

The Place of British Values in Church of England Schools & Academies

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Since November 2014 all schools and academies in England, whether state or independent, have a duty to actively promote British values as part of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education (SMSC). Although 'British values' the non-statutory guidance relates to English schools

These values are not new – they were first articulated by the government in 2011. They are:

- Individual liberty
- Mutual respect
- Tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.
- The rule of law
- Democracy

All schools must now have a clear strategy for embedding these values across the life of the school and show the effectiveness of this work. Ofsted inspects and comments on this area. The clear aim of promoting these values is stated as being to “tighten up the standards on pupil welfare to improve safeguarding, and the standards on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils to strengthen the barriers to extremism”. It is believed that promotion of these values will ensure pupils become valued and rounded members of society who treat others with respect and tolerance, regardless of background, and so leave school better prepared for life in modern Britain.

It is stated that through their provision of **SMSC**, schools should:

- enable pupils to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence
- encourage pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative, and understand how they can contribute positively to the lives of those in their locality and to wider society
- encourage respect for other people
- further tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions by enabling pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures;
- enable pupils to distinguish right from wrong and to respect civil and criminal law
- enable pupils to acquire a broad general knowledge of and respect for public institutions and services and democratic processes.

When these values are embedded pupils are expected to gain understanding and knowledge of issues such as:

- an understanding that the freedom to hold other faiths and beliefs is protected in law
- an acceptance that people having different faiths or beliefs to oneself (or having none) should be accepted and tolerated, and should not be the cause of prejudicial or discriminatory behaviour
- an understanding of the importance of identifying and combatting discrimination
- an appreciation that living under the rule of law protects individual citizens and is essential for their wellbeing and safety
- an understanding of how citizens can influence decision-making through the democratic process

Further guidance has been issued by government organisations. However, the emphasis now placed on this area of SMSC may cause concern to church schools already striving to embed explicit Christian values in school life. They may question whether British values should replace the Christian, and, indeed whether there is any contradiction between them. Schools may also wonder which values should take priority, or despair as the list of potential school values grows ever longer and so seem less manageable or relevant.

The Church of England, with the Queen as its earthly governor, has a legal role as part of the state and so is inextricably bound to the rule of law and the process of democracy. Indeed, the Queen, in her coronation oath, pledged to govern her many territories 'according to their respective laws and customs' while also causing 'law and justice in mercy to be executed' and to do her utmost to 'maintain the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel' while maintaining 'in the United Kingdom the Protestant Reformed Religion established by law'. This oath is just one articulation of the strong link between the British state with its values and the Church of England. Britain is now a multi-cultural nation but is still built upon its historic Christian heritage.

The Church of England is intrinsically inclusive. Not only does it affirm the importance of each individual, but the historic parish system offers everyone living within its boundaries opportunity for the 'cure of souls' – an offer of spiritual care for all who wish to accept it. This inclusivity extends to Church of England schools. Since the Church of England's National Society set out to establish a school to educate 'the children of the poor in the principles of the Established Church' in every parish in 1811 it has accepted all children from the parish and beyond, space permitting. The early aims of the National Society, stated in 1828, were not dissimilar from modern British values.

They included the need to:

- train the infant poor to good and orderly habits
- instil into their minds an early knowledge of their civil and religious duties
- guard them from the seduction of vice

These schools were first established at a time when England was regarded as a Christian country and its values were inextricably linked with those of the Christian faith. However, the foundations of Church of England schools still ensure that the Christian principles on which they were established is clearly articulated within the schools trust deeds and instrument of governance. This should include an ethos statement to the effect that: 'Recognizing its historic foundation, the school will preserve and develop its religious character in accordance with the principles of the Church at parish and diocesan level. The school aims to serve its community by providing education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice. It encourages an understanding of the meaning and significance of faith and promotes Christian values through the experience it offers all its pupils.'

However the need to open the doors to all in the locality, regardless of faith or culture, means that such schools are inclusive – they welcome pupils as unique and important individuals who matter both to God and the school. In more recent times, admissions policies may give academies or aided schools the right to offer places to children from Christian families for nurture in their faith, but the percentages of such places offered is always set to ensure that those of all faiths or none are accepted and included.

