsted visited one school’, *The Guardian*, 27 March 2012. Available at: www.theguardian.com/education/2012/mar/27/michael-wilshaw-ofsted-school-inspector.

¹⁸ See the article by Dorothy Lepkowska, ‘First “outstanding” school of 2012 reveals all’, *The Guardian*, 13 February 2012. Available here: www.theguardian.com/education/2012/feb/13/outstanding-osted-for-birmingham-school.

[sic] files', concerning a plot to 'Islamicise' schools in Birmingham and purportedly addressed to others similarly engaged.¹⁹ It outlined a five-step plan to take over schools by dominating governing bodies, ousting head teachers, organising the recruitment of sympathetic teachers, and the establishment of a curriculum and practices based on Sunni Islamic principles. The story first appeared in an article by Richard Kerbaj and Sian Griffiths, in the *Sunday Times* on 2 March 2014, outlining an 'Islamist plot to take over schools'.²⁰ Further press stories discovered anonymous witnesses who 'confirmed' the seeming malpractices. Various inquiries were set up by Birmingham City Council and the Department for Education, with one journalist, Andrew Gilligan, developing his own inquiry in *The Telegraph* focused on Park View Academy and the 'dramatic changes that had taken place since 2012' (when it became an academy),²¹ notwithstanding that the letter, and the subsequent Kershaw and Clarke Reports, suggested that the process had been taking place for over a decade: that is, over the period of Park View's improvement and not just since it became an academy.

The school that had brought about such a major improvement in pupil performance was now claimed to be betraying 'British values' and promoting an Islamic religious agenda.²² As the story gathered pace, its achievements were omitted and its practices deemed to be both contrary to 'British values' and unlawful. Part of the difficulty is to understand how a school – and set of schools – could be advocated by Ofsted and the DfE and, within a short space of time, subjected to such misunderstanding and repudiation by erstwhile supporters.

Part of the explanation is the political climate in which the events took place. There had been a recent shift in public policy

¹⁹ The letter and document is appended to the Clarke Report.

²⁰ Richard Kerbaj and Sian Griffiths, 'Islamist plot to takeover schools', *Sunday Times*, 2 March 2014. Available at: www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/uk_news/Education/article1382105.ece.

²¹ Andrew Gilligan, 'Trojan Horse: how we revealed the truth behind the plot', *The Telegraph*, 15 June 2014. Available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/10899804/Trojan-Horse-how-we-revealed-the-truth-behind-the-plot.html.

²² Cannizzaro and Gholami (2016) 'The devil is not in the detail'.

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concerning 'British values' and a turn against what was called 'state multiculturalism'. This became evident in a speech on security given by then Prime Minister, David Cameron, in Munich in February 2011. The speech indicated the need for a strong national identity and a requirement to engage robustly with the agendas of different organisations before extending public support, whether by national or local government: 'Do they believe in universal human rights – including for women and people of other faiths? Do they believe in equality of all before the law? Do they believe in democracy and the right of people to elect their own government? Do they encourage integration or separatism?'²³

As with Dame Louise later, there was an easy (and, as we shall see, false) assumption that areas with a high density of Muslim residents are self-segregated, motivated by different values, and that these values are implicated in the radicalisation of young Muslims. In this way, the very context of disadvantage in which the school had achieved its academic success became an indication of vulnerability to extremism and a presumed lack of integration of the community from which it drew its pupils.²⁴ The Prime Minister's call for a more 'muscular liberalism' was also taken up within different departments of state, giving rise to a high-level conflict between the then Home Secretary, Theresa May, and Secretary for State for Education, Michael Gove, over the Prevent strategy and the role of schools.

Prevent is one strand of the government's CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy that was launched in 2003. It was directed at stopping

²³ David Cameron, 'PM's speech at Munich Security Conference', 5 February 2011. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference.

