



Conference on Radicalisation

Agenda

10:00 – 10:30 Registration

10:30 – 10:55 Geraint Evans. Ofsted.

10:55 – 11:20 Zafar Ali, Iqra - Governance and Community/legislation

Break

11:35 – 12:00 Noeman Anwar, Iqra - Policies/Curriculum

12:00 – 12:25 Area Commander, Simon Bowden – Prevent/ working with schools and community

12:25 – 12.45 QA

12:45 – Buffet lunch

Event closes 1.15

Geraint Evans - Her Majesty's Inspector Ofsted with responsibility of being Specialist Advisor for Extremism.

Noeman Anwar – Head Teacher IQRA Primary School

BSc Honours degree in Management Sciences, QTS, MaST (Distinction), NPQH.

Part of SLT moving school from Special Measures into Good, March 2012

Pupil Premium Regional Awards Winner 2014

Judged Outstanding by Local Authority November 2014

Section 8 Ofsted visit (July 2015) highly praised leadership of safeguarding

Externally supported nearly 2 dozen educational organisations in moderation, teaching and learning, Pupil Premium identification, SMSC, British Values, leadership development, innovation within schools

Zafar Ali – Chair of Governors of Iqra Primary School

Zafar Ali, BA Jurisprudence Hons (Oxon), MA (Oxon), PGCE Post Grad DMS and HND in Computing, one of the founding members of and the Chair of Governors at Iqra Slough Primary School, a state-funded VA Muslim School in Slough.

Zafar has considerable experience in governance of education of schools as Chair of Governors at both primary and secondary level, having been the Chair of Governors at Slough and Eton CE Secondary School and Vice Chair of Cippenham Juniors in addition to being Chair of Iqra since 2008.

Zafar's past careers were as a University Lecturer in Law and Finance, Police Officer, Director of a CAB Law, Centre Advocacy, Equalities Consultant to Royal Holloway College and more recently Director of Slough Equalities Commission. Zafar is currently a Director of Age Concern in Slough, Co-Chair of Slough Faith Partnership and Chair of Slough Community Leisure.

He also acts as a Business Advisor to a care home for adults with learning disabilities.

Zafar has delivered lectures for The Key and AMSUK for school leaders and for schools in Slough on Radicalisation. He has experience of working with Muslim Community groups and is a member of the Parliamentary Round Table Group discussing Radicalisation. He has participated in media programs dealing with Radicalisation on Sky, BBC, ITV, CNN, Japanese TV and Brazil News. As Chair of Governors of Iqra he has led the way on directing how schools should educate pupils about Radicalisation. He pioneered and delivered a conference on addressing Radicalisation bringing together community leaders, groups, think tanks, schools and police following his personal research into this area. The first of its kind nationally. It was held in Slough in November 2014.

Superintendent Simon Bowden

Local Policing Area Commander - Slough

Simon Bowden is the LPA Commander for Slough. He joined Thames Valley Police in 1988 and was initially posted to Maidenhead. The majority of his career has been in the South East of the Force - he has worked at Slough, Maidenhead and Windsor as well as other stations.

During his time as a police officer, Simon has also worked on the Force Drugs Squad, and in the HQ Criminal Justice Unit, where he implemented the 'No Witness, No Justice' programme for the Thames Valley and was a national witness champion. He has worked with ACPO in developing the current policy and grading system for court warrants. Prior to taking up the role of LPA Commander for Slough, Simon was the LPA Commander for Bracknell and then Windsor & Maidenhead.

Article written for The Key by Zafar Ali.

British values? Universal values in an Islamic school

I have often been asked why I supported the creation of an Islamic faith

school. People forget that before asking this question, they should really reflect on whether any faith schools should exist. Since they do exist, and since the Equality Act 2010 protects all faiths that meet its definitions, including Islam, objections to faith schools that are not Christian in character are not valid because they are not consistent. Either we have faith schools for all recognised faiths, or none at all.

My conversion to the value of faith schools does not come from my own faith as a Muslim. My core support for the value of faith schools stems from my education at what was then St Mary Redcliffe School, a Church of England school in Bristol. I was the only non-Christian at the school during my secondary years, and will always be grateful for the way I was welcomed and treated as equal. I was never made to feel as though I was an outsider. The values that I am discussing today were ingrained throughout the whole life of the school, which was testament to the school's enlightened thinking and vision. These values were tolerance, equality, democracy and respect for other faiths.

I came to this country in 1954 – I was three years old. The education I've received here has never shaken either my own faith or my commitment to respecting the faiths of others. It has only enhanced both.

