

Dealing with the British National Party and other radical groups: Guidance for schools*

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What are the problems?

In April 2005, a school in the North of England decided to run a mock general election². In the run-up students in citizenship classes worked on the election processes and nominated their own candidates to stand in the election. Parliamentary candidates from three mainstream parties (Labour, LibDem and Conservative) were invited in to coach the students on campaigning methods and the election process though not, it seems, to talk about their policies. When some parents and the local British National Party (BNP) candidate himself complained that the BNP had not been invited, the head was forced to answer claims that she was being undemocratic. She argued that the candidates were talking only about the *processes* of the general election and further, that

‘none of the children can vote so the candidates were not electioneering’.

However, convincing or unconvincing the head’s defence was, the dilemma she faced is one that many teachers recognise, especially, perhaps, in schools with many Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students or where, in the locality, racial tensions are high. Where does the school’s duty lie here, especially when the open discussion of policies and practices which some, but not all, regard as ‘racist’ appear to be in contradiction to the schools’ statutory duties to promote race equality and community cohesion?

Issues surrounding the activities of parties which lie within the democratic spectrum but which are regarded as extreme by many – even the majority – present schools with a number of difficult issues to consider. Until now, these issues have occurred in a relatively small number of locations and consequently many schools have not been placed in the position of having to decide how to handle them. Lack of a school policy and the training that should go with it can place individual teachers in difficult situations. Recently teachers in a predominantly white working class school were confronted with a wave of resentment towards increased Eastern European immigration to the UK. The tensions increased during the build up to the European elections, with BNP views prominent in the local and national media. This led to a challenging situation in which, prior to one tutor time, the slogan ‘BNP’ had been scribed on the whiteboard by a student. This was the first time such an incident had happened in the school. The teachers involved felt a responsibility to address the incident by challenging students’ views and encouraging them to consider other viewpoints. However they felt their effectiveness limited due to their own lack of confidence in dealing with the issues, lack of time to fully research the facts for themselves and a lack of guidance from senior management. The issue continued to be a minefield for some time, evoking strong emotive responses from both students and teachers.

¹ With additional material by Tony Breslin

² This is based on a report taken from the Huddersfield Daily Examiner April 26, 2005

* This document represents the views of the authors and should not be taken as representative of government policy.

This document, therefore, attempts to set out the key issues and arguments in order to help schools arrive at a clear policy which can be confidently implemented.

The Human Rights background

This country's democratic values are based on the fundamental beliefs enshrined in the European Convention of Human Rights that everyone has:

- The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This includes the freedom to change a religion or belief, and to manifest a religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance, subject to certain restrictions that are "in accordance with law" and "necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others" (Article 9)
- The right to freedom of expression subject to certain restrictions that are "in accordance with law" and "necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or the rights of others". This right includes the freedom to hold opinions, and to receive and impart information and ideas (Article 10)
- The right to freedom of assembly and association, including the right to form trade unions, subject to certain restrictions that are "in accordance with law" and "necessary in a democratic society" (Article 11).

Further, and perhaps less well-known, is the right in Protocol 1, article 2 which provides for:

- The right not to be denied an education and *the right for parents to have their children educated in accordance with their religious and other views.* [our emphasis].

Freedom of conscience often involves personal beliefs or values into which the state is not entitled to intrude. However, in cases where beliefs are contentious in a public way, for example, beliefs which appear to deny the human or legal rights of others, or threaten their security or right of abode thereby undermining public policy commitments to race equality and community cohesion, schools as servants of the state find themselves in what may feel like a policy contradiction.

What is extremism?

Discussions about extremism can become confused when terms like 'extremist', 'fundamentalist' or 'terrorist' are used inter-changeably or without clarification. Each of these is different and in terms of the current discussion, there is an important need to distinguish between groups operating within the law, even though some of their aims might be shared by other groups which implicitly or explicitly espouse violence to achieve the same ends. In this discussion we distinguish between 'extremist' and 'radical' groups, where radical means groups

working *within* the democratic system to achieve fundamental changes to the way society is run.

