



Teaching, Learning and Community Cohesion: A study of primary and secondary schools’ responses to a new statutory duty

Research Report

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- supporting teachers, schools and colleges with the delivery of citizenship education;
- working with young people in community-settings on issues that concern them.

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Executive Summary

- Teachers were carrying out many activities prior to the duty being introduced which they felt were already promoting community cohesion.
 - The notion that schools and education can contribute to community cohesion in a wide range of ways was accepted universally across the sample. Further, it was strongly felt amongst respondents that cohesive learning communities are an important prerequisite for effective teaching and learning.
 - The introduction of a *statutory duty* to promote community cohesion has been greeted with ambivalence by teachers. Some have welcomed it as validating existing concerns and a stimulus to further activities, whilst others viewed the need to demonstrate the impact of their cohesion strategies as challenging.
 - Guidance offered to schools was positively received, on the whole, but was shown to be non-problematic in its focus, leaving schools without help in addressing a range of complex issues.
 - Many schools expressed concerns that the duty was difficult to implement from existing human and financial resources; some schools accessed external resources and a range of existing national programmes in order to help them comply with the duty.
 - The experience of those schools that were inspected on the duty differed significantly. The fact that the duty was inspected for a period between 2008 and 2011 focused many teachers' attention on this area of school life and many positive improvements in practice resulted.
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Introduction

The following report came about as a result of a study conducted in 2010 by a research team based at the Citizenship Foundation into how schools responded to the introduction of the duty to promote community cohesion. This was inserted into the Education Act 2002 by the Inspection Act 2006 and came into effect in September 2007. Community cohesion was of considerable concern at this time, following the London bombings of July 7th, 2005 and a series of earlier racial disturbances in a number of towns in the north of England in the spring and early summer of 2001, disturbances that had produced a significant report on the matter (Independent Review Team, 2001). In effect, the legislation overlapped with existing legislation designed to promote positive race relations, remove discrimination of all kinds and maintain respect for human rights. Other policy developments which came about as a result of the London bombings were a large number of projects aimed at preventing violent extremism, some of which focused on schools and colleges, and a National Schools Linking project which grew out of a small-scale Local Authority pilot based in Bradford.

Non-statutory guidance in support of the duty was published jointly by Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCLG/DCSF, 2007). Ofsted began to inspect the duty in September 2008, providing guidance for inspectors and schools which was revised in February 2009 and again in 2010.

After the new coalition government came to power in May 2010, it signalled its intention to reduce the bureaucratic burden on schools, and in December of that year announced in its first education white paper (Department for Education, 2010) that 'unnecessary duties, processes, guidance and requirements' would be removed, 'so that schools are free to focus on doing what is right for the children and young people in their care'. Some believed that the duty to promote cohesion itself would be removed but the Education Bill 2011, progressing through Parliament at the time of writing, will remove the duty from Ofsted to inspect the duty whilst leaving the duty itself intact.

The research team was keen to find out how teachers in both primary and secondary schools had understood and implemented the new duty. Interviews were conducted with teachers from 27 maintained schools, most of them heads, senior leaders responsible for community cohesion or heads of citizenship/PSHCE. Two focus groups were held, followed by face-to-face interviews with 26 teachers and 3 Local Authority advisers. Schools were mainly based in three local authorities (LAs), one of which was a highly multi-cultural urban authority in the Midlands. The other two LAs were large county authorities, containing conurbations with multi-cultural populations but also with many towns and villages with low ethnic minority populations. Six schools were faith-based, four were Anglican, one was Catholic and one Jewish.

The semi-structured interviews focused on:

- How teachers' interpreted the meaning of the duty
- What they felt they were already doing to promote community cohesion
- What new steps were taken, if any, following the introduction of the duty
- What training, if any, had been given or received
- What help or external resources had been drawn on
- What challenges had been experienced in implementing the duty
- What benefits had resulted from implementing the duty
- Their experiences of inspection
- Whether, overall, the duty was felt to be more of a benefit than a burden, or vice versa.

This report focuses mainly on the responses and actions of the teachers in the sample to the duty. It is aimed at practising teachers and is offered in the belief that teachers can learn from colleagues' thoughts and experiences in this, as in any other, field. A sister publication (Rowe *et al*, 2011) examines policy issues surrounding the new duty.

How did teachers understand the term 'community cohesion'?

What does 'Community' mean?

We asked our interviewees what they understood by the terms 'community' and 'cohesion' in the context of this duty. Overall, there was a good level of agreement about the term. In spatial terms community was widely understood to have layers of meaning – school, local, national and international communities. Interestingly, this was equally true for both primary and secondary schools in the study. As one primary head expressed it:

Well for us it's about how we work together as a school community. How we then work with our community around our school and like a local community. And then kind of nationally and internationally and that's kind of the broad areas that we've seen it as, and what we're doing to promote the links between all of those areas.

One primary head likened it to the layers of an onion and another to a set of Russian dolls – an image she used to convey to the children that sense of concentric circles of communities radiating outwards. We did not detect amongst primary schools that their focus was merely on the local community, even though that is a natural focus with younger children. Several primary schools in our sample were developing strong links with schools overseas and raising awareness of wider issues through topics on global citizenship. However, there was agreement that the 'national' community was the one which presented teachers in both phases with the greatest problems both pedagogically and in terms of making successful inter-school links.

The broad wording of the duty enabled teachers to define 'community' for themselves but, at the same time, this did create some uncertainty. One teacher felt that:

...community's difficult to define as a set definition because of the broadness and the width that it can then encompass.

What does 'cohesion' mean?

