



Executive summary of the independent investigation commissioned by the Trust

Trustees are now in receipt of the findings from the external independent investigation commissioned following complaints that an image of the Prophet Muhammad was used as a teaching aid in a Religious Studies (RS) lesson on 22 March 2021. The investigation takes into account the education, equality and employment framework the Trust operates within. The Trust has accepted the key recommendations of the independent investigation.

RS lessons at the Trust's schools follow the national guidance, are challenging and are in line with Local Authority area agreements. Difficult issues such as blasphemy are included in the curriculum offer, as these are key aspects of the provision, and are important learning points for all our young people. The image in question was used on 22 March as part of the 'controversial issues' topic in the RS scheme of work for Year 9.

It has been confirmed that the image was used on more than one previous occasion. The image had been selected to supplement the scheme of work and was not included in the formal scheme overview. The Trust fully recognises the level of concern this has caused.

The independent investigation has concluded and the Trust has accepted that the teaching staff who developed and delivered the lesson genuinely believed that using the image had an educational purpose and benefit, and that it was not used with the intention of causing offence. The image was included to initiate a discussion about the meaning of 'blasphemy'. Nevertheless, the Trust recognises that using the image did cause deep offence to a number of students, parents and members of our school community. The Trust deeply regrets the distress this has caused. The Trust also considers that the topics covered by the lesson could have been effectively addressed in other ways and without using the image.

The Department for Education states that schools are free to include a full range of issues, ideas and materials in their curriculum, including where they are challenging or controversial. However, schools are able to balance this with the need to promote respect and tolerance between people of different faiths and beliefs, including in deciding which materials to use in the classroom. All Trust teachers must exercise appropriate professional judgement when selecting materials to supplement schemes of work for use in lessons. Clearly, where subject content is sensitive or controversial, great care must be taken to ensure that lessons are planned and delivered in a way that promotes respect and tolerance between people of different faiths, beliefs and values. The Trust considers that its lesson planning processes could have facilitated a more holistic approach to the selection of teaching aids, taking more careful account of relevant factors which would include:

- (1) the need to always promote fundamental humanitarian and British values;
- (2) the nature of the material to be used;

- (3) the reason for including it, the context and what is said about it;
- (4) the educational benefits of including it;
- (5) the age, abilities and maturity of the students;
- (6) the need to be cognisant of local context;
- (7) the need to respect and understand all faiths and no faiths, in the delivery of RS curriculum and the importance of engaging with parents.

In the light of the above, and in respect of the views of our school community the Trust is clear that it is not necessary for staff to use the material in question to deliver the learning outcomes on the subject of blasphemy; or any such images of the type used on 22 March for use in any Trust RS lessons, or any other lessons.

Following recommendations from the investigation, the Trust will establish a more formal Trust-wide structured approach to quality assurance of individual teacher planning. The process will ensure that the selection of teaching aids is subject to more rigorous monitoring. Additional guidance and training will also be provided to teaching staff to help them to take full account of the needs of different student cohorts and their contexts when planning the delivery of lessons. Induction of new staff across the Trust will include training which promotes an awareness and understanding of our local context and its rich and proud history and heritage. The Trust is committed to ensuring that there is a strong and robust network across all our schools for the teaching of RS and will utilise expert national guidance including National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE).

The Trust is committed to providing high quality education to all students and has an excellent track record of inclusivity and of building strong relationships with the wider community. These relationships have been built over many years and, as a local family of schools, are paramount to the Trust's vision and values. The Trust will not avoid addressing challenging subject matter in its classrooms but it is committed to ensuring that offence is not caused and that this is always done with care and sensitivity, enabling students to build empathy, mutual respect and understanding.

Finally, Trustees would like to thank all of the Trust's stakeholders for their contributions and support during what has been a difficult period. The Trust is determined to learn from the experience and redouble its efforts to ensure all students aspire to excellence and achieve their full potential, both in their academic studies and personal development.

If you have any questions, please contact telephone: 01924 683386 or email at **communications@batleymat.org.uk** in the first instance.