

Submission to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion

This submission focuses on young people and on the role of schools in integration and cohesion. It is widely acknowledged that young people are key to promoting successful community cohesion, both now and in the future. Schools provide a key space for promoting understanding and respect.¹

There are now many excellent projects taking place with young people at a local level or within individual schools. However, too little is currently being done at a national level to promote and replicate good practice.

The Citizenship Foundation, informed particularly by its work on the Diversity and Dialogue project, therefore has two key recommendations:

1. Good practice in promoting positive youth interfaith and intercultural relations should be centrally and proactively promoted through network building, information sharing, action research and training.
2. Schools should be given a positive duty to promote community cohesion. Schools should be provided with more support to take on this key role, given the lack of experience in these areas on the part of most teachers.

¹ For example, see the recommendation on p36 of 'Community Cohesion, A report of the Independent Review Team', Chaired by Ted Cante (2001):

'All schools should be under a statutory duty to promote a respect for, and an understanding of, the cultures in the school and neighbouring areas, through a programme of cross-cultural contact. This could be an expansion of the introduction of citizenship education from September 2002. Schools should not be afraid to discuss difficult areas and the young people we met wanted to have this opportunity and should be given a safe environment in which to do so.'

1. National promotion of positive youth interfaith and intercultural relations.

Recent government and other funding streams have enabled numerous new youth interfaith and intercultural projects to spring up across the UK. Some schools are also creating linking projects and finding ways to address issues of faith, cohesion and integration both inside and outside the classroom. They are often doing excellent work, but such projects are overwhelmingly local and operating in isolation. At present it can be difficult for individual projects to find out about other work taking place and there are few forums where participants or practitioners can meet to share ideas and experiences. More importantly perhaps, there is no national strategy to promote good practice in this area. Established and innovative projects are not being encouraged to support the development of work in other areas where there is less expertise.

Therefore, we would recommend that support be given for the central promotion of positive youth interfaith and intercultural relations, including:

- Maintaining a database detailing existing youth interfaith and intercultural projects, both in schools and in the community.
- Highlighting examples of innovative or good practice (developing criteria for 'what works').
- Developing new and innovative models of dialogue, through pilot projects and action research
- Organising training and networking events at a regional level
- Providing advice and information
- Matching up schools, youth groups and others interested in linking projects
- Producing educational resources and tool kits
- Acting as an advocacy body

In its first phase, Diversity and Dialogue² began to undertake many of the functions listed above. It created an online directory of over a hundred youth interfaith and intercultural projects, published a report sharing good practice and ideas and ran a national conference for those interested in youth social cohesion in Leeds in July 2006. Many conference participants requested regional follow up meetings, training opportunities and an annual national event. Project staff are also often contacted informally by people setting up new projects and wanting advice. This supports our assertion that there is a need for the central promotion of youth interfaith and intercultural work.

2. A positive duty for schools to promote community cohesion

For a number of reasons, schools (both faith schools and mainstream schools) have an important role to play in promoting good community relations and intercultural understanding.

Currently the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000) puts a positive duty on schools to promote good race relations and the Community Cohesion Standards for Schools (2004) offer some helpful guidelines on how schools can:

- I. Close the attainment and achievement gap
- II. Develop common values of citizenship based on dialogue, mutual respect and acceptance of diversity.

² Diversity and Dialogue is now a project supported by the Citizenship Foundation. It is based on a multi-faith partnership of aid organisations, has worked in this area for two years and would be ideally placed to take forward a national coordination role. Please see www.diversityanddialogue.org.uk for more information.

III. Contribute to building good community relations and challenge all types of discrimination and inequality.

IV. Remove the barriers to access, participation, progression, attainment and achievement.

We believe that the duty on schools should be extended from 'promoting good race relations' to 'promoting community cohesion'. This duty would recognise the important role of the school in fostering strong community relations and would widen the race relations duty to include religious, cultural and other identities. It would compel schools to take positive steps to promote strong relationships between people from different faiths and backgrounds, both within school and in the wider community.

Schools need to be encouraged to provide opportunities for young people of different faiths and backgrounds to meet and engage with each other such that they develop the skills, language and positive attitudes to support dialogical answers to community tensions. Schools self-evaluation Inspection Forms should ask schools to report on what they have done to promote strong relationships between people from different faiths and backgrounds, both inside and outside of school.