²⁴ Andrew Gilligan's approach was a little different. He regarded the 'hardline Islamist' teachers and governors as being out of touch with their communities and the problem lay with the attitudes of officials: 'the almost mono-racial nature of Alum Rock and its schools made it easier for the plot to remain under the radar. Many council officers and journalists mistakenly saw Alum Rock as monolithically conservative and religious, and wrongly took self-appointed representatives such as Mr Alam as a true reflection of his community.' Gilligan, 'Trojan Horse'.

people from becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism.²⁵ Theresa May, as then Home Secretary, published the review of Prevent in 2011. Although she did not identify any problems with publicly funded schools, she did suggest that there was regulatory confusion at the DfE which could cause problems in the future

Notwithstanding the Conservative-led coalition government's commitment to reducing and simplifying regulation, it was certainly the case that policies toward schooling (in particular, the programme to increase the number of academies and free schools) had increased in complexity and had created confusion over responsibilities. For example, schools might be publicly funded and under LEA control and scrutiny. This would involve a requirement to follow the National Curriculum, including a locally agreed curriculum for religious education, developed by local Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs). We will address the significance of the latter in a later chapter. Or schools might be academies (or free schools), publicly funded, but under the direct authority of the DfE with no obligation to follow the National Curriculum and outside LEA control. There remained a requirement for religious education in such schools, but this need not be the locally agreed curriculum under the auspices of the relevant SACRE. In addition, schools could be designated as 'faith schools' – 'schools with a religious character', as they are more properly called – or as local community schools. However, as we shall see, it would be wrong to suggest that schools that were not designated as faith schools, should, by that token, be understood as 'secular'.

²⁵ CONTEST comprises 'Prevent', 'Protect', 'Prepare' and 'Pursue'. In 2007, following the 7/7 attacks, Prevent was relaunched by the DCLG as a 'hearts and minds' approach to 'preventing violent extremism'. It was subsequently revised by the coalition government in 2011. See DCLG (2007) *Preventing Violent Extremism: Winning Hearts and Minds*. London: DCLG, and Home Office (2011) *Prevent Strategy*. Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Home Department by Command of Her Majesty. London: Cm8092. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf.

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All schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are required to have a daily act of collective worship, which frames the school day, and to provide religious education, regardless of school type.²⁶ Collective worship for faith schools will be the religion of that faith, but for other schools it must be ‘wholly or mainly, of a broadly Christian character’, as the legal regulation puts it. This latter requirement can be varied if the nature of their pupil intake warrants it. In other words, collective worship can reflect other faiths, such as Islam. Determination for ‘other faith’ worship is overseen by the SACRE for LEA schools and by the DfE for academies and free schools. Religious education, for its part, is required to be, ‘in the main, Christian’, while taking into account the presence of the principal religious traditions represented in Great Britain. We will examine these issues and how they bear upon the Trojan Horse affair more fully in a later chapter.

When academy schools outside LEA control were first introduced in July 2000 by the then Labour government of Tony Blair, as a development of an earlier City Technology Colleges programme, they were designed to reinvigorate failing schools and tackle low expectations. After the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition was elected in 2010, the policy shifted to encouraging all schools to become academies, using a variety of financial inducements, as well as compulsion for failing schools. It is in this context that Ofsted began to be criticised for its lack of independence and the use of failure at inspections to compel local authority schools to become academies against the wishes of parents and school governors.²⁷ This involved two

²⁶ This requirement is set by the 1944 Education Act. In Scotland, the Education (Scotland) Act 1872 allows discontinuation of religious education by decision from a local electorate. Post-devolution, education policy is a devolved matter. For details of the specific requirements across England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, see Peter Cumper and Alison Mawhinney (eds) (2015) *Collective Worship and Religious Observance in Schools: An Evaluation of Law and Policy in the UK* (AHRC Network report). In that report, they note evidence of very high levels of non-compliance with this duty across schools in England – and particularly in secondary schools. See page 8.

²⁷ See, for example, Richard Garner, ‘Teachers urge boycott of new Ofsted regime’, *Independent*, 31 March 2013. Available at: www.independent.co.uk

categories of academies: (willing, though not always unanimously so) ‘convertor’ academies and (failing) ‘sponsored’ academies. The latter were sponsored under the tutelage of a successful academy which was expected to engage with staff (including governors), as well as the existing practices and structures of the schools to bring about change. Park View became a convertor academy in April 2012 and, between that time and its dissolution in 2014, was sponsoring two other schools within its Park View Educational Trust – Nansen Primary school and Golden Hillock secondary school – with the support of Birmingham City Council and the DfE.