Extremism, by contrast, could be described as:

‘the active pursuit of and/or support for fundamental changes in society that may endanger the continued existence of the democratic order (aim), which may involve the use of undemocratic methods (means) that may harm the functioning of the democratic order (effect).’³

The government’s definition of extremism spans a wide range of beliefs and includes violent Irish Republican and animal rights groups as well as Islamic groups such as Al Qaida and violent individuals or groups of the far right. The recent toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism declares⁴:

‘In addition to the severe threat posed by Al Qaida-influenced groups, dissident Irish Republican terrorist groups who oppose the Northern Ireland peace process still pose a threat to British interests. Other UK based extremist groups including racist and fascist organisations and far right extremist groups also pose a threat to public order and the British multicultural way of life. These groups often aspire to campaigns of violence against individuals, families and particular communities and, if unchecked, may provide a catalyst for alienation and disaffection within particular ethnic communities.’

It is important to note here that the BNP, as a lawful political party, cannot and does not openly advocate violence and in their public pronouncements and activities they take great care to remain within the law, even recently agreeing to modify their membership policy which was ruled to be discriminatory. In the same way, Hizb ut-Tahrir, works towards a society based on Islamic values (a Caliphate), as opposed to Western-style democracy and capitalism, through political and intellectual, *not* violent, methods. After the London bombings the British government explored the possibility of banning the organisation but shelved the idea after warnings from police, intelligence chiefs and civil liberties groups that it is a non-violent group, and driving it underground would be counter-productive. In the same way, UK citizens have become used to the notion that Irish Republicanism, expressed politically through the Sinn Fein party, has worked politically and lawfully to oppose British rule in Northern Ireland, but it is the *violent* dissident extremist groups (such as the Real IRA) that are proscribed.

It may be helpful to remember that all political groups, and this certainly applies to the British National Party, are ‘broad churches’ and there are often political disagreements within a party. It is intellectually sloppy to argue against any organisation based solely on the actions or views of *some* of its members. Recently it was revealed that BNP membership included citizens from a wide spectrum of society, including teachers. Although BNP party members may not join the Police, the General Teaching Council in 2008⁵, declared that teachers who were BNP supporters should not be banned from the profession because the party is not illegal. In an internet forum, the question of whether the BNP should be allowed to remain legal was discussed. One supporter replied:

³ Sieckelinck in Davies (2008) ‘Educating Against Extremism’, Trentham Books.

⁴ Learning Together to be Safe, DCSF, p12

⁵ General Teaching Council statement about political party membership, published 21 Nov 2008

“In a word yes, opposition to unsustainable immigration and defence of indigenous culture is a legitimate political aim. Just ask the Tibetans.”⁶

Such views may be looked on sympathetically by members of other political parties. Some people may support the BNP party simply because they, rightly or wrongly, feel it the best route to social housing. They may feel, with regard to immigration, that the ‘pendulum has swung too far’ or that current policies unfairly favour immigrant groups and that, on these grounds, discrimination is indeed taking place but against, in their words, ‘indigenous’ British people. These claims are contentious and often disputed, and anyone making them has a duty to bring forward the evidence to support them. But that is the nature of democratic political debate. These debates highlight the fact that there are wide disagreements around issues such as immigration, race and racism, including, sometimes, the meanings of the very words themselves. As Peter Kellner (President of YouGov) has argued⁷:

“The BNP won 6% of the total vote in the [2009] European elections. But only one elector in three turned out. That means just 2% of the total electorate voted BNP. And YouGov research for Channel 4 News found that (depending on precise definitions) roughly half of the BNP’s voters are truly racist; the other half are people who feel insecure and alienated from the main political parties. [...] Millions of people feel let down by the main political parties. Most want immigration halted completely. [...] These are issues that certainly need addressing.

But those facts, alarming as they are, tell us something actually rather encouraging. The surprising thing is not that the BNP vote is so high, but that it is so low”.

