

15 May 2014: Response to allegations

Introduction

Park View School – key facts:

- Park View follows Birmingham City Council’s admissions procedures for community schools and serves an area in which almost 100 per cent of families are Muslim
- The school has just over 600 students
- Students are split 50:50 girls to boys
- 72 per cent of students are eligible for Free School Meals
- 75 per cent of students overall achieved 5 A*-Cs at GCSEs (including English and Maths) in 2013
- 78 per cent of girls achieved 5 A*-Cs (including English and Maths) and 70 per cent of boys achieved 5 A*-Cs (including English and Maths) in 2013.
- 99 per cent of students are from Muslim families
- The school follows the National Curriculum

What do you think is the motive for the allegations that have been made about Park View Educational Trust and its schools?

The political storm created by the so-called ‘Trojan Horse’ document has evidently provided a heightened climate for allegations to be repeated and conflated in an attempt to ‘prove the plot’. The document has also seemingly created a backdrop for the settling of political scores that have nothing to do with the Trust’s schools and students.

A number of the allegations have been made by a small number of former staff who, for a variety of reasons, felt that Park View School was not the right professional environment for them. Differences of opinion over staff competence, capacity for promotion, performance, as well as on the wider issue of how far families are entitled to have their religious and cultural beliefs accommodated where possible within the school environment have all played their part here. Other allegations have been attributed to ‘official sources’, the fact that these are being presented as fact in the public domain makes it imperative for the Trust to explain its position.

We have been clear that for many years students at Park View were not well-served with regards to having their culture or religion recognised within school. This created a disconnect between the home and school environment, resulting in lack of parental involvement and student engagement within school.



The fact that we are now able to recognise students' religious and cultural background and needs in school is a source of great pride to the Trust and has transformed our relationships with parents and students. However, we understand that some former members of staff have not agreed with this approach.

Park View Educational Trust

Is Park View School run as a faith school?

No. Park View is a community school and does not have religious designation. It is not run as a faith school.

A school which has religious designation (i.e. a faith school) is able to admit pupils based on faith affiliation, staff can be selected because of their affiliations and the school has a published religious ethos to which all parents are expected to commit as a condition of entry. Park View does **none** of these.

Any accommodation of the religious needs based on parental or pupil requests are voluntary. There is no expectation or requirement as part of Park View's ethos for pupils to observe particular religious practices. All such accommodation is within regulatory and legally acceptable parameters for a community school.

Did Park View Educational Trust chairman Tahir Alam lead in developing a guide to meeting the needs of Muslim students in 2007?

Yes. The document was entitled 'Meeting the needs of Muslim students' and was published by the Muslim Council of Britain. It was written at a time that many professionals working within schools and children's services in multicultural areas were looking for guidance on how to better accommodate Muslim children. There was concern that young people should have their cultural and religious needs recognised where possible in order to promote wellbeing and encourage high achievement.

As with similar guides produced by the London Borough of Ealing, Kirklees Children's Services and the Muslim Liaison Committee (amongst others) this guide was not prescriptive. The aim was to develop an understanding between parents and schools as the basis for discussion about what could be possible.

The MCB guide was widely downloaded and was the subject of much positive feedback. Local authorities and head teachers expressed their appreciation for a document that helped them to gain a clearer understanding of potentially contentious issues and come to a solution for the whole school community. Park View, like many other schools, has benefitted from some of the suggestions in the document.



Did the Trust mount an aggressive takeover of Nansen primary and Golden Hillock School?

No. The Department for Education asked the Trust to sponsor Nansen in 2012. In 2013, Park View Educational Trust was invited to present as a potential sponsor for Golden Hillock, along with other sponsors. The governing body selected the Trust for sponsorship and this was approved by the Department for Education.

Was Lindsey Clark side lined and reduced to a figurehead?

No. As Executive Principal (and prior to her retirement earlier this year at the age of 63) Lindsey Clark was responsible for strategic oversight to enable the development and growth of the Trust. She also supported the schools' headteachers in ensuring adherence to Trust policies and procedures to ensure accountability across the organisation. She did not have day-to-day operational responsibility for the schools.

