

Combining the Equality Act with a whole-school ethos to deliver British values

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Teachers today are expected to do more than follow the curriculum; it is also important to foster a positive school culture. Doing so opens the classroom to being a safe space for talking and learning about issues students may be afraid to discuss openly. Jigsaw, the Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) programme for 3–11-year-olds, was launched in July 2013 and a programme of resources and activities about the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) has been rolled out to all primary and secondary schools in the UK (Banerjee *et al.*, 2014). Authors of the programme found that ratings indicating a whole school universal approach to SEAL were significantly associated with school ethos, which in turn mediates associations with pupils' social experiences, overall school attainment and persistent absence.

A whole school ethos strives to promote a message of unity in education. It speaks for a shared belief in all students in the school however they might differ from one another. Greenberg *et al.* (cited in Banerjee *et al.*, 2014) observed that research and practice increasingly show that schools will be most successful when the entire school community is engaged. This can be a crucial platform for creating an ethos capable of reinforcing and amplifying children's social and emotional learning. A teacher from Birmingham successfully instigated a whole school ethos at his school in the context of the 2010 Equality Act. Called No Outsiders, this project has made great strides in creating a communicative environment for students.

My article in the *Times Educational Supplement* offered an insight into a book written by Andrew Moffat, the teacher at Parkfield Primary School

in Birmingham (Khan, 2016). It looked at how he used literature to teach students about equality. In this article I offer a closer look at how Moffat's book, *No Outsiders in Our School: Teaching the Equality Act in primary schools* (2016), connects the 2010 Equality Act with a whole school ethos to deliver British values to students. In May 2016 Andrew Moffat's school was rated Outstanding across all areas by Ofsted (2016), and No Outsiders is a key contributing factor, as the report released shows. Readers of *RET* may be interested in my interview with him.

The 2010 Equality Act places a statutory obligation on the public sector, including education. So it is up to teachers to ensure that students are taught according to the values of this British law. Andrew Moffat sees the 2010 Equality Act as a source of support to teachers:

I was so relieved by the creation of the 2010 Equality Act as it is a legal framework which ensures that there is accountability so that those who were not privy to the prevalence of the issues surrounding homophobic behaviour now know the protocol to follow. Teachers and headteachers I spoke to found the 2010 Equality Act very helpful as a resource as it supports the whole school ethos that many schools carry, and particularly my school's No Outsiders ethos. Ofsted now require schools to demonstrate how they are tackling homophobic bullying.

For teachers who have been in the profession for decades, present British policy and law might appear progressive. Teachers are expected both to learn about and adjust to changes in policy and law so they can apply their understanding

to their students. Andrew draws on his own long career as a teacher to reflect on how the message delivered to students on diversity has changed and how this has influenced the ethos in his school:

The message that I taught when I started teaching 20 years ago, was that we are all the same, it is obvious that this is actually not the case. Children's literature is a great tool for promoting diversity which is why I have chosen to use children's books to promote the 'No Outsiders' message, which is that we are all insiders; no one is left out. This was inspired by a quote from Desmond Tutu: 'Everyone is an insider no matter their beliefs, whatever their colour, gender or sexuality'.

I asked Moffat how he thinks the 2010 Equality Act coheres with the teaching of British values in schools. He replied:

I believe that British values are values of humanity and democracy. The key thing we hope to achieve is for our students to want to live in a diverse Britain and our school's promotion of diversity will give us the agency to help our students see all the good that can come from living in harmony with people different to us.

Since November 2014, when the government instructed schools to promote British values, schools have struggled to understand what exactly those values are and quite how they should be taught. Lord Nash (DfE, 2014) stated that 'we want every school to promote the basic British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths and beliefs.' Andrew says that 'promoting British values is not just about countering radicalization (as some have interpreted it to mean) – but ensuring no person faces discrimination because of their race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.'

Andrew justifies his ideas on British values on the grounds that teaching students to appreciate the ways in which individuals differ from one another acts as a catalyst in preparing them for later life:

This is all in aid of preparing our students for college, university and work so they can all get along and make different friends. We want children to work anywhere and work with anyone. Life is unpredictable and our students' future work colleagues could be gay, lesbian, transgender, have disabilities or be of a different ethnicity to them so it is our role to support students in accepting and welcoming this diversity.