More importantly we would argue that more attention be given to the role of the curriculum in developing a sense of shared citizenship within a democratic and pluralist framework based on equality, justice and human rights. It is the experience of the Citizenship Foundation and Diversity and Dialogue that this aspect of the citizenship curriculum is not systematically addressed because traditionally it has not formed part of the RE curriculum and neither is it yet a recognised part of the Citizenship curriculum. In Citizenship the focus of 'diversity' work has been on anti-racism, though this is still very patchy and widely avoided by many, if not the majority

of schools³. From the conference platform, Professor Cantle has confirmed that to date the citizenship curriculum has disappointed in terms of promoting cohesion⁴. The Department for Education and Skills has not yet, in our judgement, acknowledged the unique opportunities open to schools to promote dialogue and community relations.

We believe that developing young people's understanding of the potential causes of tensions between different communities is key to successful community cohesion. However, Diversity and Dialogue has found that schools can be slow or reluctant to deal with controversial issues. The repercussions of outside conflicts, such as anger over the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad or war in Iraq are addressed effectively in some schools, but ignored by the majority. Our consultation suggested that young people often feel anxious and powerless about events happening in the news and want a safe space to discuss them. This is backed up by evidence from wider research⁵.

"Even if it's not in London we see it on the news - the conflict between these religions and these cultures, it affects every person. It does something to your brain."
15 year old, female, Muslim.

"The government is trying to pull people apart. You hear all these things about how they are going to separate whites from blacks. They're making it all worse."
15 year old, Male, Muslim

Discussing issues in a safe and well-facilitated environment supports young people to develop the skills to consider and respect a range of different view points. Yet, although there is already provision for discussion of controversial issues, many teachers are nervous of addressing these complex and sensitive topics, because they

³ This problem was identified by Chris Gaine (*Still No Problem Here*, Trentham Books, 1995) and still remains.

⁴ Tackling Extremism Together, Building Safer and Stronger, Cohesive Communities, 14th December 2006

⁵ For example, Global Citizenship Education: the Needs of Teachers and Learners (2002-2004), funded by the Department for International Development

fear stirring up conflict. Conflict is often viewed as negative and something to be avoided. However, conflict is necessary to achieving understanding and if handled constructively, it can be a positive part of learning about others. Effective training and good quality resources are needed to make sure that teachers are equipped with conflict resolution skills and the wider skills and confidence to lead lessons and discussions effectively⁶. Our experience is that teachers need help and training supported by new curriculum development work in this area.

New recommendations for the citizenship curriculum following the current review are likely to draw attention to its potential to assist young people in exploring multiple identities and shared citizenship. Schools are uniquely placed to take on this role. Yet, whatever the recommendations of the QCA are in this regard, it is likely that very little will change in curriculum provision unless teachers are provided with high quality support and guidance, backed up with a national strategy to train teachers in these new and challenging areas.

Making a difference

An emphasis should be placed not just on dialogue, but on action. Asking young people to do something to tackle some of the problems that they have identified in their communities can be an effective way of overcoming feelings of disempowerment. Challenging young people to work together constructively also helps to build trust and awareness of common values, thus strengthening community cohesion. We would welcome more projects which bring young people from different backgrounds together to work on social action projects. The two case studies show the wide range of issues that can be chosen, from local prejudices to global injustice.

⁶ Diversity and Dialogue and the Citizenship Foundation have developed resources and guidance for dealing with controversial issues in the classroom.

Case study: Warwick School Youth Act project

Youth Act is a project run by the Citizenship Foundation that provides support and training to groups of young people and adults who want to achieve change in their communities. Warwick School for boys' campaign 'Understood' has grown out of the tension they feel in their community towards Muslims after 7/7 and the recent terror arrests. They are focussing on community cohesion and developing understanding of different religions and cultures in Waltham Forest, London.

Case study: Make Poverty History project

Diversity and Dialogue worked with Muslim and white secular young people in Tower Hamlets, East London. Participants worked together over six weeks, learning about issues of fair trade, international debt and aid, then creating a campaigning video which they took up to Edinburgh to the Make Poverty History rally. Evaluations showed campaigning together on a global issue to be an effective way of building trust and friendship between the young people. Their common goals and values were demonstrated through their commitment to the project.

Wider community relations

Schools need to reach out into the wider community if they are to promote community cohesion effectively. Even in the most multi-cultural areas of the UK, schools are often dominated by one or two ethnic or religious groups, and this can limit pupils' understanding of different points of view. In largely mono-cultural or single faith schools, it is even more important to build strong links with other organisations.

The most cohesive schools and colleges therefore work hard to ensure that diverse individuals and organisations work with the school. They give pupils opportunities to experience different environments and meet new people. All schools should be encouraged to develop partnerships with a range of outside organisations and to give greater consideration to community cohesion issues when planning work experience, school trips and other programmes.