What should be evident is that the process of transforming schools into academies is potentially a conflictual one, with disagreements among teachers, governors and parents about the reorganisation of their schools, and also potential conflicts with new senior management teams from a sponsoring academy. Moreover, Sir Michael Wilshaw, Chief Inspector at Ofsted, had made several high-profile statements about the need to challenge underperforming teachers and governing bodies. Indeed, in an interview in 2012 with Andrew Marr, he had commented that, ‘it’s about good performance management in schools, and up to now I don’t think it’s been robust enough and that’s something we’re going to look at much more carefully’.²⁸

The precise circumstances surrounding the emergence of the letter outlining the ‘Trojan Horse plot’ are unclear. It was sent anonymously to Birmingham City Council in November 2013. The letter and document are widely viewed as a hoax. More precisely, they are viewed as written by someone knowledgeable of Birmingham schools and of specific conflicts between governors and head teachers, but not written by someone with an ‘insider’s’ knowledge of a plot; that is, they are not from the Trojan Horse’s mouth. The initial response of

[co.uk/news/education/education-news/teachers-urge-boycott-of-new-ofsted-regime-8555233.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education/education-news/teachers-urge-boycott-of-new-ofsted-regime-8555233.html). See also Jacqueline Baxter (2016) *School Governance: Policy, Politics and Practices*, Bristol: Policy Press.

²⁸ Andrew Marr, ‘Interview with Sir Michael Wilshaw, Ofsted’s Chief Inspector’, *The Andrew Marr Show*, 2 September 2012. London: BBC. Transcript available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/0209122.pdf>.

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the council was to dismiss it. At around the same time, the British Humanist Association had been forwarding to the DfE material from ‘whistleblowers’ about the transformation of ‘secular state schools’ into ‘strict, conservative faith schools’. It would emerge subsequently that evangelical Christians had raised concerns about pressure from Muslim parents on schools a year earlier. The original letter and document outlining the ‘plot’ had also been forwarded to the DfE by West Midlands Police via the Home Office, although they also investigated the matter and had no concerns.

In the face of growing media concern – the story was taken up by *The Telegraph*, *Express* and *Daily Mail*, as well as *The Sunday Times* (and *The Times*), in which it was first reported, and also in the *Guardian* – the DfE took preemptory action, with Sir Michael Wilshaw ordering special snap Ofsted inspections of the schools against which allegations had been made. There were reports on 21 schools, all with significant numbers of Muslim pupils. The inspection reports were published between March and June and, in the case of Park View, serious grounds for concern were found with regard to the ‘Behaviour and safety of pupils’ and ‘Leadership and management’, two of the four criteria against which school performance is evaluated. The rating of the school was downgraded from ‘outstanding’ to ‘inadequate’. A report in May 2014 by the Education Funding Agency (EFA) into the PVET ended its funding and sought new trusts to take over Park View Academy and its other schools.²⁹

Alongside the Ofsted reports, the then Secretary of State, Michael Gove, also commissioned a separate report into the allegations about Birmingham schools that arose from the Trojan Horse letter. This report was conducted under the auspices of Peter Clarke, the former Metropolitan Police head of Counter-Terrorism. At the same time, Birmingham City Council set up an inquiry under Ian Kershaw of the Northern Education Trust into the culpability of the council (which

²⁹ Education Funding Agency, *Review of Park View Education Trust*, 9 June 2014. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-park-view-educational-trust.

was also under separate investigation for failures in its child services department).³⁰ Both reports were published at about the same time in July 2014.³¹ The Clarke Report found that there was an ‘organised campaign to target certain schools’ and ‘an intolerant and aggressive Islamic ethos’.³² In the light of this and the Ofsted reports, Sir Michael Wilshaw also declared that there had been an ‘organised campaign’ targeting schools in Birmingham to impose a ‘narrow, faith-based ideology’, with the same people ‘highly influential across several of the schools’.³³ The findings of the Kershaw Report were similar. The council, it argued, had failed to act on reported concerns and Ofsted had previously failed to identify the ‘dysfunctions’ evident within the schools. Having initially resisted the criticisms, Sir Albert Bore, leader of the council, apologised, with a statement that, ‘we have previously shied away from tackling this problem out of a misguided fear of being accused of racism’.³⁴

³⁰ Kershaw Report; *A Report to the Secretary of State for Education and the Minister for Children and Families on Ways Forward for Children’s Social Care Services in Birmingham*, chaired by Professor Julian Le Grand, February 2014. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/297748/Birmingham_report_25.03.14.pdf; while a wider *Report on Birmingham City Council’s Governance and Organisational Capabilities: An Independent Review under Sir Bob Kerslake* was published in December 2014. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/birmingham-city-councils-governance-and-organisational-capabilities-an-independent-review.