Acts of worship/assemblies

Has Park View held anti-American assemblies?

No. A member of staff who left the school more than 10 years ago made this allegation for the first time in 2014. This member of staff had left the school pending an investigation into parents' allegations that he acted in a racist and derogatory way to their children.

Our assemblies, or acts of worship, are used to focus on the spiritual and moral development of pupils and are relevant to their school and home lives. This includes looking at the common values of kindness, mercy and forgiveness and talking to students about studying hard, and being a good friend.

Has Park View hosted Sheikh Shady Al-Suleiman?

Sheikh Shady Al-Suleiman visited Park View to conduct an assembly with our Year 10s and 11s in November 2013. He spoke about positive values such as studying hard, excelling in education, becoming role models in the community and becoming good British citizens.

Sheikh Shady Al-Suleiman has visited the UK many times in the last 10 years to deliver talks and education courses and been granted a visa by the Home Office. He is given unrestricted movement in the UK. He was not known to the Trust or the school as having extremist views. We would never knowingly allow anyone with any kind of extremist views to enter the school.

Has a senior member of staff at Park View praised Anwar al-Awlaki?

Categorically no. This allegation has been made anonymously, with both the date of the alleged incident and the staff member allegedly involved not detailed. This feels like a deliberate tactic aimed at inflicting maximum harm to the reputation of the school. We challenge anyone to provide genuine evidence of this having happened.

Is Park View's statutory daily act of collective worship Islamic in character?

Yes. The school applied for a part-determination which exempts it from the statutory requirement for a Christian act of worship and allows it to provide an act of worship that is Islamic in character in accordance with the faith background of the children. Ninety-nine per cent of students at Park View are from a Muslim background.

Are students allowed to opt out of those acts of worship?

Yes they are, and an alternative act of worship would be provided if requested.

Curriculum

Is Creationism taught in Science lessons at Park View?

No, this is not school policy. The school follows the syllabuses of AQA and Edexcel in science lessons.

Is Music taught at Park View?

Yes. Students receive weekly music lessons at Key Stage 3, where they learn how to play keyboards, play both African and Dhol drums, sing and analyse music from many cultures and create their own music using an array of Music Technology. The school has music concerts every term where the students have an opportunity to showcase their many talents to the rest of the school. Recent activity includes a mixed group of 18 students performing at the NIA with Roger Waters 'Another Brick in the Wall' Concert and the mixed steel pan group performing in Birmingham's CBSO Centre as well as Bournville College.

Mixed groups of students are also taken regularly to concerts in Symphony Hall by the CBSO, and have even been treated to a concert given in school by the entire CBSO String section.

Has the curriculum, namely GCSE subjects, been restricted to comply with conservative Islam?

No. We follow the syllabuses that are set by the exam boards. It is not credible that we would receive the exam results that we do (75% of students achieved 5A*-Cs including English and Maths in 2013) if we were restricting parts of the examined syllabus.

Were Christian children made to teach themselves RE at Golden Hillock School?

No. Two students in Year 10 exercised their option to study Christianity and Sikhism respectively, while the rest of the class was studying Islam. The teacher differentiated the teaching for those two students.

Were humanities, art and music removed from the curriculum at Nansen primary school?

No. This allegation refers to the period in the run-up to the Key Stage 2 SATs tests when the school, in common with many others, places an increased focus on Maths and English with Year 6 students. This means that for a short period there is less space in the timetable for other subjects.

Prayer

Was £70,000 paid for a set of speakers to call students to prayer at Park View?

No. The speakers themselves cost £900 and were part of a PA system in the school hall, the cost of which did not exceed £10,000. The speakers are primarily used for school functions and are used for a call to prayer once a day during the lunch break.

Is it compulsory for students to pray at Park View?

No. There is however space set aside in the school hall for those who wish to pray, but it is a matter of personal choice. Typically between 5 to 10 per cent of students choose to do a daily prayer during their lunch break.

