

## **The “Trojan Horse” issue.**

Just over a year ago Birmingham City Council received a copy of an anonymous letter which contained allegations of extremism in Birmingham schools and of a “Trojan Horse” plot. After discussions between that Council, the police, the Home Office and the Department for Education, Peter Clarke, an ex-deputy assistant commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and former national head of counter-terrorism, was appointed to investigate the allegations in February 2014.

By April 2014 the Trojan Horse Review Group was established by Birmingham City Council and Ofsted produced 21 inspection reports in connection with schools which had been cited in the allegations or which had been identified subsequently as causing related concern.

In June 2014 Sir Michael Wilshaw (as Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Schools) wrote to the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, setting out his key findings from those 21 reports and making recommendations. This led to the new Secretary of State, Nicky Morgan, making a related statement to the House of Commons on July 22<sup>nd</sup>.

In July 2014 both Peter Clarke and the Trojan Horse Review Group published reports containing their findings.

It appeared that similar allegations had been made prior to the original anonymous letter some dating back to the 1990s although no full investigation had been launched previously. Whilst that original letter might or might not have been genuine both reports did contain very similar conclusions. Superficially the early reports of “Trojan Horse” implied that the extremism was substantially of a religious or of a cultural nature; however further investigation extends this to include political persuasions also.

Her Majesty’s Government have defined “extremism” to be “The vocal or active opposition to fundamental British Values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance for different faiths and beliefs. Also included within this definition are calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas”.

The July reports do indicate clear evidence that there was “co-ordinated, deliberate and sustained action. carried out by a number of associated individuals, to introduce an intolerant and aggressive ethos into a few schools” leading to “real concerns about the vulnerability of young people to radicalisation in the future”.

Many of these issues relate to the effectiveness (or otherwise) of the governance in these schools and suggest that “there are a number of people, associated with each other and in positions of influence in schools or governing bodies, who espouse, endorse or fail to challenge extremist views”.

Whilst the whole of the Trojan Horse situation has been identified in relation to Birmingham, there is some evidence that it has been replicated elsewhere in the U.K. but there had previously been no way of identifying and acting upon what had previously been viewed as isolated instances.

Significantly governors will already be well aware that the Prime Minister, David Cameron, has taken steps to call schools to promote ' British Values ' including democracy, mutual respect and tolerance. This will now be a feature in Ofsted inspections and, following recent consultations, is likely to become a statutory requirement for academies. Ofsted guidance was reissued in July and changes now refer to British Values and include a new section on collective worship.

How, then, can governors ensure that these situations cannot occur within their own schools? The best guarantee must be for those involved in governance to act according to the seven principles of public life (the Nolan principles) being those of integrity, selflessness, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

Specifically there are a number of actions which should be taken by school governors:-

- (a) Avoid the potential for conflicts of interest – publish details of governors on the school website, their business interests, the nature of their governor role (as parent, community etc), on what committees do they sit and the dates of their appointment and term of office.
- (b) Avoid cliques being allowed to form – ask yourselves whether the same group of individuals are really forcing the G.B. agenda – is a wide range of views being expressed at meetings – are the roles always being held by the same people. For example it would be a good idea to move members around different committees wherever possible – apart from widening participation it also enables individuals to gain a better overall picture of the workings of the governing body and must serve as an excellent training ground for future Chairs and Vice-Chairs in the process.
- (c) Governing Bodies should review their practices for the recruitment of new governors – who makes the appointments – and how? Should volunteers be interviewed in order to ensure that the G.B. has the “right people around the table” – to ensure that they have the skills and/or experience to offer which match the needs of the G.B. If a governor reaches the end of his/her term of office should they, as tends to be the case usually, be automatically reappointed? Succession planning ought to be a feature of the dynamic of the governing body.
- (d) The balance of those around the table should reflect the local community as far as is possible, and this must mean that they have to find the best way of “listening” to the

views and concerns expressed by the parent body and by the wider local community. However they should not pay *undue* attention to a vociferous minority.

- (e) They should stay strategic and not become operational. A failure to do this was a feature at most of schools investigated in Trojan Horse.
- (f) They must ensure that the school curriculum (for which they have responsibility) is “broad and balanced” and that it provides for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of their pupils. It is right and proper that the governing body should discuss the role of assemblies, their contribution to SMSC and to the daily act of collective worship which is legally required.
- (g) The relationship between Head Teacher and the Governing Body needs to be based on trust and respect with all parties recognising their relative roles. This should also encompass CPD provision for school leaders.
- (h) All schools require a Human Resource role to be carried out by a paid member of staff – in many schools this may be included within the remit of the School Business Manager – this is over and above the HR function provided by the Local Authority but such a person within school should be capable of dealing with routine run-of-the-mill HR processes without needing to resort to external support.
- (i) The Governing Body has a responsibility for the safety of pupils and this includes protection from extremism. It also is required to check whether governors need to have a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check.

Clearly this issue is likely to remain topical for some time and work is on-going to produce the best ways forward. The National Governors Association (NGA) is discussing the details with the key institutions – including the Department for Education and Ofsted. There may well be long term implications in the role of faith within our school system and also about any gaps in the system of oversight of schools i.e. governance of the system over and above internal school governance – in other words “Who governs the governing bodies?”.

Praefectus vulgaris.