City of Bristol College teaches students from a wide range of faiths and backgrounds. Many arrive here from their secondary schools, with little knowledge of those outside their own immediate community. The College helps to build their understanding of other faiths and cultures through a variety of work placement programmes. The College encourages students to experience at least one organisation run by people from a different faith community or in an area dominated by a particular cultural group. This gives students the chance to get to know people from other faiths and cultures and to build working relationships with them. This generates a greater awareness, which they then share with their peers.

Maurice Coles' 2004 report, 'Madrasahs and Mainstream'⁷, addresses the potential for schools to engage with supplementary schools. For example, Moat Community College in Leicester was concerned that the large amounts of time pupils spent in madrasahs was having a detrimental effect on their studies. Therefore, it developed a partnership, offering supplementary schools a grant of £2000 per year in return for information and co-operation. It developed facilities for students to be examined in mainstream school on subjects learnt in the madrasah, such as Arabic.

These types of partnership help to build stronger links between schools and faith or BME networks. They also help students to make connections between learning in and out of school and to have their extra curricular learning recognised and valued.

Strong community links are also fostered through employing staff from the local community. In the medium term, the teaching body should reflect the diversity of the student population. As an immediate measure, support staff should be actively recruited from faith and ethnic groups represented in the local community. This sets up easy communication channels between the school and all sections of the local community and can build trust with 'harder to reach' groups.

Schools with little religious and ethnic diversity may also find it helpful to link with other schools, with a different make up. Bradford, for example, have an excellent school linking project, which is now being extended to Tower Hamlets⁸. There are other examples of successful partnerships between schools, although most of these take place at primary level and there is a need to build on the work at secondary level. It is notable that the government often mentions the benefits of such school linking projects, but has, as yet, not backed this up with significant funding.

⁷ <http://www.insted.co.uk/leicester.pdf>

⁸ Bradford School Linking, for more information see <http://www.bradfordschools.net/slp/content/view/72/1/>

Schools in rural areas often find it particularly difficult to promote strong relationships between young people from different faiths and backgrounds. It would be helpful to set up a searching facility (and grants scheme), similar to that produced by the Department for International Development (DFID) for schools seeking partners in other countries. <http://www.globalgateway.org.uk/default.aspx?page=7>. This could help schools to find partners, in different areas of the country. Diversity and Dialogue is currently planning an urban-rural school linking project between secondary students from East London and Cornwall and will then be developing a toolkit for use by others. Julia Igrave has also undertaken valuable work linking primary schools in Leicester and Sussex.

'Building E-Bridges' – This project originally linked primary school students at the predominantly Muslim Uplands Junior School in Leicester with pupils at the nearby St. Thomas More Catholic Primary School and then expanded to include rural schools from Sussex. Students were encouraged to discuss their own beliefs and values around ethical dilemmas, then to share thoughts with their linking partner via email. The partnership within Leicester was developed through joint sports days, picnics and visits to each other's schools. There were also shared residential sessions in Sussex and Leicestershire, to bring the email partners together. Julia Ipgrave has written several books about the project and other schools have emulated her work. Ipgrave's work was at primary level but could be adapted for older students.

Extended Schools: wider opportunities

The Extended Schools agenda offers great potential for building strong community relations. Schools are expected to work in clusters, allowing schools with different ethnic and religious make-ups to work together. Schools are expected to work with outside organisations to deliver out of hours services, allowing more scope for faith-based and community organisations to play a part in school life. Extended schools also promote the opening up of school facilities to the wider community. This positions the school as a space where diverse groups can come together to learn new skills. It provides time and resources for interfaith and intercultural activities.

This potential is exciting and very welcome. However, it is noticeable that at present, building positive relationships between people from different faiths and backgrounds is not an explicit aim of the programme.

This is a missed opportunity. Whilst some LEAs, such as Oldham (quoted below) will be conscious of community cohesion, others may not consider it when planning activities. This means that many schools may not be realising the potential of

extended schools to build positive community relations. We would like to see a greater emphasis on community cohesion in Extended Schools planning and evaluation.

Simone Spray, Extended Schools Strategy Manager at Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council, emphasises the role of extended schools in building understanding between young people of different faiths:

“Extended schools are a particularly important space for community cohesion. If you can move students around after the school day and get them to mix with different people it can have definite benefits for community relations. The beauty of extended schools is as a local agenda, it responds to what is relevant in the local community.”

In conclusion, we propose that the role of schools in promoting good community relations and social cohesion be strengthened. Legislation would consolidate existing duties and initiatives. It would provide the impetus needed for all schools to take community cohesion seriously. We propose that good practice in youth social cohesion work should be promoted at a national level, supporting work both in school and the wider community.