Do lessons at Park View begin and end with a prayer?

No they don't.

Is a call to prayer broadcast across Park View?

No. A call to prayer is broadcast once a day in the school hall where pupils pray, and on occasions in the quad area just outside the hall.

Segregation of boys and girls

Are girls and boys segregated in lessons at Park View?

No. The behaviour of Park View pupils is generally of a high standard and most teachers do not need to impose seating plans. This means that girls and boys are free to sit where they wish in lessons. This is usually next to their friends, who are sometimes of the same gender. Some lessons involve group work, where girls and boys are specifically required to work together.

As well as working together in lessons, boys and girls are involved in a large number of extra-curricular activities in mixed groups. For example, we have a mixed gender steel pan group, and a mixed gender Dhol drumming group.

Are any subjects taught in single gender groups at Park View?

Yes. PE, Personal Development (PSHE) and RE are all taught in single gender groups. Teaching PE separately is a school policy, as it is in most other secondary schools. Personal Development and RE are timetabled against PE, which means they are taught separately as matter of timetabling necessity.

Are boys and girls at Park View banned from talking to each other and threatened with having their parents told and/or being put in isolation/suspended or excluded if they do so?

No, anyone visiting the school would see that this allegation is wholly untrue. In common with all

schools Park View has a responsibility to ensure that all relationships, including those amongst students, are appropriate. Students and their families trust us to discharge this responsibility properly and proportionately.

Treatment of girls and women

Is it compulsory for girls at Park View to wear a headscarf?

No. Our uniform policy states that if girls do choose to wear a headscarf then it should be white. In every class there is a mix of girls who wear headscarves and those who do not.

Are girls treated less favourably at Park View than boys?

No. In common with trends in secondary education girls' attainment at Park View is actually higher than that of boys. This simply would not be the case if girls were not getting the support they deserve from the school. In 2013 for example 78 per cent of girls got 5A*-Cs (including English and Maths) at GCSE compared to 70 per cent of boys.

At Park View School there are 61 prefects – 42 of whom are girls.

Are women sidelined for management roles?

Across the Trust as a whole there are more women in leadership positions than men. Park View had a female head teacher for more than 11 years, who was then promoted to become Executive Principal and has recently retired at the age of 63.

Have girls' PE or sports tournaments been cancelled due to the possibility that males would be present?

In common with many secondary schools Park View teaches PE in single gender groups, with male teachers leading the boys and female teachers leading the girls. There have been instances where a female teacher was not available to lead female students in an off-site PE activity. On those few occasions the events have been re-scheduled to ensure that a female teacher was available.

Sex and relationships education

Does Park View teach sex and relationships education?

Yes it does.

Did a teacher hand out a worksheet to Park View pupils stating that women must obey their husband, and told Year 10 boys that wives were not allowed to refuse their husbands sex?

No such worksheet was ever handed out. We teach that the basis of all sexual relationships is informed consent. There was a single incident in 2011 when a group of Year 10 boys misunderstood a historical reference to cultural expectations of marriage. As soon as the school was made aware of

the misunderstanding a special assembly of all Year 10 boys was held to correct it and to make clear that a sexual relationship without informed consent is rape.

Has the Park View school nurse been told she can't offer advice about sexual health?

No. It is not school policy to restrict students' access to sexual health advice.

Was the PSHE curriculum at Park View revised to have a madrasah character?

No. Some Department for Education-approved worksheets on being a good citizen, the aims of which stated that they were designed for use with Muslim students in madrasahs or secular schools, were incorporated into the scheme of work for PSHE at Park View School.

Were discussions on sexual orientation and intimacy banned at Golden Hillock School?

No. The Trust agreed its first Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) policy for Golden Hillock School in October 2013, shortly after the school became part of the Trust. The policy does not include a ban on discussions around sexual orientation and intimacy.

Recruitment

Has Park View Trust actively tried to recruit more Muslim teachers and governors to its three schools?

