

Community cohesion – Information for governors and school staff 2007

The Education and Inspections Act (EIA) 2006 requires the governing bodies of maintained schools to promote community cohesion under a new duty to promote community cohesion which comes into force from 1 September 2007.

What is community cohesion?

Community cohesion is about working towards a society in which:

- there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities
- the diversity of people's backgrounds is appreciated and valued
- similar life opportunities are available to all
- strong and positive relationships exist and are developed in the workplace, schools and the wider community.

All schools, whatever the mix of pupils they serve, are responsible for equipping those pupils to live and thrive alongside people from many different backgrounds. Schools that are riven by divisions are less likely to perform well and improving cohesion will also improve all aspects of a school's performance.

Much of what schools currently do under Race Relations Amendment Act 2000*¹ and Section 78 of the Education Act 2002*² will already count towards promoting community cohesion.

Through their ethos and curriculum schools can promote a common sense of identity and support diversity, showing pupils how different communities can be united by common experiences and values. However, the Diversity and Citizenship Curriculum Review, published in February 2007, emphasised the need for schools to proactively address issues around 'dealing with difference' however controversial and difficult they might sometimes seem.

Community from a school's perspective

For schools, the term 'community' has a number of dimensions including:

- the school community – the pupils it serves, their families and the school's staff
- the community within which the school is located
- the community of Britain - all schools are, by definition, part of the global community – formed by EU and international links.

In addition to the above, schools themselves create communities - for example, the networks formed by schools of the same or different faiths, or by schools that are part of the specialist school network.

There are significant barriers to building community cohesion, for example, mistrust of different groups; a perception that some groups are getting special treatment; lack of spaces for meaningful interaction for people of different cultures, backgrounds and religions. However, schools can take positive steps to counter the

¹ To eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between people of different groups.

² The curriculum for all maintained schools should "promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and prepare pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life"

effects of intolerance and harassment and build mutual respect. Solutions should be based on best practice but tailored to local situations.

Schools' contributions to community cohesion fall within the following areas:

Teaching, learning and curriculum - promoting discussion and debate about common values and to valuing diversity; promoting awareness of human rights and developing the skills of participation and responsible action.

Equity and excellence - ensuring equal opportunities for all to succeed at the highest level possible; removing barriers to access and participation in learning activities and eliminating variations in outcomes for different groups.

This will include having effective approaches to dealing with bullying and harassment and also monitoring that exclusion and behaviour policies do not discriminate against any groups. The new Admissions Code emphasises the importance of admission arrangements that promote community cohesion and social equity, and schools need to support this and ensure that the way they present themselves does not deter parents from particular communities.

Engagement and ethos - providing a means for children, young people and their families to interact with people from different backgrounds and build positive relations, including links with different schools and communities locally, across the country and internationally. This could involve bringing community representatives into schools to work with pupils or as mentors, active engagement with parents from different backgrounds, provision of extended services that promote family learning and English for speakers of other languages.

There is also the provision of extended services and community use of facilities for activities that take place out of school hours, including adult and family learning, information and communications technology, and English classes for speakers of other languages.

Ways of promoting community cohesion

When developing policies and procedures the approach to promoting community cohesion will probably include a range of activities:

within the school

with other schools

with parents and the local and wider community.

Schools, local authorities and community groups need to work together on what community cohesion would look like locally and what could best contribute to achieving this.

All schools will find it useful to consider how different aspects of their work already support integration and community harmony; take stock of what has worked so far, for them and for other schools; and consider where there may be scope to develop a more explicit focus on the impact of their activities on community cohesion. Schools will want to consider how the duty to promote community cohesion can also contribute to their duty to promote children's well-being and help

to deliver the Every Child Matters outcomes of ‘making a positive contribution’, ‘enjoying and achieving’ and ‘achieving economic well-being’.

Schools where the pupil population is less diverse will need to provide opportunities for interaction between pupils from different backgrounds.

For further information

Further detailed information from Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion was distributed to schools in July 2007 by Department for Children, Schools and Families (prev DFES).

Case studies of good practice in community cohesion

www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/Communitycohesion/Community_cohesion_case_studies/

Learning Trust advice and guidance -

www.trustnet.learningtrust.co.uk/Trust/Services/equalities/Pages/default.aspx

Teachernet for information and advice on equality issues – www.teachernet.gov.uk

Community cohesion guidance -

www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/Communitycohesion/