Church of England schools are **not** confessional – their aim is not to proselytise, but rather 'To ensure that every child and young person has the opportunity of a life-enhancing encounter with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ.' They strive to offer a community with a strong and distinctive Christian character that is visible in the life and values of the school.

The possibility of a **personal, loving relationship between an individual and God is a key** belief of the reformed Protestant faith, upheld in the Queen's oath. The Christian Biblical narrative is underpinned by the importance of love; love of God, love of others and love of self. For Christians it is God's love that enables Him to have a relationship with people. God loves and is involved in His creation, especially the people He has made, and showed this especially by sending His Son, Jesus, to earth to give an example of how to live, and to offer forgiveness, salvation and hope through His death and resurrection. Christians believe that it is God's strength, through the work of his Holy Spirit, that helps people to show and live out God's love. This love supports individuals in their own journey of faith, but also to live out love for other people.

Love for a Christian means a selfless, unconditional respect and concern for others. Despite the rejection of the Church of England's suggestion that 'love for neighbour' be included within the government's list of British Values, for a Christian, love is an attitude which underpins all values.

Jesus himself said *'A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'* (John 13:34-35)

St Paul added that only *'three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love'*. (I Corinthians 13:13)

and *'the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love'*. (Galatians 5:6)

The Bible gives no definitive list of **Christian values**, although some are specifically enumerated. Values are inferred or deduced from Jesus' and new testament teaching

Colossians 3v14

Compassion

Kindness

Humility

Gentleness

Patience

Endurance

Forgiveness

Peace

Thankfulness

Christianity is unique among major world faiths in teaching that salvation is offered freely and accepted by believers – it is not the result of trying to live by a set of rules. However, faith in God's promises and a commitment to following Jesus' example with the help of the Holy Spirit means that the lives of believers should change and mirror Christ's teaching and values.

In considering the place of British values, therefore, it is important to consider whether there are indeed Biblical principles underpinning their philosophy.

Individual Liberty

Individual liberty is a key British value. This is linked to the need for pupils to realise their own self-worth and then to recognise the worth and rights of others. The belief that every individual is special and important lies at the heart of the Christian faith. Christians believe that every individual is a unique and valued creation, made in the 'image of God' [Genesis 1:27]. Moreover God loves every person he has made, has a plan and purpose for them and wants a relationship with each one. Everyone is included, special and loved. The Bible states that God says 'I have called you by name, you are mine' [Isaiah 43:1] and 'I know the plans I have for you, they are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.' [Jeremiah 29:11]

It is when pupils are confident of their own position and worth that they are best able to develop respect for others as autonomous individuals. Unpacking Christian values such as *faith, belief, trust, courage, gentleness, self-control, patience, humility, creativity* and above all *love* helps to build this sense of self-worth and dignity.

Mutual Respect & Tolerance of those with Different Faiths and Beliefs.

Inclusivity is not only a tenet of the Church of England. The Bible is very clear that Christians should respect, tolerate and indeed love and help those of other faiths and cultures, underpinning the British values of **mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs**.

Christian love is to be lived out to all those around as 'anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister' [1 John 4:21]. The parable of the Good Samaritan [Luke 10:25-37] was told by Jesus to demonstrate that everyone, however different, could, and should, be loved as a neighbour. Jesus spoke with and befriended many who were seen as outsiders in his culture and faith – not only Samaritans but Romans, the sick, outcasts and those who had failed to meet religious standards. He was actively inclusive, teaching 'I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold.' [John 10:16] and 'If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? If you are kind only to your friends how are you different from anyone else?' [Matthew 5:46]. The Bible adds: 'Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it'. [Hebrews 13:1-2]

Many of the Christian values that relate to interaction between people such as respect, friendship, faithfulness, kindness, compassion, service, generosity, hospitality, community, truthfulness and peace reinforce this key aspect of British values. It is a key part of Church of England education as it articulates the principle of inclusivity. It also impinges on aspects of planning within worship and religious education (RE) and the need to ensure that each faith covered in RE is taught in a way that honours the concepts at its heart. It is also important to remember that many values and beliefs are shared between faiths and so there are many common areas for celebration and comparison within a framework of diversity rather than division.