The Trust's policy is to appoint individuals on their merit. We do not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, culture or religion. As our exam results prove, getting the right people into school has been the most important objective. Only those people with the necessary skills and commitment to ensure that all students achieve to the very best of their ability will be recruited to our schools.

Treatment of non-Muslims

Are non-Muslims/those considered to be non-observant Muslims referred to by Park View as Kaffirs? And have children been told that if they don't pray they'll be worse than Kaffirs?

No. The school has a mixed-faith (and no faith) student population and workforce. The Trust itself is made up of members of different faiths and none. Faith, and levels of religious observance, are a matter for individuals and their families, and are not for our schools to seek to impose.

Owing to the excellent results at Park View, the school also plays host to a large number of external organisations from all over the country. The suggestion that derogatory terms would be in use in either written or verbal communication within the school, without anyone other than an anonymous source in the media having ever raised it, is simply not credible.

Were students at Park View given a list of non-Muslim staff members that they should try to convert?

Absolutely not. The senior leadership team at Park View, as well as Park View Educational Trust itself, prides itself on having a diverse membership with a Sikh and persons of no-faith working alongside Christian and Muslim colleagues. There is neither a school nor a Trust policy to convert anyone, this would be wholly inappropriate.

Homophobia

Are students taught that homophobia is wrong?

Yes. The Trust is committed to tackling bullying of all kinds – on the grounds of race, sexual orientation or ability.

Ofsted inspection 2012

During Park View's 2012 Ofsted inspection was a member of staff from another school brought in, and was this the reason that the school achieved its Outstanding rating?

A senior member of staff from another school was working with Park View at the time of the 2012 Ofsted inspection and there was no attempt to hide this fact from Ofsted. Furthermore, the allegation that the input of one teacher has the capacity to change the outcome of an inspection is naïve and suggests a lack of understanding of the inspection process. The secret of Park View's Outstanding rating was a relentless focus on excellent standards of teaching and learning, excellent results and a whole-school belief that students could do better.

7/7 and 9/11

Has Park View allowed pupils to speak positively about 7/7 or 9/11?

No. The suggestion that the school in some way supports terrorism is abhorrent and is categorically not true. We were concerned to learn of this allegation for the first time via the media. Park View has found itself vilified for a concern that the former staff member apparently did not think was serious enough at the time to raise with the school, governors, the Trust, Ofsted, Department for Education or any other organisation that could reasonably be expected to have a role in investigating concerns around extremism.

In fact the school has been clear that such extremism is a perversion of Islam. The day after the 2013 murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich the school held rolling assemblies for all pupils in which the act was condemned as outrageous and utterly wrong.

Teaching of Arabic

Was an after school madrasah set up for girls at Park View?

This after-school club was not a madrasah, it was an Arabic reading class which the school offered for a short period at the request of a small number of families. This was due to safeguarding

concerns in relation to the girls attending their mosque. The class was hosted at the school and paid for by parents.

Is the teaching of Arabic compulsory at Nansen Primary School?

All primary schools are required to teach a language to pupils and the language we offer at Nansen is Arabic, which they all study. We believe that this is an important part of preparing pupils to be economically-active citizens. The British Council (Languages for the Future report 2013) has identified Arabic as the second most important language, after Spanish, in terms of ensuring Britain's future economic prosperity. In our secondary schools Spanish, French Urdu and Arabic are taught as optional subjects.

Christmas and Easter

Has Christmas been banned at Trust schools?

No. The main celebrations of all faiths are recognised in line with the locally agreed religious education curriculum. At Park View, for example, a Christian member of staff led an assembly last year explaining the significance of Christmas from a faith perspective. There was also a Christmas tree in the reception area and another in the main hall and all students and staff were invited to have a Christmas dinner cooked by school canteen staff.

Have Easter eggs been deliberately smashed in the playground at Park View by a school-sanctioned so-called morality squad?

No. This is another example of an allegation attributed to an 'anonymous source' and is entirely fictional. We feel that this allegation is a blatant attempt to create disharmony between communities.