When asked about what community *cohesion* meant to our respondents, the terms which recurred most often related to the broad values of respect, tolerance, understanding, acceptance and belonging. Teachers generally chose not to discuss the nature of a cohesive *community*, unless prompted, but preferred to define cohesion in terms of attitudes or dispositions they wished to nurture in their students. The following responses are typical:

Community cohesion means respect, understanding and tolerance of different cultures, religions and views, be they political or other.

Community cohesion means

- Respect, empathy and understanding of each other's differences and similarities.
- Learning, living together with a common sense of togetherness, supporting, teaching, nurturing each other. (Family, school, local, national, global).

This more nuanced response also pointed to the fact that acceptance of others requires an acceptance of self:

To me, community cohesion means providing children with a clear understanding of who they are, where they are from, a confidence in themselves and an awareness and understanding of the world they live in. It's about developing empathy and

respect, understanding your rights and responsibilities and a sense that they are global citizens and also members of a range of communities.

Not surprisingly perhaps, our teachers rarely speculated in a philosophical way on the nature of a cohesive society as a whole. Their focus was an inter-personal one rather than a critical social perspective. True to the prevailing cultural climate in the UK, teachers showed remarkable levels of acceptance of cultural, religious and ethnic differences and displayed considerable determination to help students, and often their families, overcome the barriers to integration whilst being able to retain their cultural and religious identities.

Primary teachers were as responsive as secondary teachers to the idea that education contributes to these important values. As one primary head said:

We wanted our children in the school at the time to understand the community more and as they grew up to be adults to be tolerant of other faiths and of other cultures. And the best time to start is when they're young.

How were schools affected by the variegated nature of their communities?

Many teachers we talked with understood the importance of building a strong sense of community within the school and between the school and the community it served. However, some schools found considerable challenges arising from the nature of their local communities. Some communities, for example, had been decimated by industrial change:

A lot of us are in broken communities [...] in an ex-mining area the community's gone really but it used to exist and it used to be a really strong community - but if we don't do it within our own school, the children will never experience it, will they?

And another teacher commented:

I'm not convinced there is a community around our school, therefore we have nothing to tap into; we just have people who happen to live there and a lot of them don't get on and a lot of them have nothing in common with each other and we're just kind of stuck in the middle. So what we can do - and we do it quite successfully - is to deal with the varying communities in our school and we build that up. But it just dissipates from that point which is a problem.

Many other schools were faced with rapidly changing populations in their catchment area, such that children arrived at school, often unannounced, having widely differing backgrounds and lacking any English language, facing teachers with the immediate task of settling them in and bringing these children up to speed with basic skills. The cultural mix in some of the urban schools we visited was complex. At one school, there was not only a high proportion of Muslim children but there was great diversity *within* the Muslim population – including both cultural differences (Asian and African Muslims) but also Sunni and Shia. Another school, serving the children of military families, had not only a very transient population to contend with, but 15% of these were newly arrived Nepalese Gurkha children. A few schools in our sample had faced complete shifts in their character and therefore, to a degree, the nature of their mission. Two of the faith schools we visited, one Catholic and one Jewish, had witnessed an exodus of many of the families that it originally catered for and had now become, of necessity, much more diverse.

In such multi-cultural schools, we detected a strong commitment amongst teaching staff to helping students overcome barriers to integration and in such settings the commitment to community cohesion was already in the warp and weft of school life, long before the duty was introduced.

For most of the teachers with whom we talked, the duty most clearly related to encouraging more cohesion between people of different ethnic, cultural and religious groups – as stated in the DCLG/DCSF's non-statutory guidance (2007). These were the issues foregrounded in the policy discussions at the time of the duty's introduction, shortly after the London bombings and increasing activity in related areas, including the high profile 'Preventing Violent Extremism' (PVE) initiative.

Many schools recognised that the very diversity of the school population provided a resource in itself in the push for community cohesion. However, there are ongoing training implications if teachers are to be adequately briefed about students' backgrounds and the practical demands of teaching can make this problematic. One LA adviser doubted whether the local teachers sufficiently acknowledged and utilised the differences amongst students:

One of our schools has got a recommendation for action from Ofsted and it was just about not making enough of diversity. [...] There is all that potential there and it is the same in lots of things but we don't always stop and think, 'Let's make more of it'. [...] I don't think the professionals know enough about all the different groups - and it is changing all of the time as well. [...]

It is also important to understand the different family backgrounds of the children. Assumptions cannot be made about what happens once the child has gone home at the end of the day. This was echoed by a primary head working in a very diverse area of one city:

And what we actually discovered was that many of the staff, for whatever reason, didn't have a broad enough empathy and understanding of where many children came from and what experiences they'd got. And that's improved incredibly. Do you know what they do when they get home after school? And then obviously with some groups, do you know they go to Mosque group? Do you know which language they speak? Do you know if they actually speak English at home? Or do they never speak English from the moment they leave the building at quarter past three?

One senior teacher in a secondary school only realised the extent of teachers' lack of knowledge after receiving some training provided by a local NGO, and made possible by a PVE funding stream which has since dried up:

Teacher: I did a couple of Wednesdays on Islam and fundamentalism and how that affects us in our school community. It was absolutely fascinating, about Islam; the religion; the culture; the factions - the sections. We went into the mosque, we went into a madrassa, we were part of the community. And I went back to the SLT to say that all the teaching staff, or certainly the senior leadership teams, should actually take part in that course because they needed education of what they're dealing with their students - with Muslims and Islam.

Interviewer: Did it change your views on anything?

Teacher: It did.