Schools, and in particular, teachers of citizenship, social studies and politics, have a duty to help students understand the concepts and arguments used in public debates and to equip them with the skills and dispositions to engage in rational, democratic debate in which discussants make claims and bring forward arguments to support them in the understanding that those taking different positions will do the same. In the case of the issue under discussion, it would be very important for students to understand what each political party *actually* stands for, as opposed to what it is commonly claimed to stand for.

As two teachers working in an area where the BNP has elected members on the council put it,

- T1 The line I’ve used in class before is ‘Let’s research it, let’s find out what it actually stands for, before you say, “Yes I’m BNP”.[...] As a teacher I always say, “Let’s research what you’re saying and get into it a little bit deeper”, and generally speaking that’s what they want to do.
- T2 A lot of our kids are from recently immigrated families and a lot of them are really against more immigration – “All these people coming in taking our jobs it’s too busy already” - and it does allow you to say, “Why do you think that? Why did your family come here? Why do you think the BNP might see you as different?” I think there is a value in

⁶ Comment from Ogoopogo on Yahoo Answers to the question ‘Should the BNP be legal?’ <http://uk.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090307175859AAWGUr4> [accessed June 19, 2009]

⁷ Kellner, P., “Don’t Do Something, Sit There” accessed on 17th Sept 2009 from <http://www.fabians.org.uk/debate/democracy/kellner-on-the-bnp-dont-do-something-sit-there>

just talking about it in itself: “Why do some people support it and why do some people not support it and what do you think about it?” The kids in my class who support the BNP say things like ‘Yeah but my Mum can’t get a council house with all these people coming in’ and you say “Let’s see how it works out and how the points work” I’m quite comfortable talking about it and I think the kids are surprisingly comfortable talking about it as well.

The above discussion should not be taken to imply approval or disapproval of the BNP or its policies. It is to underline the argument that all democratic parties operating within the law should be able to be properly and openly discussed, and students should be helped to understand their key positions (and the evidence or otherwise that supports their positions) and how they differ from illegal, extreme groups who may share similar aims.

These issues can come into sharper focus for schools at times of general elections when teachers often use time in citizenship lessons to explain what is happening in the news. It is common practice for schools to invite political candidates into schools to talk about elections and the importance of voting. However, it is worth noting the unwritten code against electioneering in schools agreed to by Members of Parliament in 1975. This was a cross-party agreement forbidding MPs from visiting schools for the purpose of electioneering. Thus, in practice, MPs will concentrate on educating students about the role of Parliament and how MPs serve their local constituents. If schools allow one politician, of whatever political perspective, on such a visit to promote their own party’s policies, it would be in breach of the school’s duty to ensure a balanced presentation of views. However, where a school sets up a session in which a representative panel of politicians answers students’ questions about the issues at stake in the election, then it is likely that MPs would not see this as a breach of their duty not to unfairly use school visits to canvass for votes. On such occasions, schools may well be faced with the dilemma about whether to include radical groups on the panel, particularly if they are locally active, as was the case in the Huddersfield school which we referred to at the beginning of this article.

Should BNP members or other radical parties be allowed in school?

The straightforward answer to this appears to be that unless and until the law decrees any political party to be undemocratic, illegal, or in contravention of human rights law, schools must treat all parties equally and all parties must be asked to avoid direct electioneering when in school. Failure to do so arguably places the school itself in a position of being undemocratic and denying the rights of some citizens their entitlement to freedom of conscience and expression. As discussed, two possible responses are:

1. *Prohibitive* :

In this option, the school may invoke a longstanding and well-publicised “no platform for racists” position. However, there is a danger that this is not publicly well understood or well thought through by the institution and also that such responses are just ‘wheeled out’ reactively in challenging circumstances. In these cases, they can be experienced as oppressive, selective, ‘politically correct’ and anti-democratic. Thus, some would contend that they stifle legitimate debate. Given that the BNP is not a proscribed party it cannot be assumed that its spokespersons will behave in an unlawful manner. Given that much of the BNP’s public

material draws on feelings of resentment that groups they claim to represent are systematically ignored by the political establishment, this 'no platform' policy could be seen to directly reinforce that kind of feeling.

