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Schools to promote community cohesion and Ofsted to inspect



From September 2008, Ofsted will be looking at how well schools are contributing to community cohesion as part of the inspection process. How will this change the inspection experience for schools?

Schools have long had a vital role in the establishment of mutual understanding as our society diversifies, by teaching youngsters to celebrate diversity and value harmony and tolerance. The Education and Inspections Act 2006, places a duty on all maintained schools to promote community cohesion, and on Ofsted to inspect their effectiveness in doing so.



Last July, following consultation, the Department for Children, Schools and Families published guidance for schools on the duty to promote community cohesion. The guidance defines community cohesion as:

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

It explains that a school's contributions to community cohesion will fall under three headings and our inspectors will include their assessments of community cohesion as we inspect these aspects of each school:

- teaching, learning and curriculum – promoting common values and understanding
- equity and excellence – ensuring equal opportunities for all
- engagement and ethos – promoting meaningful interactions between people from different backgrounds.

Most schools already contribute to community cohesion in these ways. Through the existing curriculum, pupils are learning to value the diversity of modern Britain. The majority of schools are already working hard to achieve more equitable outcomes for different groups of pupils.

Inspectors will be looking at the ways in which schools meet these different challenges. They will need to consider what the school knows about the communities it serves, how it has used that knowledge to promote community cohesion and serve the needs of its users, and how it knows whether its strategy is successful. Schools' self-evaluation will be vital in identifying strengths and areas for improvement. The inspection judgement will be made within leadership and management and draws on a wide range of evidence, including the pupils' views.

“ We must make sure community cohesion becomes part of every school's ethos to celebrate diversity and recognise common values. There'll be different challenges for different schools but it's now on the agenda for them all.

Adrian Gray, Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks, Ofsted

In the spring term we carried out trials to test the inspection guidance and our approach to inspecting schools' contribution to community cohesion. We also received feedback from headteachers and inspectors who participated in the trials. While headteachers and inspectors recognise some extra time is needed in the already busy schedule of a school inspection, most agreed the inspection approach is sensible and that understanding of the duty among schools is reasonable and improving. One of the headteachers commented that they 'welcomed community cohesion' and the discussion with the inspection team had helped give them 'a strong focus'.

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Outstanding Good Satisfactory Unsatisfactory

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