A common theme amongst respondents was that schools were making strong efforts to improve communications with their parents to involve them more fully in the life of the school and the learning of the children. One school in a highly multi-cultural area, where many of the parents had little English, made a video-based prospectus of the school, which allowed translations of the audio track into different languages. This had the added advantage of giving a visual introduction to how the school worked for groups of asylum seekers who suddenly find themselves in very alien surroundings knowing little about even the basics such as the legal requirement to send their children to school. Another primary school staged a community week during which parents were invited in to take part in a range of activities including playing games with the children, something not done in some home cultures. One secondary school carries out a survey of parental opinion from time to time to establish whether the school is meeting the needs and aspirations of the parents as a whole, and of sub-groups of parents within that. Another (primary) school uses its 'parents forum' to help bridge the gap between home and school and to gain different perspectives on what the school is providing.

Schools in very diverse areas often have huge language barriers to overcome, which led one school in our sample to appoint two learning mentors with a range of community languages to act as links and interpreters. In this way it was possible to highlight a whole range of parental and family needs which could be 'signposted' towards more specialist agencies. A fruitful time for exchange is that time at the end of the day when parents gather to collect their young:

We bring all the children into one place, and the parents come to the playground to pick them up. So we almost have a little farewell party going on at the end of the school day. And that's a perfect time for our translators and our key workers to actually go and start engaging with the parents, talking about issues, inviting them to school, helping support their children. And it's really those sorts of levels of face to face engagement that start unpicking things and dealing with issues.

We also set up a PTA which sounds a terribly British thing to do! But actually, our parents who were interested and supportive wanted something that was

encompassing all of the diverse communities that use our school. And they wanted something with a non-political, non-religious, non-biased agenda. And we could really promote and support that and get that going.

Improved relations and communications helped better cohesion but also contributed to solving a range of issues where differences in cultural values between school and home had become an issue. In one case, there was the need to provide assurances that the school meals would contain meat that could be eaten by the children and in another school, members of the community were worried about how schools were respecting the different cultural approaches to gender. Swimming lessons raise issues which are controversial, though not insuperable, but sex education, especially for girls, is rather more sensitive. One school received objections from the male Muslim community but good links with the local Muslim women's groups meant that they were able to beg the school to proceed with the lessons on their behalf. This highlights one of the dilemmas constantly facing schools, namely that, whereas respect for different cultural values is basic to the 'equal but different' approach, teachers may be faced with choosing between which values in the community to support and which, consciously to strive to modify or ameliorate on behalf of the children growing up into a society very different from that which shaped the values and attitudes of their parents. Thus very sensitive and professionally skilled judgements are regularly and unavoidably forced on school staff, as these examples demonstrate:

[...] for example when we were doing work on sex education, the male community people were saying, "No, no, no". But actually, when we talked to the mothers, they were saying, "Oh, yes please, we'd love it if you did this for us." So actually there is a gender divide that we have to address. In terms of dealing with disability, again it's very challenging within this cultural setting, because if a child is disabled, if they were, say, blind for example, there are some mosques that won't let them through the door. And that's very challenging for the parents. If we're talking about a child with special educational needs, the parents can be very resistant to acknowledging that, because that has a wider implication for their inclusion within their own community if they're not allowed into the mosque.

This is another area where training and guidance would be of considerable help to teachers working at the chalk face.

Many, if not the majority, of schools in this country are not highly diverse. In such schools, there was a degree of bewilderment as to exactly what kind of issues were to be addressed under the new duty. Socio-economic barriers are specifically included in the guidance and in the inspection schedules, and these were recognised by many of our respondents as important, especially where there was a significant underclass of white working class children, sometimes from communities where unemployment had become entrenched and the children seemed to lack ambition or any wider vision as to their future. However, existing equal opportunities policies also served to remind respondents that issues relating to sexuality, disability, and gender were also relevant. In some schools, the local community was also fractured along generational lines, which gave rise to concerns in response to which strategies were developed:

And this week actually we've got a, we call it a sustainability week loosely, but we're working with the local community trying to overcome some of the - prejudice isn't the right word - but the kind of views that the older community have about children and the children have about the older residents in our community, trying to kind of break down the barriers between the two. [...] The perception from the elder community that all young people are all thugs, badly behaved, take drugs, drink and so on and so forth. And of course from the children's point of view it's "Oh well they're old and they moan a lot and they whinge when the ball goes in the garden." And that type of thing. So the children are going out and visiting. Today they're in town, they're interviewing people. But we're going to have some of the older generation coming in for visits.

A number of schools faced fractures in the relations between the school and the local community which needed addressing for a number of reasons. The poor behaviour of students in the vicinity of the school is one such issue:

.... And that's things like shoplifting which is a fact of life. It has been forever, but how quickly and effectively you get to it has a massive impact in the local community. Your being out on the corridors, being out on the street, being out at the bus stops. [...] And then after that it's getting groups in, working with local churches, et cetera. We have Parliamentary youth members in the sixth forms for the Local Authority; we've got people – again in the sixth form and in year eleven – working with the police.

How did schools strengthen their own communities?

One repeated response from colleagues in our survey was the importance they all placed on developing a very strong, cohesive school ethos, without which any attempts to promote cohesion in the wider community would be ineffective.

We realised we were already doing much of the work but it needed sort of bringing together. And I think, just to begin with the title community cohesion, I think maybe some people saw it as starting out in the immediate local community. I think that's perhaps how some staff saw it. But then when we talked about it on the different layers of a young citizen and the child, to the school community, to the local community and, as I explained, going out more globally it all began to make much more sense.

And what we've really concentrated on is not suddenly doing more things in the community because we didn't think that was the right thing to do, we weren't suddenly going to become good citizens and go visiting people - and we already do a little bit of that - but that's not really how I saw it, I saw it as actually bringing together our school community.