Let me share a memory that I will never forget. The headteacher at the school called in my parents one day to discuss whether I would take part in religious education classes and morning assemblies which, in the 60s, were very religiously oriented. My parents asked that I attend the meeting, which I did. The head said that as I was a Muslim he would understand if my parents did not want me to take part in RE and assemblies. Just imagine the freedom I was afforded in 1963! The meeting was very short and my parents agreed that they had brought me up to respect other faiths and it was imperative I learn about other faiths. This, they said, was the Islamic way.

The foundation that this school gave me in a values-based system has always convinced me that faith schools embodying universal values can be of great benefit to pupils. For me, universal values are British values, which are also Islamic values, and which indeed exist in all major religions. Those who lack understanding, or who are mischievous, confuse faith values with cultural values. This confusion is where friction and mistrust come from.

Fast forward to 2002, and the start of the project to establish an Islamic voluntary-aided primary school in Slough. The community wanted it, I believed in it, and the government of the day had opened the door to schools based on a wider range of faiths, including Islam. That to me was a true recognition at last of freedom of religion in this country. I will not go into the ups and downs of the period 2002 to 2008, when IQRA School finally opened. What remained clear throughout was our desire to create an Islamic school in a multi-faith environment. Then we faced the issue of how to ensure effective governance at an Islamic school located in Slough, and found ourselves confronted with some severe challenges.

Why should this be so? Well, there were several issues relating to Islamic sectarianism, the stereotypical image of a Muslim school, and the difficulty of taking over an existing community school. If I had to do it again, I would never choose to take over a school in this way. I underestimated the hostility of the staff and parents at the school, even though the majority of pupils were Muslim, and those other issues came to the fore. Questions were asked as to whether it was a Wahhabi or Sunni or Shia school, and so on. Was it really a madrasa? Would all female teachers have to wear a veil? Would female pupils be allowed to talk to boys? Would female pupils have to have their faces covered? Would all teachers have to convert to Islam? These questions were often raised by a small group of parents who wanted an intolerant school, narrow-minded and discriminatory. Some staff, too, Muslim and non-Muslim, wanted to denigrate the school in the eyes of the community.

From this I learned some real lessons for surviving as a governor of a faith school. Let me share these with you now:

1.

Have a clear vision and ethos. Don't sacrifice your stated principles for the sake of an easy ride. Ensure that you understand and value the whole community, but abide by those universal values you believe in

2.

Don't fall into the trap of sectarianism. We made it clear that we were not a Sunni or Shia or Wahhabi or any other kind of school. We stood firm and, though, that was a difficult time, we are now reaping the rewards. Our stance was clear: "If you don't agree with our values and our rejection of any form of intolerance, our school is not right for you". We weathered Facebook attacks, defamatory leaflets, petitions and open confrontation. Why?

Because we were promoting among staff and pupils those values that have recently been called British values – equality, tolerance, respect for other faiths, democracy and rule of law. Our school, IQRA, was ahead of the curve: recruiting the best teachers irrespective of faith, freedom to wear or not wear the hijab for Muslim female staff and pupils, teaching other faiths, tolerance of others, and the desire to teach our children to be good Muslims in multi-faith and multi-cultural Britain.

After those first two years of fire-fighting, the school has gone from strength to strength. It's been rated 'good' by Ofsted and outstanding by the local authority. We are very active in the community, and proud to have confident young Muslim children. Staff, pupils and the community know what IQRA stands for.

In November 2014, we took the bold step of holding a conference to discuss radicalisation, and how we as schools and community should address it. We were the first Muslim (and primary) school to hold an event of this kind. We knew there was a danger of a backlash, but leadership requires strength and conviction, and I am pleased to say it was a great success. For me, governors must meet head-on the danger of pupils being groomed by those who have extremist views. We must give pupils the tools to question those who would distort the truth and teach them to appreciate values we all believe in – in all schools.

There are many facets to governance: improving the quality of teaching, raising standards, improving behaviour, ensuring health and safety. Any governor will tell you this list goes on and on. Besides all of these, safeguarding is as vital as ever, with the added dimension now of protecting our children against extremism. It's a long-term commitment that requires great effort and dedication along with strong leadership by the governing body.

I leave you with one comforting thought – make this commitment and you'll find that 95% of the Muslim community will be with you. As chair of governors for nearly seven years, it's been a rollercoaster ride, but I know the true value of strong leadership and governance. It will always pay dividends.