

Widespread local denial over Trojan Horse, as DfE accuses select committee of 'downplaying' the scandal

Posted: Tue, 30th Jun 2015

A Birmingham councillor has warned of widespread local denial over the Trojan Horse scandal, days after the DfE said downplaying the affair risked undermining counter-extremism efforts.

Councillor Matt Bennett warned that the "narrative in the community is that the whole [Trojan Horse affair] was a stitch up."

The [Birmingham Mail](#) reports that Tahir Alam, formerly chairman of the Park View Trust and reportedly the "[prime mover](#)" behind the scandal, had "spoken to an audience of 180 people... without anyone arguing against him", according to Councillor Bennett.

"He has put this narrative out there and it needs to be tackled," the councillor added.

"Trojan Horse has been very, very damaging to community relations."

The council is reportedly concerned that schools outside the control of local authorities are particularly vulnerable to infiltration by hardliners and extremists, a concern shared by the National Secular Society.

The deputy leader of Birmingham City Council, councillor Ian Ward, said that there was "a narrative that does not recognise the outcomes of the inquiries and their recommendations."

His comments reflect the findings of the Department for Education which recently published a report that accused the education select committee of downplaying "the seriousness of events in Birmingham" in a way which "risks undermining our efforts to tackle extremism."

The select committee, which investigated the Trojan Horse allegations, found that there was "no evidence of extremism or radicalisation, apart from a single isolated incident" and that there was "no evidence of a sustained plot" or similar situations "elsewhere in the country."

The Department for Education has strongly criticised this finding, and said that a "particular hard line strand of Sunni Islam" had left pupils "vulnerable to radicalisation" and that the "life chances of young people attending these schools was wilfully narrowed".

The DfE argues that children were left "vulnerable to indoctrination by extremist ideologies."

There have been several prior investigations around the Trojan Horse scandal, and the DfE report highlights Peter Clarke's review, which found a pattern of behaviour which "emerged over two decades" before the scandal made headlines.

Stephen Evans, campaigns manager for the National Secular Society, commented: "Until we successfully challenge the mind-set that says it's legitimate for schools to be used to promote the religious agendas of the adults involved in running them, the risk of a repeat of what happened in

Birmingham will remain.

"It's clear from the concerns the City Council have expressed that the number of schools now free from local authority control could make the situation considerably worse and leave many more schools open to this kind of infiltration in the future.

"As for the debate about whether the takeovers were a 'plot' or not, in some ways it is much more concerning if it was not an organised scheme. If the problems did just emerge from the local community, that would be far more troubling than a small, organised group of people deliberately subverting the schools.

"This is particularly concerning given Councillor Bennett's warnings about the widespread denial among the local Muslim communities over the Trojan Horse affair. While we are glad to see the DfE taking steps like a national database of school governors to obstruct deliberate 'plots', there are much deeper underlying problems which need to be addressed."

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