



The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for School Standards
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London, SW1P 3BT

5 March 2019

Cc Jackie Behan

Dear Mr Gibb

We are very concerned about the ongoing situation at Parkfield Community School and are keen to understand the Department's response.

As you know, the school is facing large-scale protests and mass withdrawals over its teaching of a programme entitled No Outsiders, which encourages children to accept and understand the reality of diversity. According to some reports the school may be preparing to drop or dilute the lessons in response to the pressure.

The evidence suggests the No Outsiders programme is carefully crafted and teaches pupils about tolerance, difference and British values in an age-appropriate manner.

The parents protesting against the programme have not raised reasonable objections. As we have previously informed the Department, some of the individuals promoting the protests at this school have bemoaned the "queering of the Muslim community" and said Muslim parents should adopt a "psychological" or "mental health" response to same-sex attraction. These kinds of opinions should be robustly challenged, not respected, regardless of whether they are religious or not.

Whilst we appreciate that schools will be mindful of the backgrounds of their pupils, taking parents' religious views into account should not mean shielding pupils from knowledge or teaching them differently on account of their parents' religious outlook.

Any concessions in this situation will set a dangerous precedent for other schools facing similar pressure to change the way they teach in order to conform to parents' beliefs. That will undermine LGBT rights, children's right to a decent education and teachers' ability to do their jobs.

The situation at Parkfield is particularly significant because it is part of a pattern of mounting religious pressure which demands that schools adjust their teaching. We note with alarm, for example, that St Stephen's Primary School in east London was last year forced to back down from a policy of restricting the hijab and fasting amid a campaign of intimidation.

I am therefore keen to receive your assurances that the Department is providing unequivocal support to Andrew Moffat and the school and will continue to do so throughout the consultation process. We also seek your assurances that the Department will support other schools which face similar pressure to dilute their teaching in the face of religious intolerance.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Evans
Chief Executive