2. *Permissive:*

On this option, schools treat all parties on an equal basis. Given that MPs should not normally come into schools in order to canvass for votes, it may be that schools will feel no need to invite in all parties if the visit is simply for the purpose of providing coaching in campaigning techniques. If a school decides to host a panel in which there is a broad balance of parliamentary candidates, including radical groups, schools should make it clear that such an event takes place against the very clear back-drop of:

- The anti-racist provisions of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act
- The school's commitment to equal opportunities and its legal obligations in terms of race equality and community cohesion
- Those broader school rules about acceptable behaviour and against any actions that would breach the law in terms of, for example, incitement to racial hatred.

Given that the whole purpose of a democratic system is to debate policy differences in public, to avoid violence and to abide by the will of the people as expressed through the ballot box, any system that denies a platform to any lawful group arguably helps justify those who would argue for non-democratic, extra-legal methods of achieving their aims. As Professor Lynn Davies puts it, we must be confident that⁸:

a strong civil society is one that is not afraid to critique but which has people with the skills and dispositions to engage in this without violence.

Teachers, of course, do have concerns about 'doing the right thing' by their students, protecting them from offence, insult or worse and avoiding controversy that could possibly get out of hand, given young people's relative immaturity and the possibility that some of them may take the law into their own hands. The existence of the positive duties to promote race equality and community cohesion may place pressure on schools to take the prohibitive route in respect of non-moderate parties. Some teachers may believe that this is their public duty. However, we argue this is by no means clear.

Implementing and drawing support from policies and legal duties

A range of duties and directives exist which provide guidance and support to teachers when addressing challenging race-related issues. Although not a comprehensive list, the following duties are of significance to the teaching of controversial issues and exploring aspects of identity and diversity within the citizenship curriculum (these policies are further discussed in appendix 1):

- The Education Act (1996)
- The Race Relations Amendment Act (2000)
- The Duty to Promote Community Cohesion (2007).

⁸ Lynn Davies, 'Educating Against Extremism', Trentham Books, 2008.

Equally important are the school's and department's own policies that should both reflect these legal duties, be tailored to the school's individual circumstances and proactively support teachers in addressing these issues. Before embarking on discussions of sensitive issues such as discussed here, teachers would be advised to discuss with the Senior Leadership Team the school's response in the event of complaints from parents. It is hoped that the guidance set out in this document might assist schools in developing a robust defence for the discussion of controversial issues based on educational, not political, grounds and one which addresses potential charges that schools are deliberately seeking to undermine selected parental views.

Approaches to confronting extremism

Whole school approaches

The Combating Extremism toolkit discussed previously offers a three-tiered approach to addressing extremism, including issues deriving from the far right. Some of these strategies are whole school initiatives, some are targeted strategies which are more likely to be addressed through teaching and learning, and some involve specialist work with targeted students.

In summary, the guidance⁹ stresses the importance of understanding extremist narratives and suggests that teaching should:

- Model to students how diverse groups can be heard, analysed and challenged in a way which values freedom of speech and freedom from harm.
- Help to build students' skills and knowledge to challenge radical and extremist views.
- Use teaching styles and curriculum opportunities that allow grievances to be aired, explored and demonstrate the role of conflict resolution and active citizenship.
- Allow space for debate amongst staff concerning the challenges of extremism and offer training to increase staff confidence in handling discussions of controversial issues.
- Understand local issues and tensions with help from the local authority and police.
- Develop a network of community contacts and links with mentors and role models.

Undeniably the challenges of addressing these issues in the classroom can feel daunting and can vary according to the school and community in which it is situated. Some teachers may not feel fully equipped or supported to be able to deal with them. Discussions held with teachers during the development of this guidance found the challenges that teachers experienced when addressing extremist views included the following:

Beyond the classroom

- Lack of perceived support from senior management in recognising the need to allow students to have these challenging discussions without students being punished or reported for expressing radical views where these are genuinely held.

