



CAMBRIDGESHIRE ASSOCIATION

Minutes of General meeting held on Wednesday 18th June 2014 at Huntingdon Town Hall

Present: Philippe Harari (Chair) and 9 members

Apologies: Jackie Francis, Louise Crook, Daphne Babouris

1. **Minutes of last meeting:** the minutes of the General Meeting held on 12th March 2014 were read and signed by the Chair as a true record.

2. **Resolutions:** The following resolutions were carried by the meeting.

Motion 1: The 'Trojan Horse' events in Birmingham

1. Cambridgeshire NUT recognises that the 'Trojan Horse' affair has been politically charged and that the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove has made numerous attacks to further his agenda:

- a) On students who have been subjected to continuous scaremongering while many have been preparing for vital exams including their GCSEs.
- b) On staff who, many of whom have been worried about potential press intrusion as they go to work, on school visits and on social media sites that they use.
- c) On Muslims with the use of Islamophobia in the press and beyond which fuels racism and divides communities by associating Muslims in Birmingham and beyond with the words 'extremism';
- d) On Birmingham schools by both the threat of forced academisation or transfer of sponsors;
- e) On Birmingham LA – which is at risk of takeover by private companies or a trust;
- f) On all schools – no notice inspections and the teaching so-called 'British values'.

We strongly oppose all of these attacks. We say to Gove: 'Hands Off Birmingham Schools'. We welcome and support the 'Hands Off Birmingham Schools' campaign.

2. The attacks on Muslims in the media may well be part of a wider Tory strategy to out-racism UKIP in the run-up to elections next year. We acknowledge that many Muslims feel the Islamophobic waves from this regardless of whether they have any connections with these schools and regardless of the practices of these schools. The media effort has been to portray Muslims as 'extremists', something that featured heavily in the Ofsted reports without any description of what extremism is and of any real evidence of incidents of extremism in the schools. In other words, the Ofsted reports tend to criticise schools for failing to deal with an extremism that Ofsted itself failed to find.

It is vital the NUT is CLEARLY seen to be opposing the Islamophobia that a large section of Birmingham's citizens (and NUT members) are feeling. That includes making public statements that clearly reject the Islamophobic nature of the discourse. Within this context we believe that the Ofsted reports have been politically charged and we reject the notion that they could possibly be fair and unbiased reporting of the schools.

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3. We note that the Ofsted and EFA reports include critical references to governance, management and curriculum and other educational practices which are contrary to those acceptable to the NUT. We do not believe that Ofsted has been motivated by a desire to defend staff terms and conditions or to ensure that there are 'open and fair' employment practices in schools. Nor do we believe that Gove is motivated primarily by a desire to ensure equality and social justice in the educational experience of pupils in the schools. The Ofsted reports took place within a politically motivated climate. For example, we note the recent reports that inspectors were sent back to do a second inspection of Park View School as the first inspection report was not sufficiently hostile to the school (see the Guardian: "Ofsted inspectors make U-turn on 'Trojan Horse' school, leak shows" 30/5/14).

However, while taking account of the government's motivation we do not base our response on it, we make our own critical assessment of the evidence presented in the reports.

a) The role of governors. We note the complaints by some staff members at all five schools that the governing body interferes inappropriately in the day-to-day running of the school. We also note the EFA's criticisms of the competence of governors, including financial irregularities. One issue of particular concern concerns the apparent lack of fairness of some recruitment and promotion practices by governors (see eg the EFA report).

b) The role of school management. We also note the complaints by some staff members of unfair treatment by school management. As a trade union we take the terms and conditions of our staff incredibly seriously and make it clear that we will support members with individual or collective action wherever members deem this necessary.

c) Curriculum and equality issues. There is evidence in the reports of serious problems in some schools of denial of children's entitlement to a broad, balanced and socially just education. They include gender segregation between and within classes (which is only acceptable for sex education and some PE activities), a restricted curriculum depriving pupils of some subject areas (such as art and music) or issues within them (such as sexual orientation and relationships) or biased treatment of them (such as evolution).

To ignore or downplay these issues, insofar as the evidence is accurate, or to fail to put forward an effective strategy to deal with them, including within the Hands Off Our Schools campaign, would be to depart from NUT principles and to collude in the perpetuation of injustice. It would also weaken the campaign against the government's attacks by making it vulnerable to the criticism of failing to acknowledge and act on serious failings. We recognise that these issues may apply to many schools in the city in various ways. Addressing them effectively in the schools currently under attack can serve as a catalyst to tackle them in other schools.

4. We reject Gove's solution, which is to force Saltley to become a sponsored academy and to transfer the four academies to be run by new academy sponsors.

5. We believe that it is the right and the responsibility of the local authority, as the elected body representing the whole community of Birmingham, to oversee all schools and ensure that they function appropriately – they are held responsible by Ofsted for all schools in their area, including academies and free schools and should take on this important responsibility, seeking funded in order to achieve this.

We therefore state that it should be role of the LA, not Gove or Ofsted, to deal with any issues at the schools in question or elsewhere in Birmingham.

Cambridgeshire NUT supports the call from Birmingham NUT that:

a) The Local Authority should publish an Interim Review Report of the schools in question from the Review group.

b) The Local Authority should hold a Public Inquiry into the local authority's Interim Review Report which involves all stake-holders including all trade unions represented in the schools, staff, governors and parents.

- c) The Local Authority's inquiry should not have any preconditions bar that we live in a multicultural city and want students to achieve in all areas of the curriculum. Such an inquiry could also then look at the Islamophobic effects of Government leaks, quotes and reporting.
- d) If the LA refuses to hold a Public Inquiry then we believe that it should be organised by the community itself, the school unions and other relevant bodies.
- 6. There is a serious possibility that Gove will use this opportunity to attack the local authority itself by taking it over and handing it over to a trust or a group of trusts and/or private companies. In this event we resolve to build the strongest possible local and national response to defend the local authority against privatisation.
- 7. Cambridgeshire NUT agrees to send a message of support to BANUT and to the 'Hands Off Our Schools' campaign.

Motion 2

Cambridgeshire NUT agrees to donate £200 to the Cambridge and District Council to fund a coach for the June 21st demonstration called by the People's Assembly and supported by the NUT.