Cohesive schools are powerful environments where students can acquire skills, attitudes and expectations which encourage and enable them to contribute towards cohesion in the wider community. In one Local Authority, a county-wide programme called 'Rights, Respect and Responsibility'¹ had been running for a number of years and, judging from the practices of our respondents, has had a perceptible impact on the quality and framing of the schools' ethos at both primary and secondary levels. These 'rights-respecting' schools promote an explicit and consistent culture of equality, respect for human/children's rights and fairness, and thus the promotion of cohesion within and across the community comes to be conceptualised in ways consistent with this approach. A senior teacher in an infants school explained that this approach was seen as morally educative, building self-governing, morally autonomous citizens of the future:

[...] rights, respect, responsibility and class charters where it's sort of negotiated what our expectations are of each other. There's a big emphasis on choice and responsibility and then that would be the sort of self-discipline that would carry you through life, rather than something that is rule governed.

And from a secondary school in the same local authority:

And I'd say that the philosophy behind the whole school can be summed up in three words: rights, respect and responsibility. And that philosophy drives everything. So every single member of staff knows about it, every single child in the school knows about it. If you were to look around the school you'd see evidence of it everywhere so it's integral to what we're about. [...] [There's] a document which staff use to guide their language with children, their behaviour, their attitudes, the ethos of the school. We have a Rights, Respect and Responsibility Group that meets every three weeks.

This group is composed of staff and students and works both internally but also externally, offering training and support to other schools developing the same approach.

¹ UNICEF UK promotes a 'Rights Respecting School' Award for schools which have introduced teaching about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and who develop procedures and practices consistent with these values and principles (see <http://www.unicef.org.uk/rrsa>). In parallel, to this move, Canadian educators Covell and Howe (2001) developed and researched a programme teaching about the UNCRC, called 'Rights, Respect and Responsibility'.

This is not to argue that the only basis for a positive school ethos is the '3 Rs' approach but it clearly has the advantage of achieving consistency of expectations across year groups and educational phases. It provides a coherent framework which links school values, behaviour and teaching and learning and is also nationally supported by the leading children's rights body, UNICEF. This is a good example of the overlapping synergy between many existing school-based movements and the duty to promote community cohesion.

The whole thrust of schools as places of learning, where rationality is promoted based on equal rights for all its members, has been an abiding weapon against bigotry and extremism. One head saw this as inextricably linked to education's moral mission:

I think we respond to that in terms of the ethos and values that we portray as a school, therefore the values which we try to develop in young people, that sort of active citizenship development. From a school point of view, one of the biggest issues that we have is that the BNP is a legally recognised political party in Britain and it's very hard for a school to be overtly political in that sense. What we would hope to do, would be to equip our children with the skills to discuss and analyse and reflect upon a range of different views and the values, to understand why certain views are wrong.

Whilst recognising, one thing that has been true since time began, which is that home is the biggest influence on children. I suppose I would see our approach to that as being about putting together the right curriculum, delivered in the right way, having the right ethos, portraying the right sorts of behaviours, giving the constant right messages about respect and tolerance and living together and accepting and valuing differences. Ultimately as a result of that, and if that's working on this 5-19 continuum that we try to have across the cluster, then I see that as being the most powerful way of dealing with that.

I wouldn't see it as the school's role particularly, to go out into the community and deal with those issues in that way.

And many schools in our sample also placed importance on the presence of student voice as a strong promoter of cohesion within the school community. This feeling appeared to be as strong amongst primary as secondary colleagues, as exemplified by this primary head:

I think if you come into my school what hits you is a very cohesive community. The children have decided on the rules and things, and we've got our houses, we have groups that lead different elements within the school. We've got peer mentoring, we've got leading learners - children supporting other children in classrooms every week, you know, and on the playground. Every facet of the school is child led. And that is at the heart of their community. They take ownership of that community, they belong to that community and they lead that community through the council.

Building the Curriculum to Promote Community Cohesion

There was a strong consensus in our sample concerning the important role played by the curriculum in the promotion of community cohesion. Many of the teachers we spoke with were in various stages of conducting curriculum audits or adapting their curriculum provision. Schools varied considerably in the extent to which they felt community cohesion should be at the heart of the curriculum and the educational process. Some schools, particularly in highly multi-cultural areas, had explicitly and thoroughly scrutinised the whole of the curriculum using this particular lens, whilst others, in less racially mixed areas, seemed to assume that community cohesion was an almost automatic product of teaching and learning that was already in place.

For many of the primary schools, the emphasis was at least as much on the development of language skills as on the acquisition of knowledge about the wider world. At the level of secondary school, concerns over children acquiring the necessary language to overcome barriers to integration were also expressed. Whilst respecting students' home culture and the right to cherish and sustain it, one school explicitly bans students from using their home languages in school, even amongst friends, insisting that English should become totally familiar through practice and expectation.

We can see that the problem here is that you are Turkish speaking and that in your culture you would prefer, even in school, to speak Turkish - but it's not doing you any favours. It's not helping you to be seen as separate and to speak that language in the corridors and in the playground. So I'm going to work with you so that you don't. Because you will integrate for that period of six hours a day and you will not be ostracised or feel ostracised and you will be getting steadily better.

Several of the schools in our sample, both primary and secondary saw the value of developing generic thinking skills alongside the skills of talking, of respectful listening and of expressing personal views with confidence. To do this they used the Philosophy for Children approach², often alongside approaches concerned with developing the children's emotional literacy through the nationally recommended SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) programme³. This programme is in use in many secondary and primary schools. As one secondary head commented:

And when we teach SEAL [...] it is ultimately worth grades because [as a result] they're not fighting and they're not in conflict with teachers or each other and they've learnt how to resolve conflicts better than they had before.

Schools serving ethnic minority students were also aware of the need to make the curriculum relevant to the children's experiences, so that learning is meaningful and purposeful. However, at the same time, there is an awareness that the curriculum should not become unduly narrowed such that the children's ability to cope with the wider world, with all its complex cultural diversity, becomes limited. This is a genuine problem and requires highly professional balancing judgements to be made.