⁹ Learning Together to be Safe, DCSF, p7

- Concerns that teachers will not be supported in the event of complaints from parents.
- The lack of legal guidance readily available to teachers.
- Concerns that the issue may become very divisive across the school community when ‘outside’ issues are imported into the school which, after all, has a prime duty to educate rather than engage in politics.

Within the classroom

- The concern that some students would reveal ‘unacceptable views’ which could potentially marginalise or offend other students and cause hostilities and possible divisions between students both within and outside the classroom.
- A lack of teacher confidence in their skills and knowledge to respond appropriately and confidently. As a result teachers fear they might actually ‘worsen’ the situation by not being able to defend arguments with reliable, balanced information.
- A concern that the sensitive nature and potential for emotive debates could lead to loss of class control due to a lack of maturity from students.
- The lack of clarity in guidance for teachers about how the core human rights and values underpinning citizenship can be reconciled with the values of parties on the margins of acceptability
- The possibility that some students will practise self-censorship or be silenced by others, either because of fear of being politically incorrect or of being marked down by teachers or ostracised by their peers. This censorship makes it very difficult to engage in a genuine exploration of student’s views and therefore limits the potential to engage them in genuine dialogue.

Managing discussions in class

The importance of establishing a climate in the classroom that is open and non-judgmental cannot be underestimated. For this reason, students need to be trained in the ground rules of democratic debate from the beginning (ideally this should begin in the primary classroom) and they should not be expected to discuss seriously contentious topics before they have been trained in the basic techniques with ‘safer’ topics. It will be helpful, if at some point, teachers explicitly introduce the concept of democracy, including the fact that different individuals and groups fundamentally disagree on the kind of society they want. This underlines the need for respect, toleration (in the political sense) and the need to resolve issues through the ballot box and not through violence. In particular, students need to develop an understanding that:

- Within a democracy, people can legitimately disagree
- There are acceptable ways of dealing with disagreement
- Views should be expressed in ways that are respectful and non-intimidating.’¹⁰

Students must understand that they are welcome to express their views but that others have the right to examine and challenge these views and ultimately may disagree. However uncomfortable the views that are being expressed may be,

¹⁰ Fiehn, J. Agree to Disagree. Citizenship and Controversial Issues. LSDA. 2005. Pp11.

students must understand the importance of Voltaire's sentiment¹¹, 'I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.' Pupils should also be aware how the expression of their views, however, sincerely held, may impact on their peers.

Ground rules must be regularly revisited and reinforced specifically for group discussions to help prevent unmanageable situations. They work best if the students themselves are involved in their development and are considered by all to be work in progress. Teachers at times may need to call 'time out' on discussions which become overheated but the class should be enabled to understand why such discussions are difficult. Appropriate ground rules could include:

- One person speaking at a time.
- Not making personal comments against a person whose opinion you do not agree with (address the arguments not the person).
- Not referring to a specific individual either within or outside the class.
- Encouraging others to share their views, by offering reasons and evidence.
- Not using abusive or derogatory language.
- Sticking to a time limit (to prevent rants, maintain focus and encourage participation from all).

The teacher's role in handling open debate

It is helpful if teachers reflect upon their own facilitation method and the needs of the class when dealing with challenging classroom discussions. A particularly good description of facilitation approaches is explored in 'Agree to Disagree: Citizenship and Controversial Issues'. Fiehn offers four approaches:¹²

- 'Neutral chair': The facilitator adopts a role of impartial chairperson of a discussion group.
- Stated commitment: The facilitator always makes known his/her views during the discussion.
- Balanced approach: The facilitator presents participants with a wide range of alternative views and materials.
- Challenging consensus: The facilitator consciously and openly takes up an opposite position to that expressed by participants or resource material (Devil's Advocate' role). This may often happen with younger groups where teachers feel more developmentally mature views are lacking from the discussion.