³¹ A third report by the Permanent Secretary at the DfE was published in January 2015 (Wormald, *Review into Possible Warnings*). However, it had a very narrow frame of reference, just addressing whether allegations had been raised with the department and not examining its engagement with Park View Education Trust through the Academy process.

³² Clarke Report, page 14.

³³ Sir Michael Wilshaw, Speech, 9 June 2014. Available at: www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/trojan-horse-sir-michael-wilshaws-7240705.

³⁴ As reported in *the Birmingham Mail*, 15 July 2014. Available at: www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/birmingham-mail-trojan-horse-investigation-7456936.

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This was now seen as confirming earlier newspaper reports. *The Telegraph*, in particular, regarded its own investigation as vindicated and its reporter, Andrew Gilligan, wrote that:³⁵

there are, as our reporting has made clear, three separate strands of wrongdoing. There is clearly extremism in some of these schools, as Ofsted and the DfE found, but it is not the most important strand. The employment of relatives, the bullying and other dubious practices show another strand is simple, old-fashioned power-grabbing and nepotism.

But the most significant and worrying aspect is the promotion of an isolationist ideology. The problem highlighted by Trojan Horse is not really a security one, but a deep concern for community cohesion.

The *Guardian*, for its part, headlined its story on the Clarke Report as a ‘co-ordinated agenda to impose hardline Sunni Islam’, writing that there was an attempt to ‘impose and promote a narrow faith-based ideology’ and quoting the Clarke Report that it was ‘a deliberate attempt to convert secular state schools into exclusive faith schools in all but name’.³⁶

By now, a particular form of the narrative had been established. The practices put in place in Park View might have been acceptable had it been a ‘faith school’, but were not appropriate for what the Clarke Report, and the press more widely, described as a ‘secular’ school, notwithstanding, as we have observed, that non-faith schools in England are not secular and have a requirement for daily collective worship and compulsory religious education. Particular ‘facts’ had

³⁵ Andrew Gilligan, ‘Trojan Horse: how we revealed the truth behind the plot’, *The Telegraph*, 15 June 2014. Available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/10899804/Trojan-Horse-how-we-revealed-the-truth-behind-the-plot.html.

³⁶ Patrick Wintour reporting in *The Guardian*, 17 July 2014. Available at: www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jul/17/birmingham-schools-inquiry-hardline-sunni-islam-trojan-horse.

been reported in the press and had been highlighted in the reports – for example, the recording of a jihadi video in the school media centre, handouts proclaiming that it is a wife’s duty to consent to sex, the invitation of a radical preacher to speak at a school assembly, the ‘banning’ of Christmas celebrations. They were used to give credence to the wrongdoing, alongside complaints by teachers of discrimination and favouritism in appointments and promotions.

However, none of these ‘facts’ had been properly tested. The Clarke Report and the Kershaw Report took many witness statements, including from those teachers and governors who were held to be culpable, but there was no attempt to reconcile different accounts. Peter Clarke’s status as a former police officer probably gave credence to his report as being established in well-grounded complaints, but with the exception of the chair of PVET and former chair of governors at Park View, Tahir Alam, whom he regarded as untrustworthy, the responses of those who were criticised went unreported.

In this context, the reports (including those of Ofsted) are taken as establishing the ‘evidence’ and yet the reports are themselves deeply unsatisfactory and, as we shall see, fail to provide any context about the requirements of religious education in British schools. For example, the role of Birmingham SACRE was not discussed in the Clarke Report. Nor do the reports discuss the requirements on the teaching of health and personal relations, the guidelines for schools on promoting community cohesion, and the specific nature of the obligations on schools under the Prevent agenda. In the absence of a proper treatment of these issues, there is no clear benchmark against which the schools were judged. Did the schools act differently from other schools, and did they act unlawfully? The presumption of the reports is that they did. But, as we shall see, the reports are ill-informed and frequently erroneous. Indeed, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that they represent the improper exercise of arbitrary authority by the DfE and a breach of due process.