In terms of the teaching and learning and the curriculum, I think the guidance has certainly highlighted to us that perhaps what we taught in history, geography, citizenship, and science should be relevant to the children. How do their experiences fit in? And the same when we did writing, you know when you do stories, things like that, are we actually including cultures and the diversity of all the children? And we discovered that although we were sticking to the National

² 'Philosophy for Children' (P4C) is an international movement that developed from the work of Matthew Lipman, an American philosophy professor. It trains teachers in how to promote and sustain philosophical reflection in students throughout the primary and secondary years. For more go to www.sapere.org.uk.

³ The Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning programme is a national strategy introduced to schools in 1995, first for primary and then for secondary schools. The aim of the programme is that, through class-based activities and assemblies, children will develop greater emotional intelligence and self-control. For more, go to <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/inclusion/behaviourattendanceandseal>.

Curriculum which you need to do, there was much more room for extending our curriculum to meet the needs of the children. And that wasn't just through culture - it was through experiences, interest, you know, interest for boys as well as girls.

The children are entitled to an education that enables them to grow up in British society and develop a mastery of it. Failure to do so limits integration and students' life chances. But teachers are not always united in their view of how to strike the optimal balance of content. For example:

We've got our hands on a great citizenship [resource] delivered through an Islamic perspective for our [Muslim] children. We've grabbed hold of this with both hands. Yes, great, this is what we need for our children. [...] It's a way in to discuss their lives and their perspectives. [...] But some of our staff say that's not preparing them for living in this country. So we're having the debates and we're willing to discuss it, and we're willing to work with all our different perspectives and our different stakeholders.

These issues might also include the fact that for some Muslim children, music is religiously forbidden (haram), so cultural issues require tact and sensitivity to negotiate in a respectful way without losing the wider perspective.

Naturally, questions of culture, faith and religion are highly significant areas to be dealt with through the curriculum. Encouraging students to understand that their home culture, tradition or belief is just one of many that exist is vital, underlining the need for the development of attitudes of tolerance and respect for difference. However, it is not unknown for teachers dealing with such complex and sensitive areas to focus on curriculum topics that are safe and non-controversial in class. Such 'avoidance' is most common where teachers lack knowledge and confidence. One secondary head, in charge of a Church of England school, found that the best way is to develop a whole-school atmosphere of openness, for example, about religious differences. Although most of the religions groups represented in his school are Christian, they differ significantly and some of them are relatively 'extreme' in their fundamentalism.

Teacher: We have a 'Faith in Focus' month in the school. It's a month in which we have everything from proper debates with the major faith groups who come along with a particular topic to talk about; faith and employment...

Interviewer: Every year?

Teacher: Well yes.

Interviewer: And everyone in the school experiences this somehow?

Teacher: Absolutely everyone yes through R.E. which is compulsory for all, so they all cop it that way in one sense. And then just a load of other fun activities: lunchtime bands and drumming and just stuff happening.

And in a virtually all-white secondary school, RE was seen as a valuable vehicle for encouraging students to think about the issues surrounding living in a multi-faith society:

I did a lesson with the children where we were looking at how we promote community cohesion and tolerance and understanding etc. of difference within the school. I challenged them to come up with as many different examples as they could and what was very pleasing was that they came up with a whole range of things, right across the school, both in terms of the formal curriculum and in terms of, for example, assemblies. In terms of how we behave as adults in school, in terms of how it impacts on them about acceptance and tolerance and respect, in terms of having different types of food available in the school dining room, in terms of the extra curricular activities that go on, in terms of the stop the clock days where we deliver things. [...] You know, you don't create an attitude or a belief just

by giving somebody an hour a week telling them something, it's more about learnt behaviour and a developed attitude.

Citizenship education, in both primary and secondary schools was also seen as a key vehicle for dealing directly with a number of issues at the heart of community cohesion. Identity and diversity, including racism immigration and discrimination of all kinds are key topics on the citizenship curriculum. Many schools have recognised the importance of having specialist teachers in charge of the delivery of this demanding but important subject, even where it is part of a wider modular structure. There was an emphasis on quality teaching through committed and specialist teachers:

The Life Skills department delivers a number of core areas. Basically we deliver citizenship, PSH EE, careers and we deliver enterprise which is part of PSH EE. So we've got subject specialists. Three of us are experts in citizenship; four of us are experts in PSHEE. The SLT member in our faculty, he has a qualification in careers and enterprise. It's not like some schools do on an ad hoc basis, we have a set period of time where all students throughout the school know that for six weeks they will only learn about citizenship and we rotate it so that at any given time in the year everyone gets to sample these things.

We have two lessons a week, so two 50 minute lessons a week over the whole five years, so I consider us quite pioneering and progressive. We have always given equal time to all those things in the last seven years that I've been here. We deliver modules on citizenship in both key stage three and key stage four where we talk about how we don't act as a separate entity. We have links to the community, we have a role, we have a responsibility and how we have – you know, in year seven we might say that our role and responsibility is in terms of being active in our school and active in our local school council. By the time they get a bit older and at the end of key stage three and year nine they look at Government and how they can have an impact. By key stage four they look at things like, you know, their roles in trade unions and what have you.

In another secondary school the requirement to introduce citizenship had chimed naturally with other developments in whole school policy.

I think the shift that has taken part, is the shift towards the concept of citizenship. We now talk about citizenship in year 7, citizenship year 8, year 9, year 10 and year 11. I would say it's much more targeted and focused now towards giving them responsibility, towards understanding you know, you are a member of the community. Towards rights, respect and responsibility. And that means that we are more open to initiatives that fit in with what we are doing.