Andrew has found that children's literature is an effective way of promoting diversity, as the books engage children in a way that perhaps helps them empathize with characters who experience trials and tribulations because of how they differ from the accepted norm. He pitches the literature at the appropriate level of each year group and tailors the message of the story to match the classroom. As he says:

For successful moral reasoning I paved a clear thought path for children to follow by scaling the complexity of the topics of literature according to their year group. So Reception and Year 1 have simple messages about getting on with someone different – for example, the book *10 Little Pirates* helped this age group to feel encouraged for boys and girls to play together.

He describes the process by which he chose the books that represented thought-provoking themes and would leave readers contemplating the moral of the story:

I chose the books very carefully to talk about characters that were different so that children were taught to not be scared of difference. In Reception, the book *Red Rockets and Rainbow Jelly* shows that we can like different things but still be friends. In Year 1, the

book *Max the Champion* shows a child with a disability who is mad about sport. *King and King* is used in Year 4 to talk about gay marriage and in Year 6 *The Island* sets out to challenge the causes of racism as the book gives children an opportunity to talk about refugees and to understand how racism occurs and what actions they can take to stop it.

Andrew explains how children's literature is a functional medium for communicating issues about diversity:

I use books because I want to embed the work into the school curriculum and these lessons can be used to support literacy, guided reading and PSHE. Talking about characters makes a tricky subject accessible; we talk about the character and the situation first and then relate it to real life and our own experience.

A website Andrew uses to share assembly pictures and new lesson plans can be found at www.equalitiesprimary.com. When he finds new books about the promotion of equality and diversity, he puts them on the webpage and adds a lesson plan that teachers can access for free. Alongside the schemes of work pinned to children's literature, Andrew also ensures that students have opportunities to mix with students from other backgrounds and faiths, and be aware of global events. He believes this has helped contextualize the lessons taught in PSHE classes, as the No Outsiders ethos helps the children gauge the actions they should condemn and also to understand why.

I've talked about the Paris terror attacks with students and told them that we believe there are no outsiders and the terrorists don't believe in our ethos of No Outsiders. The children now want to spread the No Outsiders message across Birmingham.'

No Outsiders clearly doesn't shy away from uncomfortable subjects and the classroom is kept as a safe space for students to talk about such events.

To spread awareness about No Outsiders and to celebrate diversity, Andrew's school has initiated programmes with other communities. He describes its Ambassadors Programme:

... which I think all schools should do, which is for children to meet those different from them in different communities. The majority of our children follow the Muslim faith so I seek out schools where we can meet children who are not Muslim, and they play together in an after school club for an hour. This promotes the message that we can all get on together as we all believe in No Outsiders. This supports our work around reducing radicalization. We promote the message that we don't want to have just one race or one religion. We want to have lots of races and lots of religions.

British values can be perceived as polarizing groups of people but Andrew believes that teaching democracy is a key approach to altering this view in schools. In response to Andy Thornton's post from the Citizenship Foundation (2015) in which he expresses concern that the notion of British values creates an 'us' and a 'them', Moffat is clear: 'I have to say that the way these values are taught determines what qualifies people's perception of British values.' He maintains that democracy and values can be taught by using a No Outsiders-driven school project. This, he believes, puts theory into practice, and allows students to get a genuine feel of how democracy works in action so they can acquire a better understanding of the process:

One way we promote democracy at school is to hold a summer event where based on a £1000 budget children vote for a play activity which they want new equipment for. So

children came up with either a table tennis party, chalkboard party or a reading party. They learn democracy through the principle that someone has to win and others lose but what's important is that they all have a vote.

The No Outsiders-inspired ideas can be seen as going the extra mile, but with all the competences teachers must meet, is there the time to do it?

I understand the concern teachers have regarding the pressure of being judged on students' attainment but any worries about how allocating curriculum time to promote diversity coming at the cost of student performance would be misplaced. This is because if children are worried about the skin they are in or where their family comes from or that their family is different, they won't do well. The school needs to be successful in making children feel content with who they are and naturally children will respond by being more open to learning. Citizenship need not take much curriculum time as it can be between 45 minutes to an hour a week. But the lesson plans are only a part of the work. More important is the school ethos that needs to permeate everywhere. In alignment with the whole school ethos, lesson plans support what the school believes.

