

Mr. John Nash
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Date 17th June 2015

Dear Mr. Nash,

Section 128 of the Education and Skills Act 2008: Prohibition from taking part in the management of an Independent school.

This is my response to your letter dated 25th of March 2015. I was disappointed that you did not allow me more time to submit this response as some things required a more detailed response which I have not been able to make. However, I am preparing a video recording also which I hope to submit in the next few days.

Attached please find the following documents:

- 1) Letter Mr. Michael Wilshaw
- 2) PVET statement on Ofsted reports
- 3) PVET response to EFA review – RED
- 4) PVET response to Allegations in Media

As part of the evidence base please see also a video lecture (U-TUBE) by me where I go through some of the evidence based which is relevant to this response. The duration of the video is 1 hour approx. I hope this is an acceptable form of evidence.

Weblink: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k10K3xdAbZI>

If any clarification is required regarding my submission please do contact me and I would be happy to oblige. Also, I would be happy to make representation in person, if that is possible or required.

Please see below for full document (11 pages)

Yours sincerely

Tahir Alam

Contentions: Ofsted Reports, Peter Clarke's Report and EFA Review

The prohibition order relies primarily upon four reports for its evidence base: Peter Clarke's report, EFA Review and Ofsted reports & MCB guidance document which I authored.

Ofsted: I have always contested the fairness and objectivity of the Ofsted reports as they were politically motivated and done in a climate of moral panic (Islamophobia) and driven by false allegations in the media. See attached letters to Sir Michael Wilshaw & Prime Minister David Cameron and complaint submitted at the time in June 2014 to OFSTED itself. All three documents are attached.

Peter Clarke's report- I reject the findings of Peter Clarke's characterisation of myself, the work that I have done in education, and activities of the schools in which I had responsibility. It is not something I can recognise as being accurate or true at all. The fact is I was not running a plot to takeover schools. I have not been bullying and intimidating people or presiding over nepotism-I did not have a single relative working in the schools! I am a campaigner of inclusion of Muslim pupils in schools and in education and have been promoting greater participation and contribution from parents and community. Civic participation as I understand it is very much in the democratic spirit. Clarke's attributions are gross misrepresentation of the truth and his narrative is a fabrication relying upon half-truths, uncorroborated claims and attribution of guilt by association. It is quite frankly a shoddy and worrying piece of work for 'top policeman'. I will briefly explain why I believe this.

Top policeman gets basic facts wrong.

Peter Clarke concluded by saying:

"There has been co-ordinated, deliberate and sustained action, carried out by a number of associated individuals, to introduce an intolerant and aggressive Islamic ethos into a few schools in Birmingham"

Please note he never visited, spoken to a single pupil or a parent.

Mr. Clarke promises, early on in his report's findings that his investigation and subsequent report is "extensive and has been able to reach clear conclusions based on firm evidence" and that he has treated "the entire investigation as an exercise in fact finding and establishing a sound, verifiable evidence base and where possible, fully corroborated evidence base" p.8

Such a lofty claim ought to be borne out by the quality of the contents of his report, but unfortunately it does not live up to what it promised. The Clarke report contains a number of basic factual inaccuracies. Had there been a basic modicum of fact checking and corroboration with those involved, this would not be the case.

Unfortunately in some instances the report tries so hard to back up the 'hardliner' takeover narrative that it ends up playing fast and loose with the facts.

The report introduces me as a former Chair of the Association of Muslim Governors. But I have never been its Chair! No one sought to fact check this basic claim or to ask me about it. May be because it suited what he was trying to prove. If you were trying to prove schools were being 'taken

over', linking the main protagonist with the Association of Muslim Governors, an organisation that was set up to encourage Muslims to become governors, would be the perfect foundation upon which to evidence the conspiracy. Therein lies the problem, lots of inaccurate information has been put out there to convince people that a plot was underway and to justify the crackdown. On a more basic level, if Clarke was unable to get basic facts right, how can we rely on the rest of his report?

Other factual inaccuracies include the claim that I was a 'previous trustee of Birmingham Central Mosque'. I am in fact a current trustee.

