

# Birmingham's Trojan Horse Hoax — brief update

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At some stage last year someone created a document that purported to be a letter written by someone in Birmingham to someone in Bradford. The supposed letter apparently showed that some Muslims in Birmingham were plotting, in close liaison and cooperation with the city's director of education, and with her warm approval and encouragement, to 'take over' a number of local schools. They had a tried and tested strategy, the letter said, which they named as Operation Trojan Horse. This involved substantial use, the letter cheerfully acknowledged, of dirty tricks, deceit and deception.

The document was riddled with factual errors and howlers and for this reason alone was clearly not written by someone familiar with the matters being referred to. Also it contained a number of phrases which reflected Islamophobic fantasies and stereotypes, and for this reason too it was clearly a fake, for no Muslim could conceivably have written it, unless as an April Fools-type practical joke designed to expose the gullibility, ignorance and deep-seated prejudice of many non-Muslims.

But alas the document was taken at face value when it somehow fell recently into the hands of two reporters on the Sunday Times. Their specialism was security, not education or religion, and it apparently did not occur to them to make elementary checks about the document's authenticity. Nor were elementary checks made by editorial staff at the Sunday Times before the article was approved for publication.

The story appeared on Sunday 2 March and in the course of the following few days was widely recycled by other national papers, and by many regional ones, and by the BBC. No one in these papers or at the BBC apparently bothered to check whether the document was genuine. Some papers, on the contrary, invented further details, for example that the supposed authors of the document were Salafis, and all made extensive use of stereotypes and tropes about fundamentalists, Islamists, extremists and jihadists.

Investigations will hopefully establish who concocted the hoax document, and for what specific purposes. Also there will hopefully be clarity in due course about why Birmingham City Council did not kill the story dead when it first surfaced. But people who were fooled by the hoax are already beginning to change their ground. The spoof document, they are ready to concede, is indeed a hoax. But nevertheless it could have been true, they tell you, for it accords with experiences they themselves have had, or that friends or acquaintances of theirs have had, or friends of friends and acquaintances of acquaintances, over the years.

In consequence there is a danger that entirely legitimate concerns and grievances about the academic achievement of Pakistani heritage pupils in Birmingham schools will be sidelined, and that valuable and much needed measures to increase the

involvement of Pakistani heritage teachers in school management and leadership, and of Pakistani people in school governance generally, will be slowed down.

These dangers are compounded by the declining influence and capacity, since 2010, of local education authorities, and by their loss of expertise, professionalism and wisdom. Also they are compounded by consequent increases in uncertainty and anxiety. It is when human beings are anxious, and are uncertain about the role, nature and capacity of legitimate authority, that they are prone to give credence to stories which, in happier and more secure times, they would laugh out of court.

### **For fuller information**

The best single source for fuller information is an item on Inayat Bunglawala's blog, **Inayat's Corner**. It provides links to much of the main media coverage so far, and to a robust rebuttal by the chair of governors alleged to be master-minding the so-called plot. The address is <http://inayatscorner.wordpress.com/2014/03/10/more-developments-in-the-muslim-plot-to-take-over-schools-story/>.

Factual errors and howlers in the spoof document were described by the sister paper of the Sunday Times in an article on Tuesday 11 March. This can be read in full at <http://www.islamophobiawatch.co.uk/times-discovers-that-trojan-horse-letter-is-a-crude-forgery/>

Factual errors are also itemised in an article in today's Guardian, though under a misleading headline, since it refers to a 'possible' hoax rather than to a blatant and self-evident one: [http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/mar/13/alleged-islamic-plot-birmingham-schools-possible-hoax?CMP=tw\\_tfd](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/mar/13/alleged-islamic-plot-birmingham-schools-possible-hoax?CMP=tw_tfd)

Relevant blog posts by Karamat Iqbal about the situation of Pakistani pupils in Birmingham schools include the following:

<http://forwardpartnership.org.uk/2014/02/11/character-and-resilience-are-essential-to-becoming-educated-but-so-is-their-religious-education-for-pakistani-children/>

<http://forwardpartnership.org.uk/2013/10/14/pakistani-boys-education-school-important-but-so-is-their-religion-for-muslim-pupils/>

Source: Insted Consultancy blog, 14 March 2014