A Theatre in Action group from Dorset came to us and said "Would you like us to show this play called 'Surya's Story'?" And it's about a little girl in India who is ten years old and she makes footballs for the European market. She sews footballs and she got beaten because she wasn't making them fast enough. Now all of our children in year 7 and 8 last year saw this play, and did some work on it, and it was remarkable. And some of those citizenship GCSE students came and did some work on that as part of their participation activity.

School Linking

One of the clear recommendations from the DCLG/DCSF (2007) non-statutory guidance was that students should be provided with opportunities to meet people different from themselves. In highly mono-cultural schools, teachers face challenges in making this happen. Making links between pupils in schools with different ethnic make-ups is one strategy that has been nationally recommended by the Ajegbo Report⁴ (Ajegbo *et al*, 2007) and by the national School Linking Network⁵, funded by DCSF and the Pears Foundation, and also supported by the British Council which offers a range of international linking schemes. We found considerable enthusiasm for international schools linking because, in both primary and secondary settings, links can work at a number of levels and in different ways.

Nationally, several local authorities with diverse schools in terms of their ethnic mix, successfully manage to link local schools of very different character – guidance and training is provided as to how to manage such schemes sensitively and, for those students fortunate enough to participate, the experience can be memorable and, according to the urban local authority advisor in our sample, 'life-changing':

I've had verbal feedback from the students and it's been really successful and quite interesting. A lot of our students were really afraid. The main fear was that the students were going to be racist. Completely ungrounded, I don't really know where it comes from, but it seems to be a really common thing that they expect these people are going to be racist. And they actually found them – and it's actually, you know, we like the same things, we do the same things, we're all human and, you know, they got on really well and quite enjoyed it.

But such schemes are demanding of time and resources and, in practical terms, may not be able to be extended to all students as an entitlement. Questions remain as to how vulnerable such schemes will be when external funding assistance has dried up.

The Local Authority set up the project and have funded the project. There were three CPD sessions where they provided sort of guidance and training and people spoke about the different projects that they'd done in their schools and sort of got together with like the main members of staff and the museum network to try and find neutral venues that were either free or cost effective and then provide a variety of different examples of what we could do. And obviously they provided £1,200 to fund the project. So I've not had to charge the students anything for the projects that we've been doing as yet.

At the national level, schools seemed to encounter more difficulties. Whilst some schemes had successfully run, logistical problems were greater and schemes appeared to be more difficult to sustain over the longer term. They are also often highly dependent on the goodwill of individual members of staff who often take on such responsibilities in addition to existing duties. Several senior leaders mentioned to us that implementing the duty placed considerable additional resource burdens on the school which it found difficult to meet.

⁴ Downloadable from http://publications.education.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/DfES_Diversity_&_Citizenship.pdf

⁵ The Schools Linking network exists to enable schools to assist students in encountering issues of identity and diversity through contact with students different from themselves. Linking facilities, case studies and training are amongst support offered by the SLN. For more, go to www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk.

Making stronger links with the community

Many schools in our survey realised the value of making the school and its facilities much more open to the community for a wide range of uses, both religious and secular. In a multi-cultural area, the head realised the value of holding the after-school Madrassa on the school site and building much closer relations with the Madrassa teachers. In a white area, where the recent incomers had been from Poland, a teaching assistant with a Polish background had requested use of the school for a Polish cultural club which had even attracted the attention of some of the local English parents who asked if their children might also attend. One result was greater confidence in their heritage culture for the Polish children who at Christmas time performed Polish carols for the rest of the school. A number of schools were open to supporting community events such as carnivals and multi-cultural festivals, providing space and personnel. Another school hosted Somali and Punjabi schools in the evening besides more traditional classes in the arts, design and IT as well as an annual multi-cultural festival organised by a local NGO.

One rural junior school developed a project in collaboration with other local primary schools based around the improvement of their schools' grounds and sharing their use both between the schools and with the wider community. This is an example of the kind of work often cited to us as 'community cohesion', where it might be more accurately described as 'community involvement' – though no less valuable for that. Other schools run environmental projects as part of a community focus and commonly encourage students to develop their international understanding through practical fund-raising activities. In an urban primary school, teachers very actively provided out of hours and weekend social activities, such as trips to museums or the sea for whole families in order to encourage mixing and friendship forming and to break down cultural barriers:

Where we've taken parents on trips with us, some of the parents have gone into churches for the first time ever. And they're amazed at how lovely they are, and how peaceful. And that a church can be such a calm, religious place. Because they've never been in, they didn't know anything about it. And they just love it and will then come back and talk about it and spread their awareness.

What challenges did teachers face in implementing the duty? How should the duty be interpreted?

There is no doubt that in responding to the new duty, many schools found themselves in varying degrees of uncertainty as to what was required. Some of this no doubt emanated from the fact that they were doing much already to promote aspects of community cohesion – so what more was required? It is clearly impossible to do everything that could be done because of limited time and resources, and because of competing priorities. Furthermore, the duty required a considerable degree of interpretation in the light of each school's particular circumstances, so an element of subjectivity was added to the issue of implementation. What made this particularly problematic for schools was that they were to be inspected on their responses to the duty and this undoubtedly created levels of anxiety and stress and, some teachers even expressed to us a feeling that being judged on an issue of this kind, when many of the contributing factors were beyond their capacity to influence, felt unfair. A booklet containing some non-statutory guidance was jointly published in 2007 by CLG and DCSF, which schools found helpful, but we noted that there was some degree of reinterpretation of this guidance. Schools told us that the key values for them were tolerance and respect whereas the guidance had suggested that students should be encouraged to *value* diversity. This is not an aim which many schools see as realistic. Furthermore, it was notable that schools placed great value on their ethos as a key cohesion-promoting instrument, which is not strongly emphasised in the guidance.