Mr. Clarke also claims that I acted as a consultant and trainer at Park View since 2012. This seems to insinuate I had a paid role at the school, when in fact I have always acted as a volunteer at the school in the capacity as governor and nothing more.

The Clarke report recounts a number of uncorroborated claims such as the following incident:

"The Park View girls' tennis team was taken to a local schools' tournament by PE staff after school. When they arrived they found men present. The teacher had to return the girls to school and was suspended by governors until she had written a letter of apology."

Aside from the fact that this incident is grossly misrepresented to give a desired impression of the incident, no staff member was ever suspended by governors and the governors did not demand a letter of apology nor got an apology. This can be verified via school records. More importantly and characteristically of Clarke's report these facts were never corroborated with myself as chair of governors. The rationale for what constitutes 'firm evidence' is clear; if it suits the desired narrative accept the claim as fact. Please note Mr. Clarke never set foot into the school, I did invite him but he makes fantastic conclusion, for which he blindly relying on the flawed EFA review.

I also draw your attention to a report published on 17th March 2015, 'Extremism in schools: the Trojan Horse affair ' by the cross-party House of Commons Education Committee. Having analysed and taken both written and verbal evidence from multiple sources over many months the Committee concluded and I quote:

No evidence of extremism or radicalisation, apart from a single isolated incident, was found by any of the inquiries and there was no evidence of a sustained plot nor of a similar situation pertaining elsewhere in the country.

Single isolated incident: IT technicians recording what appeared to be Al Qaeda terrorist videos into a DVD format. p.52

A computer technician at Park View School did copy a video which included footage from an 'Al-Qaeda video'. What Mr. Clarke misleadingly avoids to mention is that this video was produced by the BBC - a Panorama documentary! It was copied following a request from police officer working with the school on Prevent. This kind of misrepresentation, unfortunately, is not an exception but very much the norm in the way incidents have been misconstrued.

This is a typical example of the gross and deliberate mis-representation by the Trojan Horse reports. Another example in the Clarke report is about Adderley School:

A former headteacher told me that the governing body asserted that assemblies should be 'much more Islamic'. He therefore recruited someone from a nearby Islamic organisation, who gave inclusive assemblies with an Islamic focus. His decision was overruled by the governing body and, instead Tahir Alam appointed a staff member who has been described as 'singularly unqualified and incapable of doing the job'.

Again, whatever its accuracy or context, the accusation is uncorroborated, was never put to me. The Clarke report is replete with claims which have not been corroborated but simply taken as fact because it fitted in with predetermined conclusions.

The main accusation that all reports return back to, which the Education Select Committee has completely rubbished, is the claim that Muslim governors sought to 'Islamise' schools.

Peter Clarke: "It appears to be a deliberate attempt to convert secular state schools into exclusive faith schools in all but name" p.48

EFA - Inspectors from the Educational Funding Agency believed Park View went beyond its remit as an academy by taking the "Islamic focus too far"

A faith school has three distinct characteristics. Firstly, it selects its pupils by faith. Secondly it recruits its staff by faith and thirdly, certain religious acts (such as Mass, Friday prayers etc.) in the school are mandatory. Park View categorically did not fulfil any of this. All religious accommodations related uniform, prayer etc. were entirely voluntary. There was coercion or compulsion of any description.

Where 98% of the pupil population of a school are Muslim, it is only fair to make reasonable accommodation within legal parameters, reflecting parental requests and aspirations. If for example a school has a majority from a particular faith group, a school can seek a determination to permit collective worship based on that faith. This is what Mr. Michael Wilshaw said to the Education Select Committee said back in July 2014 when giving evidence in relation to the Trojan Horse Affair,

*"As I said, it would be the duty of the head teacher and governors of a school where the great majority of children came from the Muslim faith to promote that faith and give them every spiritual support as necessary."*ⁱ

This was precisely our approach; simply catering for children in the school and community that we were serving.

EFA – Report: We have contested much of the finding of the EFA in our reply to the draft report. **Please see 'PVET response to EFA review –RED' . Please read the RED bits in full in this document as PVET responses.** The background to the draft Review must be set in context. It is inescapable that the investigation itself and the methodology of questioning were driven by the media interest that had commented on the alleged Trojan Horse plot and criticisms by disaffected former members of staff in the main.