Equally important, the Birmingham ‘Trojan Horse affair’ is used by the government to indicate the need for its new counter-extremism strategy. The Clarke Report, for example, is cited as revealing

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‘extremists gaining positions on governing bodies and joining the staff, unequal treatment and segregation of boys and girls, extremist speakers making presentations to pupils, and bullying and intimidation of staff who refused to support extremist views. In total around 5,000 children were in institutions affected’.³⁷ It further states that, ‘as Trojan Horse demonstrated, children can be vulnerable to purposeful efforts by extremists to take control of their schools and create a space where extremist ideologies can be spread unchallenged’.³⁸ In fact, many of the reports – for example, the Kershaw Report, and one by the House of Commons Select Committee for Education, as we have seen – stop short of the accusation of extremism, though they do criticise the schools for an intolerant and conservative religious ethos.³⁹

The purpose of this short book is to address multicultural Britain, educational (and other) disadvantage and the experience of British Muslims in the context of the promotion of ‘British values’. But it is also about a serious miscarriage of justice, similar in character to that of the Hillsborough affair, where it took a prolonged campaign to dislodge the false narrative established by the collusion of police and media in the immediate aftermath of the disaster at the football match between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest in April 1989. In the Trojan Horse affair, a group of teachers and governors whose achievements in raising educational standards should have been celebrated (indeed, for a time they were) have been vilified in the national press and have been accused of imposing an Islamic agenda in schools with little opportunity to counter the claims in the face of an overwhelmingly hostile media.

The first opportunity for teachers to challenge the claims came when hearings against them for professional misconduct were begun over a year after the publication of the reports by the designated body, the National College for Teaching and Learning (NCTL), an independent agency of the DfE, in September 2015. Teachers were informed that

³⁷ Home Office (2015) *Counter-Extremism Strategy*, paragraph 20.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, paragraph 70.

³⁹ Education Select Committee (2015) *Extremism in Schools*.

hearings were being planned a little earlier with Case Management Hearings in July and August 2015 to establish the nature of charges and evidence to be submitted (the evidence file expanded from around 1000 pages to 6000 pages between the two meetings). This was *after* the government had cited the Trojan Horse affair as justification for its new plans to counter extremism. The hearings derived from the Clarke Report and its recommendation 3, 'that the DfE should consider taking action against teachers who may have breached the teacher standards'.⁴⁰ They were expected to be concluded quickly, but continued through until May 2017. The rush to set up the hearings in July and August 2015 providing little time for the preparation of the case for the defence prior to the start of the hearings contrasts with the long-drawn-out nature of the proceedings once they had started.

The hearings were convened with the purpose of determining whether the teachers at the schools should be permanently barred from teaching. However, the arrangements for the hearings were deeply unsatisfactory, with four separate cases brought against different groups of teachers associated with PVET and one other school, Oldknow Academy (involving teachers previously employed at PVET). The cases against junior teachers were heard separately from that against the senior leadership team at PVET. Once again, there has been misreporting of the evidence and little coverage of the detailed rebuttal of claims indicated above, for example of banning Christmas celebrations, or handouts promoting the obligations on wives to consent to sex with their husbands.

The Birmingham Trojan Horse affair dramatically came back into media attention in October 2016 after one of the hearings that had concluded went to the High Court on appeal. The findings were quashed on grounds of serious procedural irregularities. Mr Justice Phillips declared that evidence for the defence presented in the hearing

⁴⁰ Clarke Report, page 98.

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against the senior leadership team should have been made available to the defendants in the other case.⁴¹

A further comment by Mr Justice Phillips is noteworthy. At paragraph 37 of his judgement, he writes that:

the Panel expressly stated in each decision, when pronounced on 9 February 2016, that the allegations were ‘in no way concerned with extremism’. It appears that this wording troubled the Head of the Department for Education’s Due Diligence and Counter Extremism Group, Hardip Begol. He asked for publication to be delayed pending ‘clarification’. With the apparent agreement of the Chair of the Panel, the decisions were amended prior to publication so as to state that the allegations against Mr Anwar and Mr Ahmed were ‘in no way concerned with violent extremism’.