It is important to be flexible on the approach used depending upon the nature of the discussion and circumstances of the class. It is also helpful to be upfront with students as to the method being used and the motives for this choice.

¹¹ These are, in fact, not the actual words of Voltaire but written by a biographer Evelyn Beatrice Hall to summarise Voltaire's position set out in the book *The Friends of Voltaire* which was published in 1906 under the pseudonym of S.G. Tallentyre.

¹² Ibid, Pp13. These build on those outlined in the Crick Report of 1998.

Structured methodologies for exploring controversial issues

Teachers may need to build resilience within the community of the class in respect of contentious issues such as race, immigration and terrorism. Commonly, teachers nervous of engaging in such debates will avoid them altogether thereby failing to help students critically reflect on their own views or engage with counter-arguments. In the event that a teacher judges that a class, for whatever reason, is not yet ready to engage with difficult issues in open debate there are more controlled approaches which could be called upon, such as students being presented with a range of arguments and/or counter-arguments on an issue and being asked to write about why the subject is sensitive, acknowledging different positions on the issue.

Structured discussion methods can diffuse situations and encourage students to think more rationally and less emotionally. In addition, young people are known to jump to conclusions, with much thinking remaining implicit and unexamined (a sign of immature reasoning). Structured methods can assist the development of students' thinking skills by making the implicit more explicit and therefore more open to examination.

'Focused Conversation'

The 'Focused Conversation' (or ORID method) is a simple tool that can be applied to exploring issues around identity and diversity. It works most effectively if a stimulus is presented first and requires students to work through a series of four questions: ¹³

- 'WHAT?' (Objective) – These questions help to clarify the facts and could include: What did you see / hear? What can you define as a fact or opinion and what is the evidence? Are all the key words understood by everyone?
- 'GUT' (Reflective) – These questions ask students to consider how they feel and their immediate reactions. They could include; How does this make you feel? Can you relate to this in any way? Who do you feel sorry for? What is your view of the events in question – do you approve/disapprove of what took place and why?
- 'SO WHAT' (Interpretive) – These questions ask students to consider what it all means and why the situation is occurring. They could include: What are the reasons we behave in this way? What would happen if we all had these opinions or behaved like this? What other ways could these opinions cause problems?
- 'NOW WHAT' (Decisional) – These questions help to consider what needs to be done next. Questions asked could include: What would be the best outcome? What should happen to people who have these views?

Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry' (OSDE) approach

An alternative methodology recommended in the 'Diversity and Citizenship report' as a method to explore sensitive issues is the 'Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry' (OSDE) approach.¹⁴ This methodology

¹³ Nelson, J. (2001) *The Art of Focused Conversation for Schools* Toronto: Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs

¹⁴ DfES Curriculum Review: Diversity and Citizenship, (Ajegbo Report) 2007.

provides a framework for critical engagement with and reflection upon different voices and perspectives.

The approach aims to create a safe space where students can examine their own knowledge and beliefs against different perspectives, acknowledging their origins and encouraging students to be open to changing their views. It is based on three principles:¹⁵

1. That every individual brings to the space a valid and legitimate knowledge, albeit constructed in their own contexts.
2. That all knowledge is partial and incomplete.
3. That all knowledge can be questioned.

Within the space there may be a need to suspend school rules temporarily regarding the acceptable use of language if someone is genuinely trying to express their feelings rather than condemn and insult. This in itself can be a challenge for some schools and practitioners.

Recommended procedures in the classroom include:

- Use different stimuli to look at different perspectives and evidence on the issue.
- Students draw or write their first thoughts and share them with a partner.
- In pairs, students generate questions on the issue they would like to discuss.
- As a class, they vote to select the question for discussion.
- Students discuss the question, using exploratory rather than confrontational methods of formal debate (using e.g. rounds in which students offer personal viewpoints but can 'pass', individual responses, votes etc).
- In wrapping up the discussion, students share what they have got out of the discussion.

This method has features in common with the Philosophy for Children (P4C) method which is also highly recommended as an approach to teaching positive skills and attitudes towards reflective enquiry¹⁶.

