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Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

20th July 2015

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: Advice letter from Sir Michael Wilshaw on the latest position with schools in Birmingham and Tower Hamlets

I write with reference to the recent letter from Her Majesty's Chief Inspector regarding the schools caught up in the so-called 'Trojan Horse' scandal.

Having followed these matters closely, I am concerned that inadequate attention is being paid, both by Ofsted and the Department for Education, to the bullying of Christian pupils.

All bullying is wrong, whatever the reason, whoever the perpetrator is, and whoever the victim. All pupils must be properly protected from it and it is wrong to elevate certain categories of victimisation above others. However, we feel we have to speak up for Christian pupils who have been disregarded by Ofsted in recent months.

It is striking that, while the official reports by Peter Clarke and Ian Kershaw listed a number of examples of explicitly anti-Christian intolerance in several of the 'Trojan Horse' schools, not one of these are noted in the Ofsted reports on those schools.

I enclose extracts from the Clarke and Kershaw reports. You will see they include anti-Christian chanting in assemblies, GCSE pupils who opted to learn Christianity being left to teach themselves, and Christians being called "ignorant" or "liars" by a teacher.

Clearly Christian pupils in those schools were being intimidated. Yet it appears to have gone on for years, undetected by Ofsted. According to the Clarke report (p.121) the first significant reported incident at one of the schools "occurred in 1996 when a Muslim teacher is said to have launched a tirade at a carol rehearsal, criticising the pupils for singing Christian carols".

What is disturbing is the complete lack of any specific plans of action from Ofsted to tackle anti-Christian bullying and intolerance. Christians are the most persecuted minority in the world. According to the International Society for Human Rights,

Christians are the victims of 80 per cent of all acts of religious discrimination around the world. For several years running the Pew Research Center has found that Christians are harassed in more countries around the world than any other religious group. Thousands of Christians are killed for their faith every year. Hard-line Islamic and atheistic regimes are typically to blame.

These global realities must inform our own local approach to anti-Christian intolerance. It is quite proper that the UK grants asylum to Christians fleeing Boko Haram, ISIS or Kim Jong-un. But it would be appalling if children granted asylum in the UK for being Christians were to find themselves in schools where they are humiliated for holding that same faith.

It is disturbing, therefore, that none of the Ofsted reports into any of these schools makes reference to these allegations, or to any specific action to address them. Not only did the activities themselves escape Ofsted's notice for years (indeed Sir Michael himself visited Park View in 2012 when he praised the school as a model for others), but even after the Clarke and Kershaw reports highlighted some of the problems, Ofsted by accident or design neglected to mention them. And Sir Michael's latest letter continues this pattern. Not once does it refer to the mistreatment of Christian pupils.

The February 2015 Ofsted monitoring report on Park View specifically mentions tackling homophobia, which is mentioned in the Clarke report. However, it does not say if anything has been done to tackle the anti-Christian activities at that school that are mentioned in the same report.

The closest Sir Michael's letter comes to responding to any of our concerns is his reliance on an assurance from the Executive Principal of one school "that a multi-faith approach is being taken to religious education". This is not good enough.

I should say, it is also clear that there can be secularist intimidation in schools as demonstrated by the 2015 report of the Equality and Human Rights Commission into "Religion or belief in the workplace and service delivery", which cited a parent whose child came home in tears because he was berated by his teacher for expressing his Christian beliefs about marriage and sexual ethics. The school dismissed the parent's complaint because "their views were at odds with the school ethos". The same report cited a teacher using the term "religious nutters" and ridiculing a Christian child in front of the class for saying she believed God created the universe. We are not aware of any specific action being taken by Ofsted to prevent such incidents and would be grateful to know what instructions the DfE is giving to Ofsted in these matters.

Clumsy British values inspections

Ofsted's system for detecting intolerance is clearly inadequate if it is not picking up on anti-Christian sentiment. In fact, Ofsted may be part of the problem. Whilst guidance from your department says there is no obligation on schools to promote gay marriage, there have been Ofsted inspections in several parts of the country where Ofsted inspectors have implied via questioning of pupils that they ought to accept gay marriage. We are aware of several cases of this approach being taken with primary age pupils, some as young as six.

Ofsted inspectors also seem to take a heavy-handed approach on the issue of transsexualism. In one school a girl reported that she was asked by inspectors if she knew any girls who felt 'trapped in the wrong body'. The girl assumed inspectors were referring to her. No professional should leave a pupil with that impression.

Ofsted inspections as currently constituted never seem to discover mistreatment of Christian pupils by an unprofessional atheist teacher. The example of a Christian pupil harangued by a teacher over their beliefs on traditional marriage is compounded by intrusive non age-appropriate questions from inspectors.

Ofsted inspections need to be re-balanced. The fact that a school has not covered the existence of same-sex marriage by the age of six is typical of most primary schools. Yet this appears to have become a standard question and one which results in a negative report for the school.

All the world's major faiths have traditional views on issues like marriage, the differences between the sexes, abortion, euthanasia and recreational drugs. This is not extremism. As a churchgoer yourself we are confident you will understand our concerns.

If Ofsted wants to learn lessons from what has been going on in Birmingham it must learn to respect mainstream religious views on social issues. And it must learn that the mistreatment of Christian pupils is a problem that deserves its attention.

Given Sir Michael's silence on these issues, can I ask if you can investigate and provide us with your personal assurance that Christian pupils are no longer subject to ridicule and name calling in any of the schools which were subject to reports by Ian Kershaw or Peter Clarke? And can you please also confirm that steps have been taken to remove members of staff identified as having extremist anti-Christian attitudes?

Yours sincerely,



Colin Hart
Director