The government’s wish to act against a much broader remit of extremist ideology and have the Birmingham Trojan Horse case as a justification for this extension shines through.

The charge of failure to disclose documents from the main hearing against senior teachers in other hearings, however, indicated a possibility of a similar failure on the part of NCTL to fulfil its obligations of disclosure in the hearing against senior leaders. The Panel had been ready to announce its decision in the case on 23 December 2016, but an urgent application for disclosure, relating, in part, to transcripts associated with the Clarke Report, was made by defence lawyers on 24 November.⁴² At the time, media reporting expressed alarm that the transcripts were those of ‘whistleblowers’ who

⁴¹ *In the High Court of Justice, Queen’s Bench Division Administrative Court. In the Matter of an Appeal Under The Teachers’ Disciplinary (England) Regulations 2012. Birmingham Civil Justice Centre, 13 October 2016. Neutral Citation Number: [2016] EWHC 2507 (Admin). Available at: www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2016/2507.html.*

⁴² NCTL, May 2017, ‘Professional conduct panel outcome’, paragraph 16.

had provided statements under terms of confidentiality.⁴³ However, what was at issue also included other documents outside the Clarke Report that had potentially been relevant to the case. Altogether the documents that were deemed to be relevant amounted to about 1600 pages.⁴⁴ However, what came to be the main matter of concern was whether transcripts from evidence submitted to the Clarke Report had been used in the preparation of the NCTL case.

Initially, the failure to disclose the transcripts was explained as a ‘departmental misunderstanding’, albeit one, according to the Panel, where, ‘even on that basis such failure was simply unacceptable’. However, it transpired that, just before the Panel was due to rule on 3 May 2017 on an application by the defence lawyers to discontinue, the NCTL presented a note from their solicitors. This stated that, on 14 October 2014, they had received, ‘25 of the Clarke transcripts to include transcripts of 10 interviewees who went on to be witnesses for the NCTL in these proceedings. This pre-dated by approximately 3½ months the date on which the witness statements were signed and finalised’. This led the Panel to conclude that the matter had not been a ‘misunderstanding’, but that the transcripts were ‘deliberately withheld from disclosure’. In consequence, the Panel judged that the matter was ‘an abuse of the process which is of such seriousness that it offends the Panel’s sense of justice and propriety. What has happened has brought the integrity of the process into disrepute’.⁴⁵ The case against the senior leaders was discontinued, as were the remaining cases in July.⁴⁶ The Trojan Horse affair had come to an abrupt end, albeit one that was deeply unsatisfactory.

⁴³ See, for example, Camilla Turner, ‘Alarm at move to reveal identity of whistleblowers who exposed Trojan Horse scandal’, *The Telegraph*, 4 January 2017. Available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/01/04/alarm-move-reveal-identity-whistleblowers-exposed-trojan-horse/.

⁴⁴ NCTL, May 2017, ‘Professional conduct panel outcome’, paragraph 110.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, paragraphs 86, 102, 107, 174.

⁴⁶ Richard Adams, ‘Trojan Horse affair: remaining disciplinary proceedings dropped’, *The Guardian*, 28 July. 2017. Available here: amp.theguardian.com/education/2017/jul/28/trojan-horse-affair-remaining-disciplinary-proceedings-dropped-teachers-birmingham-schools.

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Teachers had faced lifetime exclusions from teaching. However, the possible consequences would have been more serious for the individuals concerned if the government's plans for its counter-extremism strategy were to proceed, since, under those plans, exclusions could be extended to employment in the public sector and by any charity or non-governmental organisation (NGO) in receipt of public funding. In the meantime, their lives have been severely disrupted and they have been denied the pursuit of their careers for the last three years. Equally importantly, they have been denied the opportunity to clear their names from the charges made against them and widely promoted in the media and to have their achievements in advancing the educational prospects of their pupils in a disadvantaged area properly celebrated and recognised. Counsel for Lindsey Clark, executive head of PVET and former head teacher of Park View, stated, 'today's victory is a hollow one. She had very much fought for, and sought to obtain, a verdict clearing her of any wrong doing. This, now, is no longer possible'.⁴⁷