The non-statutory guidance is open-ended and relatively non-specific in its advice, a tone which was continued in documentation subsequently published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Authority in 2010 (QCDA, 2010). This provided helpful analytical frameworks and case studies of some good practice but continued to treat the issues as largely non-problematic.

Time and resources

Some schools reported to us that they made staffing adjustments in order to implement the new duty, typically placing the day-to-day responsibility for community cohesion with a senior member of staff. But encouraging better relations with the community, undertaking curriculum reviews, assessing staff training needs and identifying key areas in the school which can be seen to impact on cohesion are demanding tasks and some schools expressed frustration at not having sufficient resources to do this adequately. One of the few distinctive areas encouraged by the new duty, beyond the existing legal duties, is that of enabling contact between students from different backgrounds and this placed additional strain on staff time and economic resources, especially where it was not possible to make use of existing parallel schemes. Most of the linking schemes we encountered had been externally supported, including the provision of money to pay for visits and exchanges. Questions remain as to whether such schemes are sustainable when these external sources of funding dry up.

Attitudes of some staff

In these times of successive centralised initiatives, senior staff are often cautious about introducing yet another 'new' set of demands. And whilst we did encounter the view that the promotion of community cohesion, with its emphasis on looking at learning needs more holistically, was closer to what many heads had come into the profession to achieve, they were worried, nonetheless, that the current climate of initiative overload would colour staff reactions. One primary head told us:

I was actually really happy that this was coming through. And I thought perhaps it gives value to something that needs value. So I was happy to do it and it's something I feel passionate about. It's just as long as all your staff feel the same and they don't feel like – "Oh gosh, another initiative, let's tick this box and that box."

We found, in talking to teachers, that where overcoming obstacles to integration and cohesion are seen as key to aiding students' learning, no great tensions are seen to exist between schools core business and the new duty. Perhaps it is true that primary schools are able to take on this more holistic approach to the children's learning. This may mean that secondary schools experience the competing tensions between this and the 'standards' agenda more acutely. We asked one senior teacher about this and his reply was unequivocal:

- Int: Do you detect any resistance amongst members of staff in terms of using community cohesion as a means to steer a particular curriculum one way or the other? Is that an issue at all or is that seen to be entirely acceptable?
- Teacher: I'll put this way, they wouldn't do it unless it was going to help their results and that's right, you know, because that's what we're here for. But what we've always found is by being inclusive and drawing our kids' own experiences into our work and also helping them to understand what's beyond the local environment, that's what inspires them to learn.

So, the duty raised issues of motivation, support and training for senior leaders. To assist and motivate staff, most local authorities offered what could be called 'meso-level' guidance, interpreting the national guidelines for their local schools, linking this to elements of their existing provision and on

occasions providing courses of differing lengths and depth. Some of this was offered to teachers and some to governors. We found no consistent pattern in this provision, though our sample of three authorities was small. Unusually, one authority commissioned a leading national writer in the field of equalities education to work with some of its schools to develop new guidance and this has been published nationally (Richardson, 2009). Interestingly, in these days of the internet and weakened links with local authorities, there was also considerable evidence of schools drawing on guidance from other Local Authorities and schools. Training in many instances helped clarify the issues for teachers and governors in our sample, though we have yet to find any guidance or training provision which acknowledges community cohesion as a potentially problematic and often contested area.

Attitudes of some parents

Working in the field of promoting tolerance of 'otherness' (whatever that may be) often raises objections amongst some groups of parents who have no wish to see their own children develop attitudes of respect or tolerance of some others, including other faiths, certain forms of sexuality, certain gender issues or aspects of disability. This placed schools in complex situations, requiring fine-tuned professional judgements to be made including decisions about whether to accept as a given, or actively fight, prejudice and ignorance amongst parents. For example, we heard of objections to multi-faith work in a number of schools from both 'Christian' and Muslim families, some of whom were alarmed to learn that their children were to visit nearby places of worship. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from such activities, which is an important provision in a pluralist society which respects the freedom of belief and parental rights to bring up children in their own convictions, but to what extent are these objections to be accepted at face value by schools or should such withdrawals be actively resisted on the grounds that they are based on misunderstandings of the educational intentions? Further, teachers involved face the question of how much time and effort to expend on persuasion or reassurance:

I work with our year six and they do a Mosque visit and it's part of the programme for RE. The children were all desperate to go and in the end we probably had at least, out of 50 children, 15 who couldn't go and it wasn't that they didn't want to go but they were not allowed to go by their parents. And no matter what we said to those parents we couldn't get them to realise that it was educational, interesting, I think they thought we were trying to almost brainwash them into "Go to a Mosque and believe this".

And in our sample, there was anecdotal evidence from more than one source that such attitudes were hardening:

The first time in 20 odd years of teaching I've had a parent who has withdrawn her child from any other aspect of RE apart from Christianity. And not based on any deep religious belief, it's based on – well, from my perception - a prejudice and a set of values that won't enable her or her children to learn about any other aspect of any other world faith. And that for me after so many years of teaching in the sort of school I'm in is really a very sad state of affairs.

Evidencing Impact

This continued to be a problematic issue for the schools we spoke with. We have seen how each school was required to work subjectively within a broad and quite open national framework of guidance. Teachers were uncertain what inspectors might wish to see or what they would accept as evidence and we were told of instances where they were surprised by the inspectors' judgements (sometimes being judged more leniently and sometime more harshly than they felt was fair).

Schools were required to provide *evidence of impact* of the duty and this certainly proved problematic, with a wide range of cohesion-promoting activities going on in school. As one senior secondary teacher put it:

I actually feel there's lots of things going on in the school that promote community cohesion. It's a matter of pulling it together.