My responses to the ANNEX to your letter date 25th March 2015 which cites evidences upon which you are seeking the prohibition

1. I have worked the education profession for many years and my experience is wide and varied and is very much in the public domain. There is nothing clandestine or sinister about any of these. The manner in which I have worked and a voluntary or professional capacity has been open and transparent in the field raising achievement and campaigning for inclusive practices in school with respect to religious needs of Muslim children.

2. There is no evidence whatsoever that I was closely involved in day-to-day running of all PVET schools. My role was strategic as chair of directors. I was chair of governors at Park View and performed a strategic role where decisions were taken in the GB. I was a volunteer: what makes you think I had enough time to be closely involved in the day to days running of 3 schools?
 - You assert that I had an ‘inappropriate’ role in the day to day running of the school. This is true only for 4 weeks, and should not be misused as evidence of a broader conclusion. We found ourselves in an extraordinary situation, a crisis, where the Trust schools were under attack in the media every day and I had to deal with mainly media related matters and in provided visible support for the staff and, indeed, if the Chair had not been on site then a justified criticism could have been asserted that he was not paying enough attention or giving enough time to assist the Trust through the difficult period. This enabled the Trust schools, the teaching staff to concentrate on continuing to provide the high standard of teaching to the pupils across the Trust. The fact is we operated high delegation model – decision making was localised (LGB) level for the schools. I was not making outside of GB for schools.

Governance structure was circumvented: This is not correct. After the rapid expansion (GHS joining) the heads of the 3 schools that form the Trust did meet with each other on an informal basis to share ideas and support each other for a period of 3 months only. I also attended these meetings for most part. These meetings were informal with no agenda or minutes of the same. In essence they are quasi-social meetings. These meetings were not used to hold the head teachers of the schools to account, but as stated to provide support and sharing of ideas and good practice. There was no intention to circumvent GB accountability. The regular meeting with 3 principles were scheduled separately with formal agendas etc.

Direct involvement in all appointment: It is completely fallacious to claim this. As I have stated elsewhere, I had a very hands off approach and only sat on 2 (TWO) appointment panels in 5 or 6 years. Does that sound excessive? The paperwork is in the school you can verify this? Why has it not been verified this already? As said the EFA report has a lot to be desired when it corroborating and verifying allegations.

- This again is simply stating a claim or allegation were governors (assume it means me) ‘were seen’ by staff does not constitute evidence – so exactly how, where did I get involved in a day to day manner in influencing curriculum? Which bit was introduced outside normal governance operations?
 - I am passionate about education and participated in many aspects and organisation. This is all legitimate and proper. Since when did being influential has become something ‘bad’ for which people should be banned or criticised. I was chair of the Trust, as such, it was my role to influence the organisation strategically towards success and excellence. We did this rather well I’d say, judging by outcome for pupils and SMSC development and confidence of our children. I am professional trainer and specialise in school governance – I was appointed NLG (National Leader of Governance) by the DfE. This is what I do to pay bills! Why is this sinister?
3. **‘Espouse an intolerant & narrow minded faith based ideology’** – You tried to support this claim by selectively quoting from MCB document. Firstly the ‘information and guidance’ does not necessarily reflect my personal views, but rather covers a spectrum of opinion across the Muslim diaspora in the UK. Nonetheless I stand what I have written, which is being taken out of context.

The MCB document entitled ‘Meeting the needs of Muslim pupils in state schools’ was written in 2006 (published 2007). It was written at a time when many professionals working within schools and children’s services in multicultural areas were looking for guidance on how to better accommodate Muslim children and respond to some of the issues that were often raised by parents or pupils. I used get a lot calls myself from parents and schools about issues. I therefore thought this document should be produced.

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 and try to explain perspectives clearly as 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. It was welcomed by many schools at the time.

Mr. Clarke falsely claims that it is about imposing things on secular school. Where have I suggested or spoken about imposed things? I am calling for a dialogue and mutual amicable solutions in the document through a spirit of cooperation.