Indeed, a special adviser at the DfE at the time of the Trojan Horse affair, Jaimie Martin, has specifically linked the case to the Manchester Arena bombing of May 2017, arguing that a problem of extremism remains and writing that, 'it is important to note as they were not tried for the charges, they were therefore not cleared of them', and, further, that, 'people who downplay the seriousness of Trojan Horse, claiming those involved exhibited "mainstream" Islamic views, are guilty not only of stunning naivety, but of a dangerous error'.⁴⁸ A similar claim was made by the conservative think tank Policy Exchange, which had previously advised on Michael Gove's schools programme. The co-head of its Security and Extremism Unit, Hannah Stuart, and its head of education, John David Blake, proposed that 'non-disclosure of

⁴⁷ As reported by Richard Adams, 'Five teachers in Trojan Horse affair free to return to classroom', *The Guardian*, 30 April 2017. Available at: www.theguardian.com/education/2017/may/30/trojan-horse-tribunal-five-birmingham-teachers-islam.

⁴⁸ Jamie Martin, 'Schools must be more vigilant on Islamism than ever', *Schoolweek*, 11 June 2017. Available at: <http://schoolsweek.co.uk/schools-must-be-more-vigilant-on-islamism-than-ever/>.

anonymous witness statements from the Clarke inquiry was described as an “abuse of process”, and that is deeply unfortunate, but this falls short of an exoneration. The decision to discontinue disciplinary proceedings was based on procedural grounds – not on a shortage of evidence’.⁴⁹ As evidence, they cite the Ofsted inspection reports and the Clarke Report, which, as we shall show, are deeply flawed. Perhaps most importantly of all, the Queen’s Speech setting out the legislative programme of Theresa May’s new minority government included measures for combatting non-violent extremism and the setting up of a new commission for countering extremism.⁵⁰

In what follows, we will seek to show that there was, in fact, no extremism and no conservative religious ideology promoted at the schools in question. Park View was both mainstream and exemplary. It followed regulatory requirements and guidelines and the Islamic practices in the school were subject to proper scrutiny and approval by the local SACRE. Indeed, they facilitated the school’s achievements and its relationships with the local community in a manner previously commented on directly and commended by Ofsted. We will also set out the broader context of the affair in order to demonstrate its significance for all of those who believe in equal opportunities and addressing inequalities in pupil achievement. But the case also matters because it is indicative of a wider populism that scapegoats fellow citizens who are Muslims and promotes a disregard for due process and rights; that is, it is a betrayal of the very values that the teachers in the Birmingham case are held to have disavowed.

We have divided the book into two parts. The second part – Chapters Six to Nine – sets out the details of the Trojan Horse affair and provides an examination of the charges made against the schools

⁴⁹ See Hannah Stuart and John David Blake, ‘Trojan Horse: “If anyone is still in any doubt that the practices uncovered were inappropriate, just listen to the pupils”’, *TES*, 16 June 2017. Available at: www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-views/trojan-horse-if-anyone-still-any-doubt-practices-uncovered-were?platform=hootsuite.

⁵⁰ Queen’s Speech, 21 June 2017. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/speeches/queens-speech-2017.

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and the evidence underpinning them. In these chapters, we show that the allegations made against the schools and teachers were based on errors and poor investigatory processes. However, we also wanted to understand how the affair could have been so misrepresented. The first part of the book – Chapters One to Five – explains the wider context of schooling in England, religious education and collective worship and the obligations placed upon schools with regard to the promotion of community cohesion and preventing violent extremism. This context indicates gross negligence on the part of various authorities charged with reviewing what happened at the schools in question; in particular, negligence associated with their failure to understand the specific policies and guidelines that had been issued to schools and the requirements for religious education and collective worship. The second part, focusing on the case, can be read without the first part explaining the policy context, but our intention is to draw broader conclusions about policies for life in multicultural Britain than simply pointing out the injustices visited upon the teachers and governors involved in the schools. In that way, their experiences might also provide the way to better policies and of ensuring that others are not subjected to similar arbitrary and unjustified actions.