

Investigation opens into use of Muhammad cartoon at Batley school

Posted: Thu, 29th Apr 2021

The academy trust behind Batley Grammar School, which recently suspended a teacher after a cartoon of Islam's prophet Muhammad was used in class, has said an investigation over the incident is underway.

Batley Multi Academy Trust, which oversees the school, has said the investigation will "examine how certain materials, which caused offence, came to be used".

The school apologised for the use of the cartoon and [suspended the teacher last month](#), as protesters gathered outside its gates to demand the teacher's resignation.

In [a statement on its website](#) this week the trust said the external investigation would be led by "an independent barrister with significant education experience".

It added that the barrister had "no prior connection with the trust or any of its trustees or employees".

The National Secular Society has been seeking assurances from the Department for Education that the process will be genuinely independent, and not unduly influenced by local religious leaders or others who may have been involved in the protests.

The NSS has also asked for assurances that the government is working to protect the safety and wellbeing of the teacher affected. In response the DfE has said it is working with the trust and local authority to ensure the necessary support is in place for staff and pupils.

NSS comment

NSS chief executive Stephen Evans welcomed the support being provided to protect the safety and wellbeing of the teacher, and the appointment of an independent barrister, but has raised questions over the remit of the investigation.

He added: "For any investigation to inspire confidence, it must consider the school's handling of this affair and its treatment of the teacher – impartially and in full.

"It must also bear in mind the importance of upholding fundamental principles. Cultural sensitivity can't be allowed to morph into censorship. Teachers must have the freedom to broaden pupils' horizons and encourage them to think critically. Decisions about the appropriateness of teaching resources shouldn't be influenced by intimidation and threats.

"This affair has caused a great deal of disruption, turmoil and distress, and should be a reminder of the harm that can be done when society fails to stand up to religious bullying."

Image: Oxana Maher / Batley Grammar School / [CC BY-SA 2.0](#).

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