You have chosen to misrepresent me by selectively quoting from the 2007 document that I co-authored 'Meeting the needs of Muslim pupils in state schools' to assert that I treated all Muslim pupils in Britain as a cohesive community having the same beliefs and practices. Your assertions are completely baseless and false. For the sake of brevity I quote three examples from the said report disproving your assertions:

i) Most Muslims have no objection to learning about other religions and their beliefs and practices. A serious study of the Qur'an, for example, leads naturally to a study of the 'People of the Book' (Jews and Christians). A balance needs to be kept between giving Muslims a good grounding in and detailed study of their own faith and learning about other major faiths practised within society.

ii) Visiting places of worship. Muslim pupils are allowed to take part in educational visits to all places of worship, including churches, synagogues and temples. Some parents may object to this, but if they are made aware of the objectives and the purpose of the trip, namely that it is for educational purposes and not for worship, this should usually be sufficient to allay their concerns.

iii) Music is part of the national curriculum and is required to be taught at Key Stages 1, 2 and there is a great diversity of opinion regarding music amongst Muslims. These are often influenced by local cultures and varying religious interpretations. Traditionally, music is limited to the human voice and non-tuneable percussion instruments such as drums. Within these constraints, Muslim artists have been very creative. Relying on the beauty and harmony of their voices, Muslims use music to remember God, nature, justice, morality and history.

May I suggest that you actually read the MCB 2007 report in full. You will find that it is in accordance with national legislation and that it seeks promotes tolerance and mutual respect and does not treat the Muslim community living in England as homogeneous and categorically calls for integrationist rather than segregationist approach. May I politely suggest that whoever is making the decision read the entirety of the document and disregard the cherry picking that has gone on to give a false impression in the letter.

Participate in 'non-Islamic acts of worship' : It is suggested that I have stated 'Muslims should not be required to participate in non-Islamic acts of worship'. Why do you think they should be? Why is this 'intolerant' or objectionable? I have said this and I believe this. Are you suggesting that Muslims children should worship in accordance with Christian or Hindu religious practices? Should Christian children worship according Islamic beliefs e.g. made to perform the Friday prayer! Or made to fast during Ramadan! Of course not. So why is this

submitted as evidence warranting banning? I think this quite clearly impinges basic right to one's belief, religion and freedom to worship.

Sports – please read whole section of actual book – these are issues raised and the document is making schools aware of them as possible things Muslim parents may raise.

Music – there is a lot of music that glorifies violence, including sexual violence, or degradation of women, use of abusive language etc. Surely school should not be entertaining such things?

ART – 3D human imagery (statues) Please note this has never been implemented even in Park View as policy. The point is I have had these objection in the past. All objection you are documenting from the MCB document to be frankly are based on gross misreading of the aims of the document and ignores the spirit of it. It is providing information and guidance on range of issues suggesting some of the best practice in meeting needs of Muslim pupils. Other LA's have produced similar guidance documents of their own assist in greater understanding and accommodation.

Harun Yahya – This subject matter is controversial amongst Muslims and other religions also. This always comes up in science and RE lessons. This link was included in 2006. It was intended for schools to be able look at some of Muslim perspective might be. I am not sure when you checked this but I cannot remember what the content was 9 years ago, whether this was there at that time or not.

4. Mr. Clarke's has been very selective in his presentation of facts and introducing distortions. However, it is correct to say that we implemented most of the recommendation in catering for our children 99% of who were of Islamic faith back. We reflected parental aspirations where possible and this was in part why we so successful in transforming our school because we worked very closely with parents and developed a relationship of mutual trust. I take the view that British Muslim are integral part of British society and therefore should be catered in a reasonable way. Mr. Clarke appears to believe that this should not be case and Muslim parents and children should not leave the faith at the school gate!
5. Events at PVET school for which I had ultimate responsibility:
 - The curriculum and education plans were narrowed – disagree see 'PVET response to EFA review –RED'
 - Friday prayer poster in classes – Posters were placed as notices in a number places around school. These were categorically not instructional but gave information as regards the timing in a similar manner as, say for example, for after school clubs and when they would take place. The stretching truth this manner cannot be right. You suggest senior staff told students they were worse than 'kaffirs' if they did not pray. Senior staff at the school confirm they have never been asked about this allegations

and it is not true. Why did not EFA officers ask them and corroborate this? These claims are truly nonsensical. From a 600 pupils in park View school only around 30 to 50 came to do Friday prayers regularly, with attendance higher during Ramadan, obviously. All such activities were optional and no one was coerced participate.

