

Trojan Horse plot driven by same 'warped' Islamic extremism as Boko Haram, says Tony Blair

Birmingham schools 'plot' is part of extremist movement stretching from Pakistan to Africa to Britain, former prime minister Tony Blair claims



Tony Blair Photo: AFP/GETTY

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The alleged Islamic extremism seen in the 'Trojan Horse' scandal in schools in Birmingham is the same as that practised by Boko Haram, the Nigerian terrorist network, Tony Blair has said.

The Trojan Horse 'plot' to bring hardline practices into Birmingham classrooms is part of a global extremist movement stretching from Britain to Africa to the Far East, the former Prime Minister claimed.

Six Birmingham schools are in special measures after the education watchdog found they had fallen into the hands of bullying governors who had sought to narrow the curriculum and exclude non-Muslim pupils.

Inspectors told how raffles and tombolas at one primary school been banned from a recent school fête because they were considered “un-Islamic” as they promoted gambling.

It was also revealed that the academy's Christmas special assembly was cancelled and a termly assembly staged by a Christian charity had been scrapped. The terms “white prostitute” had been used in assemblies.

Sheikh Shady Al-Suleiman – an al-Qaeda sympathiser – had spoken at Park View secondary academy, and the theory of evolution was dismissed by teachers as “not what we believe.” There was evidence boys and girls were segregated in class.

Mr Blair said the alleged plot was part of a movement that included extremists in Pakistan and Boko Haram, the Nigerian terrorist group.

The group is responsible for the kidnapping of hundreds of schools girls in Nigeria two months ago and dozens of deadly attacks on churches and predominantly Christian villages.

Speaking from Abu Dhabi in the Middle East, the former Prime Minister said: “There is a very fundamental problem that we face, that may have originated in this region but has now spread across the world.

“That problem is extremism based on a warped and abusive view of the religion. It is a problem here in the region. It is a problem in countries like Pakistan, it’s a problem in the Far East. We can see from Nigeria and Boko Haram it’s a problem in African countries and it’s a problem in our own society as we can see from Birmingham schools.”

He added: “We have to assert the strong values of religious respect and tolerance for difference.

“Any politics that is based on a view that ‘This is my religion and if you don’t agree you are my enemy’, that is the ideology we have to attack and root out.”

Every pupil will be taught about the British values enshrined in the Magna Carta, David Cameron has said, in the wake of the Trojan Horse scandal.

Schools will teach how the document, sealed 800 years ago next year, established the rule of law and paved the way for parliamentary democracy.

The British values of free, democracy, tolerance and respecting the law are “as British as the Union Flag, as football, as fish and chips,” the Prime Minister said today. It is “not an option” for anyone living in Britain to not abide by them.

He also suggested that any move away from the "Western model" of democracy and free enterprise would threaten Britain's economic success.

Michael Gove, the education secretary, announced plans for schools to “actively promote” British values in the wake of the Birmingham plot.

Mr Cameron, writing in the Mail on Sunday, said too much latitude has been given to opponents of democracy.

"In recent years we have been in danger of sending out a worrying message: that if you don't want to believe in democracy, that's fine; that if equality isn't your bag, don't worry about it; that if you're completely intolerant of others, we will still tolerate you.

"This has not just led to division, it has also allowed extremism - of both the violent and non-violent kind - to flourish," he said in the article.

"We need to be far more muscular in promoting British values and the institutions that uphold them.

"A genuinely liberal country believes in certain values, actively promotes them and says to its citizens: this is what defines us as a society."

Mr Cameron said it was "a matter of pride and patriotism" to promote British values and history and urged people to stop being "squeamish" about doing so.

"As President Obama put it when he addressed MPs and peers in Parliament, 'What began on this island would inspire millions throughout the continent of Europe and across the world'."

Celebrations are planned next year to mark 800 years since King John signed the Magna Carta at Runnymede which established for the first time that the king was subject to the law.

Mr Cameron said they will now include lessons for all pupils.

"The remaining copies of that charter may have faded, but its principles shine as brightly as ever, and they paved the way for the democracy, the equality, the respect and the laws that make Britain, Britain.

"So I want to use this upcoming 800th anniversary as an opportunity for every child to learn about the Magna Carta, for towns to commemorate it, for events to celebrate it."