Ideas for lessons on radicalism and extremism

1. WHAT IS EXTREMISM?

Present a range of views to students on a range of topics, from animal rights, to abortion, immigration and Britishness. Students could then investigate:

- What views do they consider moderate/radical/extreme?
- What is it that makes a view extreme?
- Who do the views affect? Who might be upset by the views? Why?
- Are the views expressed uncompromising? In what way?
- How do others describe extremism?
- Why do we have disagreements about what can be considered an extreme view?

¹⁵ www.osdemethodology.org.uk <http://www.osdemethodology.org.uk/keydocs/osdebooklet.pdf>

¹⁶ For more on Philosophy for Children, visit the website of the Society for Advancing Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPERRE)

2. BIAS BUSTERS: DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN OPINION AND FACT

Encourage students to be bias busters by spotting emotive language and hearsay in media sources. Once you are confident students can detect bias present them with campaign material from a variety of political parties, including those from the far right.

An alternative source of material could be party broadcasts. Many political parties produce music videos and recruitment videos specifically aimed at young people which can be found on YouTube. Compare the material from across the political spectrum, both mainstream and 'radical'. Revisit the students' definitions and exploration of extremism and ask students to consider:

- Have any materials that they have examined shown elements of this?
- Are there any hidden implications behind the material? What are the videos NOT saying?
- What images of the political party or Britain have been presented?
- Do the actors used in the films represent everyone in British society? Who is absent? Why do you think this decision has been made?
- Who do you think the film's targeted audience is? How do you know this?
- What are the main concerns the parties are highlighting? How do they propose to overcome these problems? Are these solutions realistic or fair?

Older students could also investigate political parties' mission statements and basic aims to provoke discussions and determine hidden connotations. For example; the BNP's mission statement states the aim 'of securing a future for the indigenous people of the islands in the North Atlantic which have been our homeland for millenia'.¹⁷ Questions might include:

- Who are the 'indigenous people' referred to?
- Where are the islands of the North Atlantic?
- Is there a group of people who could be considered truly 'indigenous' from these islands?
- What is a 'homeland'? What emotions is this choice of wording intended to stir?
- How have the 'indigenous' people of these islands historically behaved in respect of other people's homelands?

Can students spot the following in the literature:

- The mention of perceived persecution and possible threat from other cultures.
- The suggestion that conventional structures in society (law, police, government) are not providing the answers.
- A strong need to change the way things are using force (either physical or through strong action).

¹⁷ <http://bnp.org.uk/about-us/mission-statement/>

Appendix 1

The Education Act (1996), sections 406 & 407, binds teachers by law to avoid promoting partisan political views in the teaching of any subjects in schools. Head teachers must ‘take all reasonably practical steps to ensure that, where political or controversial issues are brought to pupils’ attention, they are offered a balanced presentation of conflicting views’.¹⁸

Although these guidelines are clear it can prove a difficult task for teachers to determine the steps they need to take to ensure that the views expressed are balanced. The Citizenship Foundation suggests that in practice this means:

- Giving equal importance to conflicting views and opinions;
- Not presenting opinions as if they are facts;
- Not implying a correct opinion through the choice of respondents in a discussion;
- Not failing to challenge a one-sided consensus that emerges too quickly in the classroom; and
- Presenting all information and opinion as open to interpretation, qualification and contradiction.¹⁹

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act, 2000

In force since April 2001 schools have a statutory duty to promote race equality. This general duty means that schools must aim to:

- Eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Promote good race relations between people of different racial groups

As part of this duty, schools are required to have prepared and maintain a race equality policy (either explicit or within a broader equal opportunities policy) which reflects the schools character and circumstances and which links to strategic planning and decision making. Accompanying this duty is a set of race equality standards that schools can use to assess their effectiveness in promoting race equality.²⁰ Particular standards that have implications for the teacher when exploring identity and diversity in class discussions include:

Attitudes and Environment

Evidence	Implications for the practitioner
<p>* A ‘whole school’ ethos is used to promote racial equality and eliminate racial discrimination.</p> <p>* Clear procedures are in place to ensure that racist incidents, racial discrimination and racial harassment are dealt with promptly, firmly and</p>	<p>* How does your subject promote principles such as democracy, human rights and equality?</p> <p>* How is this ethos shared with students?</p> <p>* Are staff who are experiencing</p>

¹⁸ National Union of Teachers, Advice. ‘Conflict in the Middle East – issues for schools’, Feb 2009.