- Extremist Speakers in School: 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 were informed by Prevent officers from Birmingham he was not any banned extremist list. We would never knowingly allow anyone with any kind of extremist views to enter the school.
Neturei Karta – This was not checked with me before invitation but I now understand their views are controversial but I do not know what the specific content of their assembly was so I cannot say if what they presented was acceptable or not. All speakers are normally briefs on school ethos etc. to ensure suitability of content.
- Park View taught Spanish, Urdu and Arabic as MFL – Where did you get this information from? May I suggest I suggest you check your facts – I met the Spanish teacher myself in school after she was recruited!
- Three Muslim members of staff teaching SRE. Although EFA have arrived at this conclusion but for some reason the failed ask these members of staff about it. They did not write their own teaching materials as matter of fact. Again allegations are taken to be true without being corroborated with concerned parties. Why did EFA officers not speak these individuals? See ‘PVET response to EFA review –RED’
- Attempted to ban Christmas celebrations: There is no evidence whatsoever of other faiths or cultures being disparaged in anyone of our schools. You assert that governors tried to ban Christmas celebrations in Nansen. If this was something I was minded to do can you explain to why I did not do it Park View school where I had been a governor and chair for 17 years? No attempt was made to do that. This is another case of incidents being stretched beyond recognition. The point I raised with the head was that Muslim children should not act the role of Jesus or God in the nativity play and that it would be fine for Christian children to do so. According to Islamic teachings this is considered very wrong may elicit parent complaints. This does not amount a ban as is very obvious.
- SRE complaints to schools- workshops- I do wide range training/workshops for parents and governors. This is what I do for a living. The SRE awareness course is

about explaining the legal aspects, duties, responsibility and issues young people face. I cover rights of parents to withdraw etc. I explain the complaints procedures to parents if they have concerns. Is this not why we have complaints procedures? Why should not parents complain if they have concerns? I hope doing many of these and others workshops for parents as it engagement and democratic participation in civic life.

- Women and girls are not treated equally- This claim is totally nonsensical and not evidence based. Please see document 'PVET response to EFA Review –RED'. Our girls were the pride of our school and excelled the boys academically and in leadership roles in the prefect systems. 78% of them got 5A-C grades compared to 70% boys.
 - Pupils segregated according to gender – Only in PE and in lessons time tabled against that. PE is taught in single gender classes in vast majority of schools in the county. School has no policy of segregation besides this. see 'PVET response to EFA review –RED'.
 - Girls sport's teams were removed from tournament because of male staff – This again is a complete misstatement of facts – This was not a tournament but a coaching sessions. Girls returned to school because year 12 (17 year olds) were doing the coaching and school felt this was not appropriate for safeguarding reasons. See 'PVET response to EFA review –RED'.
 - Al-Qaeda Terrorist – DVD copied – A computer technician at Park View School did copy a video which included footage from an 'Al-Qaeda video'. What Mr. Clarke misleadingly avoids to mention is that this video was produced by the BBC - Panorama documentary! It was copied following a request from police officer working with the school on Prevent (not for school). This kind of misrepresentation, unfortunately, is not an exception but very much the norm in the way incidents have been misconstrued. You have gone one step further and suggested that said that video was copied 'presumably for use as teaching material'. Again another careful insertion of words to mislead the reader. This incident took place number years ago and EFA as well as Peter Clarke were told as above but still decided to create suspicion with the view to deceiving the reader.
6. I reject the idea that our school have undermined any of the fundamental British values. Your claims are not evidence based. In fact, I would say to contrary that our children were well prepared to excel as full citizens of Britain. We substantially enhance their life chances through high academic results and nurtured confidence and ambition to go with it. Our broad curriculum that included rich after school curriculum meant children were well prepared to explore future opportunities.
7. For response to these set allegations, please see 'PVET response to EFA review –RED'. This is part of the EFA review from where you have extracted the allegations.

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<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/education-committee/extremism-in-schools/oral/11342.html>