

SOUTHWARK DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION

BRIEFING SHEET

SUBJECT: DUTY TO PROMOTE COMMUNITY COHESION

RECIPIENT(S): Headteachers and Chairs of Governors of all C of E Voluntary and Foundation Schools

cc: Church of England Academies for information

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published guidance for schools in July on the new duty under the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to promote community cohesion. This duty came into force on 1 September 2007. Academies also have a duty to promote community cohesion under their funding agreement, although the DCSF guidance does not apply to academies, they may find the guidance of use. This briefing sheet provides a summary of the DCSF guidance. The full guidance can be downloaded or ordered from www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications. Further guidance is also available in the form of case studies on www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/communitycohesion.

2 COMMUNITY COHESION – A DEFINITION

2.1 Community cohesion is defined as follows:

“Working towards a society in which there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities; a society in which the diversity of people’s backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued; a society in which similar life opportunities are available to all; a society in which strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and in the wider community.”

2.2 The guidance relies on the Report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (*Our Shared Future*, June 2007) and suggests that a cohesive community recognises the contribution made by individuals within the community, emphasising the fact that while people will hold different ambitions, aspirations and beliefs they will also share important characteristics and experiences.

3 COMMUNITY FROM A SCHOOL’S PERSPECTIVE

3.1 The guidance suggests that for schools “community” has a number of dimensions:

- (a) the school community: the children and young people it serves, their parents, carers and families, staff and governing body and community users of the school’s facilities and services;
- (b) the community within which the school is located: this is a school’s geographic community and the people who live and work in the area. This includes a wider area than the local neighbourhood, ie, the local authority, and/or city in which the school is situated;
- (c) the UK community;
- (d) the global community.

3.2 Schools also form their own networks by joining with other similar types of school, or through working in clusters or partnerships. The main focus of the duty is cohesion across different cultures, ethnic, religious or non-religious and socio-economic groups.

4 THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN PROMOTING COMMUNITY COHESION

4.1 Schools already contribute to community cohesion by promoting equal opportunities and inclusion for different groups of pupils within the school. Schools also have a role in promoting shared values and encouraging pupils to engage with others to this end. Schools have a responsibility to equip pupils to live alongside people from many different backgrounds. Many schools already achieve this through the diverse population they serve;

other schools may need to do more to provide opportunities for interaction between children and young people from different backgrounds.

4.2 Schools should consider how they are already contributing to community cohesion and may review what has worked to-date and how they can improve existing work through a more explicit focus on the impact of their activities on community cohesion. A school's contribution to community cohesion could be considered under three headings: examples are given to illustrate the work that many schools already undertake.

- **Teaching, learning and the curriculum:** helping pupils to understand others, value diversity whilst promoting shared values, promoting awareness of human rights and developing skills of participation and responsible action.

Eg: opportunities to discuss issues of identity and diversity integrated across the whole curriculum, including in citizenship education; opportunities to challenge prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination; visits to places of worship and meetings with members of different communities. Support for EAL pupils and their teachers, in order to remove barriers to learning and to achieve the highest possible level in English. Assemblies which involve members of the local and wider community and promote the engagement of pupils. Encouragement for pupils to value diversity and develop a better understanding of UK society.

- **Equity and excellence:** ensuring equal opportunities for all to succeed, striving to remove barriers to access and participation in learning and wider activities and working towards eliminating variations in outcome for different groups.

Eg: Analysis of assessment results to track the relative performance of different groups and tackle under-performance. Effective approaches to deal with bullying, prejudice, discrimination and harassment. Monitoring exclusions to track whether any group is more likely to be excluded than another and involving pupils in assessing the success of behaviour policies. Admission arrangements that do not deter parents from a particular community from applying.

- **Engagement and extended services:** providing reasonable opportunities for pupils and families to interact with people from different backgrounds and build positive relations including: links with different schools and communities; and provision of extended services.

Eg: Contact with other groups should go beyond surface friendliness and provide opportunities to exchange personal information, talk about differences and identities, share interests. Partnership arrangements with other schools, international links, video-conferencing, joint projects grounded in the curriculum. Partnership with parents and the local and wider community – eg, mentoring schemes, links with community groups, involving pupils in school councils, and enabling them to evaluate how well the school contributes to community cohesion. Contact with local agencies, eg the police, youth support, different religious groups, health etc. Placements for pupils in voluntary community based activities. Extended services are required to be developed by 2010; schools should consult pupils, parents, families and the wider community about the activities and services they provide to ensure the needs of all groups are met.

4.3 It is acknowledged that schools may face tensions and problems stemming from societal factors outside their control. Responsibility for community cohesion also rests with families and the wider community. Local authorities also have a role in supporting schools and should promote community cohesion through the Children and Young People's Plan. OFSTED will inspect the contribution that schools make to community cohesion from September 2008.

5 ACTION

5.1 As can be seen from the above summary, most schools will already meet the new duty to promote community cohesion through its current policies and practice. However, schools should review their current practice in the light of the new duty to promote community cohesion. This should be discussed at a governors' meeting and possibly incorporated into the school's development plan where any further work or development is identified and prioritised and should also be noted in any revision to the school's SEF in preparation for OFSTED.