The school has been using Andrew's methods for almost two years, and he found getting parental buy-in was crucial. 'We held a number of meetings with parents, some of whom were initially very unhappy about what they believed we were going to be teaching,' he tells me, 'but we talked through exactly what we were doing, showed them the books and related the work to British law. In this instance there must be open-ended communication between teachers and parents to concretize the content of lessons in the knowledge that parents are on board with what their child learns. This is key to delivering No Outsiders

in the classroom, as the values taught at home will match the values taught in school, giving the child a complete PSHE lesson

Andrew uses film to represent the views of the school's parents and children in light of No Outsiders:

In December 2015 I commissioned a short training film at my school to support the No Outsiders resource, which shows parents and children talking about their support for the project, it is evident that everyone has to sign up to the ethos for it to be carried through to the curriculum.

Parkfield headteacher Hazel Pulley says that the strategy has had a huge impact on equalities work at the school and that the schools' interconnectedness has helped No Outsiders prevail.

It has worked incredibly well at Parkfield Primary School because the whole staff team is supporting and promoting the ethos, which gives it authenticity. The books and lesson plans have enabled our teachers and children to talk confidently about equalities and this, building on the relational trust and dialogue we have with our parents, has made the strategy a success.

As PSHE is designed to make individuals reflect on themselves and the society around them, it is a teacher's job to be aware of marked occasions when they can develop lessons in this area to reinforce the school's ethos. Hazel says:

The main point is to continually look for opportunities in the school year and in the pupil's curriculum – for example, the school election, a Queen Elizabeth Day etc. I want to enable Andrew to continue this work with other schools to extend the outreach of No Outsiders.

British law has taken a monumental step forward in the wake of the 2010 Equality Act,

because it obliged Ofsted to examine the legal requirements of schools. Despite such progress, however, Andrew stresses that further steps need to be taken towards ensuring all students' right to equality:

For schools to continue on from the success of the 2010 Equality Act and Ofsted's requirement of schools to demonstrate their no-tolerance of homophobic bullying, they need to look at all dimensions of equality. Clearly, the shifting policy window, which has brought British values into the curriculum, will need to stay open to support the change effected by the 2010 Equality Act.

Six months on from my interview with Andrew, Parkfield Primary School had its first Ofsted inspection in May 2016, and was graded Outstanding across all areas: effectiveness of leadership and management; quality of teaching, learning and assessment; personal development, behaviour and welfare; outcomes for pupils; and Early Years provision. No Outsiders is mentioned throughout the report, which is clear about the project's success. Ofsted (2016) states how Parkfield's No Outsiders project contributed to the Outstanding effectiveness of leadership and management:

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a key strength of the school. Fundamental British values are actively promoted through the school's work on 'No outsiders in our school', which develops pupils' understanding of how the Equality Act relates to and affects them. As a result, pupils celebrate diversity and are respectful towards others, including those with different beliefs, sexuality, gender or culture. One pupil spoke for many when she told inspectors, 'everyone is an insider in our school, there are no outsiders, whatever their beliefs, whatever their colour, gender or sexuality'.

Ofsted saw how the personal development, behaviour and welfare of students at Parkfield Primary School was enhanced by the No Outsiders project. That the project contributed to the school's promotion of British values in a way that appreciated the inclusive nature of British culture is highlighted in their report:

The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding and is a strength of the school. Pupils' understanding of tolerance, diversity, respect, rights and responsibilities, and equal opportunity is enhanced through thought-provoking teaching and other activities such as assemblies and visits to places of worship. The school's work on 'No outsiders in our school' actively promotes fundamental British values and teaches pupils how to make a positive contribution to local, national and international communities. Prejudices and stereotypes are confronted and challenged. As a result, pupils play and work together happily and with confidence and all pupils have equal opportunities to succeed and do well.

As inspired by the 2010 Equality Act, the No Outsiders project uses children's literature as a framework to discuss in the classroom issues concerning equality and promoting diversity. The children are able to explore ideas and seek to understand the world around them. Just as there are good children's books that open children's minds to issues of gender and sexual orientation, there is an immense literature on issues of race, refugees and other issues of equality. Anne Dolan's (2014) *You, Me and Diversity*, for example, provides a directory of recent picturebooks that feature development and intercultural themes such as climate change, migration and social justice, and range from the earthquake in Haiti to the struggle for civil rights. The framework Dolan (2014) uses for categorizing the picturebooks gives teachers a planning tool to ensure they offer children

a full range of development and intercultural perspectives while adhering to literacy guidelines. There are vast resources out there to help teachers promote British values but children's literature presents a significant and enjoyable avenue for taking the 2010 Equality Act a step further in the classroom.

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