

Promoting fundamental British values, SMSC and challenging extremism and radicalisation

Teachers and governors will recall that, in November 2014, the Department for Education (DfE) issued “Promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC (spiritual, moral, social and cultural) development in schools”, since when the issue of whether schools are promoting such values has been high on the agenda of most, if not all, Ofsted inspection teams up and down the land.

The SACRE has heard of one school in the County failing to address the fundamental British values in a manner that satisfied the Ofsted inspectors, but most schools have embraced the examination of such values through assemblies/acts of collective worship and/or lessons (lessons in English/literacy, RE [religious education], PSHE [personal, social and health education], CE [citizenship education] and history lend themselves most obviously to the examination of such values).

Many schools have mounted excellent displays that identify the values; that unpack their implications for school practice and wider society; that critically evaluate their strengths, weaknesses and limitations; that reflect on the extent to which the selected values really are British; and/or that ask whether other values that define Britishness have mysteriously been excluded (e.g. freedom of expression/speech, support for the underdog, a sense of humour).

Just to remind everyone so that teachers, etc. can audit the extent to which work about the values is currently taking place in schools, the values that **HAVE to be addressed are:**

- Democracy
- The rule of law
- Individual liberty
- Mutual respect and tolerance for those with different faiths and beliefs

As a SACRE we would recommend that, as a bare minimum, schools should have a display in a prominent place that identifies and reflects on the implications of the values. They should also address the values, either individually or collectively, in a few assemblies/acts of collective worship every year and engage in some in-depth study of the values in subjects such as RE, PSHE and/or CE. Also, do not forget that, when a school gives its pupils or students a chance to vote, partake in mock elections, reflect on the idea that everyone is equal in the eye of the law, discuss how they have choices they can make in life and/or learn about religions and beliefs that differ from those they or their parents subscribe to, they are engaging with the values above in a very obvious and overt manner.

It goes without saying that, where schools address the fundamental British values in a coherent and/or systematic way, they are creating the conditions in which it is less likely that children and young people will incline toward extremism and radicalisation (insofar as many people argue that, if you subscribe to the values above, you are predisposed to distrust extremism and radicalisation and are therefore likely to challenge both), whether such extremism or radicalisation is political or religious. That said, staff in a number of Northumberland secondary, high and special schools have already examined extremism in the classroom and/or the assembly hall, sometimes because their pupils or students have been curious about extremism as a consequence of its topicality in the media. Moreover, staff in one school have had training about extremism and how the topic might be addressed in the classroom, and an RE teacher in one of our high schools has re-written the Year 9 RE syllabus to ensure that regular opportunities exist to explore religious extremism and how people of faith challenge such extremism.

If schools/teachers wish to address extremism and radicalisation in the classroom or assembly hall, rest assured that there are already lots of excellent teaching and learning materials that can be used as they are, or adapted to suit particular audiences. For schools/teachers not familiar with such teaching and learning materials, contact Phil André (the local authority’s part-time RE consultant) at phil.andre@ntlworld.com who can provide you with the names of/websites for such resources. Phil can also provide ideas for lessons that have been tried and tested in schools across the region and, should staff so wish, undertake training for staff.

Although most manifestations of extremism in the North-East appear to derive from what might be called the far right of the political spectrum, every so often the statutory authorities hear of extremism that has a religious dimension. If schools are concentrating on extremism of a religious character, Phil can provide examples of people with religious commitments who confound manifestations of, or challenge, extremism. It is information of this nature that is best shared during training sessions with staff, so, if challenging extremism and radicalisation is on the school’s agenda, consider a staff training session to address a matter of considerable topicality and sensitivity.

It is essential that schools have somewhere documentation explaining how they will challenge (or “tackle”, as some schools prefer to call it) extremism and radicalisation. Most schools that have such documentation have a stand-alone “Challenging/Tackling Extremism and Radicalisation Policy” (many such policies exist on the internet for schools to examine for content. Why reinvent the wheel?), and the best of such policies establish a link with the promotion of British values and how commitment to such values makes it less likely that people, young or old, will incline toward extremism and radicalisation.

If seeking advice about such policies, contact in the first instance your School Improvement Partner, or write to Phil André who has already helped schools draft such policies in three North-East local authorities. If such documentation does not already exist in school, produce some as soon as possible, especially if a visit from Ofsted is expected in the not-too-distant future.