¹⁹ Citizenship Foundation ‘Teaching controversial Issues: guidance for schools’ [downloadable from <http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/main/page.php?92>]

²⁰ Commission for Racial Equality, ‘Learning for All: Standards for Racial Equality in Schools’, www.cre.gov.uk

<p>consistently.</p> <p>* All staff are trained to deal effectively with racist incidents, racism, racial harassment, prejudice and stereotyping.</p>	<p>these issues clear as to what a racist incident is within the context of an open rational debate in class?</p> <p>* Does the school policy acknowledge the need to provide students with an 'open space' to explore extreme views in a non judgemental and non disciplinary way?</p> <p>* Has this message been shared with students prior to discussions taking place?</p> <p>* Have staff who are more likely to be dealing with issues arising from extremist viewpoints received training in dealing with controversial issues?</p>
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Curriculum, Teaching and Assessment

Evidence	Implications for the practitioner
<p>* Teaching methods encourage positive attitudes to ethnic difference, cultural diversity and racial equality.</p> <p>* Racial equality and ethnic diversity are promoted and racism and discrimination challenged in all areas of the curriculum.</p>	<p>* Are opinions in classroom discussions inclusive of a variety of backgrounds?</p> <p>* Are opinions presented tested against human rights principles?</p> <p>* In the absence of cultural diversity within the classroom are opportunities given to investigate alternative views?</p> <p>* Have students had the opportunity to explore the ethnic diversity in the community and its potential benefits?</p> <p>* Have students had the opportunity to define discrimination and its subtleties including considering the implications of comments within a classroom discussion?</p>

The duty of schools to promote community cohesion also highlights issues for consideration when discussing identity, diversity and viewpoints promoted by

extremist political groups. Since September 2007, schools have a statutory duty to report on their contribution through three main areas:

1. Teaching, learning & curriculum
2. Equity and excellence
3. Engagement & extended services

Community cohesion is described 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; 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’²¹

The opportunities to explore and contribute to this whole school agenda in the classroom are significant. It presents us with the opportunity to engage with students about relevant issues such as diversity and identity and to explore what ‘community cohesion’ means to them.

The duty requires that through teaching and learning the curriculum should:

Community cohesion through teaching and learning	Reflections / contributions from the classroom
<p>* Help students to learn to understand others, value diversity whilst promoting shared values.</p> <p>* Promote awareness of human rights, to apply and defend them.</p>	<p>Through classroom discussions do you explore with students:</p> <p>* What communities the students belong to and what the community needs are?</p> <p>* What could the impact of these needs be on class discussions around identity and diversity?</p> <p>* How can our communities be friendlier places?</p> <p>* What are our communities shared values?</p> <p>* How can we focus on what we all have in common?</p> <p>* Whose viewpoints are being included / or are absent during discussions around identity and diversity?</p> <p>* What are the implications of this for human rights?</p>

²¹ Alan Johnson, Secretary of State for Education and Skills, speaking in Parliament November 2006.

<p>* Develop skills of participation and responsible action.</p> <p>* Provide opportunities for students and their friends and families to interact with people from different backgrounds and build positive relationships</p>	<p>* Are student's views being critiqued against human rights principles?</p> <p>* Do discussions explore what students themselves can do about an issue in their community that has engaged them?</p> <p>* Has this willingness to take action been followed up and supported by the teachers?</p> <p>* Do your students have the opportunity to work with representatives of other communities, listen to alternative views and consider how we relate to other citizens who are different from us?</p>
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