

# Community Cohesion in the Big Society

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# Community Cohesion/Big Society

## Community Cohesion

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.

## Big Society

We will take action to support and encourage social responsibility, volunteering and philanthropy and make it easier for people to come together to improve their communities and help one another

# New Labour policy/Coalition pronouncements

- New Labour: policy placed duties on all school with an inspection regime requiring schools to follow. In terms of community and identity: equalities duties, citizenship education, community cohesion, preventing violent extremism, extended schooling
- Coalition policy: in many of the most successful education systems in the world individual schools are given a high level of autonomy. It is heads and teachers not bureaucrats and politicians, who inspire pupils and drive school improvement.

# The purpose of schooling

- What is education and does it have wider responsibilities to solving the problems of society?
- Frank Furedi writing on Community Cohesion in 'Wasted' argues that 'Charging schools with the duty to help realise government objectives is based on the naïve idea that school children can compensate for the problems of an adult society and serve as an agent for social change.'
- Ed Balls in his Children's Plan sees schools at the heart of their communities developing active and responsible citizens.

# Why is community cohesion an issue and can school help

- WHY COMMUNITY COHESION NOW (1)

7/7 and the fear of terrorism and extremism related to religion- leading to the Prevent Agenda

Trevor Phillips: 'Sleepwalking to segregation'

Changing patterns of immigration-immigration as a major political issue – fears around the BNP

Fears around teenage gang killings, teenage pregnancy, binge drinking and community relationship

Concerns about the achievement gap of pupils on free school meals including white underachievement.

# Why Community Cohesion Now (2)

- In 1965 75 million people lived outside the home country, now 180 m
- 600,000 Britons live in Spain, more in other countries (200,000) in NZ; 3m with second homes
- 25m tourists to the UK, 70m from UK to global destinations
- Globalisation in many forms: internet, international (Ted Cattle)
- New York Times July 2010 'the United Nations estimates that there are 214 million migrants across the globe, an increase of about 37% in two decades. 'There's more mobility at this moment than at any time in world history.'

# Why Community Cohesion Now?(3)

- older cultures and solidarities based around neighbourhood, work, class and nation have been weakened in a world that is much more mobile and less predictable. These changes have brought with them increased tensions and insecurities, which have played out in new forms of identity politics. (Muir and Wetherall)

# The legacy of Community Cohesion?

- 1) The journey from personal identity, through local identity to national identity to becoming a global citizen.
- 2) Dealing with the big themes of i) Religion, ii) Ethnicity and Culture and iii) Socio economic status

# Religion

In providing young people with an education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century can schools in the curriculum ignore questions like these:

- How do schools discuss the relationship between belief, citizenship and cohesion?
- How do they deal with the issues around Islam and how it has been portrayed in the media and the impact of the preventing violent extremism programme?
- How do approaches to religious education differ in largely white communities and in those that are ethnically and religiously diverse?

# Ethnicity and Culture

- Are issues around the perceptions of different races suitable for the classroom? (eg Article in Times 2007: 'So black runners are naturally faster? Wrong) Is there a place for race and genetics in the science classroom?
- In an election year how did schools deal with the attitudes of the BNP to race and immigration? While immigration is a complex issue it is at the heart of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and can schools ignore it?
- In an IPSOS MORI survey for DEA there were the following results:  
50% of pupils think it is a good idea to have people of different backgrounds living in the same country together. 14% actively disagree with the idea while the rest are neutral

It is noteworthy that 76% of black students and 66% of Asian students were positive about different kinds of people living together while only 47% of white pupils were.

What is the relationship between the curriculum and context?

# Socio Economic Status

- How are issues of white working class underachievement dealt with? How do they feel part of this agenda?
- How through the curriculum are issues of wealth, class and achievement dealt with honestly and positively?
- Studies show that 69% of British Muslims of Pakistani or Bangladeshi ethnic origin live in poverty compared to 20% of white people. How does this relate to building a sense of cohesion?

- What is the school policy for dealing with controversial issues?
- What conversations can be had about:  
Race, about religious practice, about immigration, about poverty and social class, about sexuality?

To what extent is up to the school whether or not it has these conversations?

# Student perspectives and their relationship to teaching and learning

They see Africa as poor, Asia as flooded and England as snobby whites and poor blacks'

'I'm black I live in London-that's my home. My parents are from the Caribbean but I'm really African. I'm a Christian, but I'm E7 -that's where I hang they're my people. That's who I am.'

'I do feel sometimes that there is no white history. There's either black history month or they do Muslims and Sikhs.'

'You're bored with it, you're just British.'

# A curriculum response

- The report Diversity and Citizenship 2006
- **Identity and diversity: Living together in the UK**
- Rationale: Britain has committed itself to certain values- respect for the law, democratic political structures, values of mutual tolerance, equal rights. These should be subject to discussion and debate through looking at aspects of modern British history.

The aspects of modern British history:

- The UK as a multi national state.
- Immigration, Commonwealth and the legacy of Empire
- The European Union
- Equal opportunities legislation

# Resulting changes to the National Curriculum

- Throughout the subjects of the national curriculum the concept of identity and diversity became commonplace. Is this a sensible response to the times we live in or a political agenda?

EG: History: understanding the diverse experiences and ideas and beliefs and attitudes---

Geography: appreciating the differences and similarities between people, places ---

English: Literature in English---reflects the experiences of people from many different countries

RE: encouraged pupils to develop their sense of identity and belonging

# Ofsted guidance: an attack on autonomy?

- The views of pupils and their knowledge and understanding about their community and the way the school promotes cohesion within it form an essential part of the evidence base.
- Inspectors will explore with pupils their knowledge and views of the diversity of their local and national communities.
- They will explore how well they get on with different groups within the school and local community and what the school has done to promote good relations.

# Equity and Excellence

- Community cohesion depends on equal chances.
- Black pupils are three times more likely to be excluded from school than white pupils. ('Getting it. Getting it right' DCSF 2006; Guardian Sept 2008 report from Warwick University))
- Black pupils are .3 times as likely to be on gifted and talented register.
- In 2005 twice as many black men in prison as at university.
- Almost a third of young Muslims leave school with no qualifications
- **What is the relationship between institutional racism and community cohesion?**
- **In trying to change those circumstances has the duty been hot air?**

# In conclusion

- The duty to promote community cohesion has been a bottom line in persuading all schools to think about their school community, the community the school is in and wider issues about national and global identity. Is this social engineering or a justified attempt to deal, through the curriculum, with important questions about the way we live now?