The possible scope of this task is exemplified in one non-official guidance document, published by the Institute for Community Cohesion (ICoCo, date unknown), which lists no fewer than 65 different criteria which schools might include in their evidence folders. And other heads spoke of the lack of objective benchmarks and, even where research or evaluations had been conducted, the difficulties in identifying links between cause and effect for the purposes of the inspection.

Nonetheless, schools offered a wide range of impact evidence to inspectors and in their SEF forms based on cohesion activities in relation to particular ethnic, cultural, faith and socio-economic factors and often referred to strong and developing partnerships with a range of community organisations. Levels of recorded racist incidents provided objective evidence of cohesion, as did successful activities helping or supporting disadvantaged students or groups. Others were able to draw on attitudinal data and anecdotal evidence drawn for example, from the experiences of students following linking activities.

Conclusion: Was it necessary to introduce Community Cohesion as a duty?

As we have seen, the duty to promote community cohesion significantly overlaps with a number of other duties and initiatives. Not only do schools already have legal duties to promote positive race relations and to combat discrimination, the duty to promote equality is far reaching and one which schools take very seriously because of its limiting function in the inspection process. Furthermore, recent moves to introduce citizenship education and to require schools to consult students had already put in place strategies across the whole school which teachers identified as key instruments for schools in the promotion of community cohesion.

Whilst all schools have been able to point to a range of activities in the curriculum and in the general life of the school as promoting community cohesion in different ways and to different degrees, the sudden introduction of this *as a duty*, and more crucially, one which was to be inspected by Ofsted, did create anxieties in some quarters. Whilst not a single teacher we talked to demurred at schools being expected to promote tolerance, respect for diversity and cohesion as part of their mission, the fact that it was now a legal duty brought with it a whole extra layer of accountability, of record keeping, of self-evaluation and the prospect, at the end of the day, of a negative public report:

It's a burden because it's a statutory duty which is inspected and that creates a certain feeling around it. I wouldn't argue with any of the principles behind it, it's what a good school would do, it's what all schools should be doing.

This, however, was not the dominant reaction amongst our respondents (though we believe it likely that there is a degree of positive bias in our sample). The initial uncertainty, which we believe to have been widespread, gradually began to give way to varying degrees of clarity as schools sought guidance, spoke with colleagues in other schools and in their local authorities and began to address the issues which appeared to them to be most salient in their own situations:

Probably when it first came in it was a real burden because there wasn't enough information given to schools as to how to deal with that. So it became something else to do. How are we going to fit it in? What does it look like? All that sort of thing. But I think as time's gone on and we've looked to unpick it and actually realise that certainly for us as a school, there are a lot of things that we do do, which we may not have labelled community cohesion, but it's just part of our everyday bread and butter, because we couldn't teach these children and improve where they're at [without it].

This latter point recurred time and again in responses. Schools, particularly those in areas which are socially turbulent, deprived or fractured, recognised the need to address a whole range of issues facing the families and the communities they serve, in order to optimise students' learning and personal development. Many schools in these settings, indeed, saw the duty as little more than confirming the importance of the efforts they had been making over considerable lengths of time.

Interestingly, we asked our interviewees to make an overall assessment as to the value of the duty. The question we posed was 'Overall, do you consider the duty to have been more of a burden or a benefit?' We asked colleagues to make a balanced assessment on a 5-point scale of the benefits versus the burdens, a score of 'one' being 'a very clear benefit'. Of twenty responses we received to this question, the average response was approximately 2.2. This kind of response is probably represented by the judgement of one of the primary heads in our sample who summed things up in this way:

I hate to say it but I don't think it would have come up to the top of my agenda had I not been pushed because I'm so busy with other issues that it almost has to be that before I can find the time and prioritise this. Because although I felt that I

was quite good at that area – and the staff did – this year with even greater focus, we thought, “Let’s really embed it into the curriculum instead of playing at it by doing ‘culture week’ or whatever.”

And so I have spent masses of time trying to embed it through the two-year cycle with the visits and something that really makes the children very knowledgeable. So I probably did need it because it would not have got to the top of my agenda in the way it has now. But I could do without the stress, yes sure.

This then, would perhaps be the principal justification for making community cohesion an inspected legal duty. For all the ambiguities and the lack of objectivity around its inspection, the imposition of the duty and its subsequent inspection, undoubtedly had the effect of focusing the attention of many schools in ways they would not otherwise have done. Many schools were already active in many areas of school life which contribute towards community cohesion. As a result of the duty imposed in 2007, many schools have re-doubled their efforts in this area, have developed new structures and strategies, and developed new projects from which many students have benefited. In the main, schools have focused their community cohesion efforts on issues which *have* been of wider benefit both to the schools as a whole community and to individual students and, often, to their families. The duty has encouraged and given ‘permission’ to many teachers to look at some of the more holistic issues surrounding teaching and learning. To this extent, their schools have seen benefits.

The proposed changes to the Ofsted inspection will mean that, while schools are still legally expected to promote community cohesion, they will no longer be inspected on it. It seems likely that this change will lead to a shift and perhaps a dilution in commitment. It would be regrettable if the gains made during this period of the inspected duty were to be lost.

Community cohesion is an intrinsic good, and our study has shown that teachers recognise the importance of building cohesive communities which support both academic, social and civic learning. One head put it this way:

...When initiatives like this come along they prod us into reviewing current practice, thinking about what’s been suggested by a document or a policy or an idea, putting the two together, working out what’s going to be good for your children. In some cases, yes, making some changes and in some cases leaving well alone because it’s working the way you want it to work.

And another head expressed the view that:

I think the secret of outstanding community cohesion is that you do it because you’ve got a passion for it. You do it because you can see that it benefits your community, immediate local and national, not because somebody tells you to do it.

It is hoped that this report will contribute to schools maintaining and developing even better practice in this area.

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