The Rule of Law

The Bible is very clear about the importance of right and wrong and the **Rule of Law**. St Paul wrote 'Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle towards everyone.'

[Titus 3:1] and in Romans 13 wrote at length about the place of the authorities in maintaining order and community living, building on the simple reminder: 'What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God' [Micah 6:8]

Christians are striving to live according to God's principles of right and wrong and uphold important values such as justice and mercy which also underpin British values.

Democracy

Democracy as we know it was not a feature of the autocratic Roman rule of Jesus' time on Earth. However the rule of democracy is dependent on a belief that each person is important, valued and worthy of respect. Democracy, therefore, is a recognition of the values already discussed and a practical way of fully involving every individual in the workings of the state.

British Values

British values do not, however, give total liberty to individuals or tolerance of all views. Their declared aim is to combat extremism, and so they do not condone attitudes that are discriminatory and not inclusive or loving.

For people of faith there is freedom to believe as long as the beliefs do not conflict with these British values. Individuals have the right to hold their own views and beliefs as truth. The Bible provides a framework on which the law of Britain has been built over centuries. The danger of defining right and wrong without any definitive starting point is that morality can become subjective begging the question of who decides what is right? Historically law in Britain has been built on the principles of the Bible. These in turn are underpinned by the rule of love. Other forms such as Sharia law may be acceptable where this rule is not broken. When there is conflict then British laws built on Christian values are to be upheld. However if British values that clearly contradict the Christian message of love and inclusion were ever introduced this would create new challenges for Church schools with their mantra to remain true to their Christian foundations.

The Bible also includes guidance on attitudes to extremist views. Jesus did not respect and tolerate those who abused their faith and used it as an excuse for lack of respect and love. He spoke out firmly against hypocrisy when He told a Pharisee that he might 'clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now as for what is inside you – be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.... You load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them'. [Luke 11: 39 – 41]

Linking British values with Christian values is frowned upon by secular groups who see all church or faith schools as a threat. It was these groups who led the vote against the inclusion of 'love for neighbour' as a British value. One major concern about the promotion of British values as a way of combatting extremism is that they may prevent explicit discussion of the Christian and that any focus on the distinctive is potentially divisive and so 'Non-British'. However the National Secular Society website claims that a spokesperson for the Department of Education suggested that 'Christian principles such as 'loving your neighbour' are integral to these [values] [14.11.2014]. Government guidance to schools includes the statement that 'It is not necessary for schools or individuals to 'promote' teachings, beliefs or opinions that conflict with their

own, but nor is it acceptable for schools to promote discrimination against people or groups on the basis of their belief, opinion or background’.

On 15th March 2015 clarification was sought in the House of Commons when the motion ‘That this House believes that Ofsted should respect the ability of faith schools to teach their core beliefs in the context of respect and toleration for others’ was debated and passed. Towards the close of the debate Sir Edward Leigh MP clarified the situation with the words ‘We have all agreed that faith schools do not have to promote other faiths, only respect other faiths’. [Daily Hansard]

Pupils in Church of England schools and academies have the right to the very best education that can be offered, including the right to guidance and support on their spiritual journey. Jesus said that He came to bring ‘life in all its fullness’ [John 10:10] and Christians believe that this fullness embraces the whole person – body, mind and spirit.

British values do not contradict Christian values. Indeed just as Christian values should underpin all aspects of life in a church school, so the attitude of British values can and should be embedded across school life and within the whole curriculum, directing teaching and learning as a whole. The values should be spoken of explicitly and it is important that as teachers plan the focus of their lessons practical examples are chosen that do not contradict the attitudes of either Christian or British values. Values then become an aspect of pedagogy. Teachers should be inspired by a vision of the kind of pupils that they wish to see leave their care and use examples that enhance not contradict so impact on learning and the whole life and performance of the school.

It is important that all schools include a statement on promoting British values as part of their SMSC policy. A model adapting the government guidance is given below but it should be personalised to fit the individual school. Possible prompts are included, but it need not be longer than one sheet of A4.

NB All Biblical references are taken from the New International Version or the New Living Translation.

Promoting British Values Statement

British values are embedded in the life of the school. They are actively promoted through spiritual, moral, social and cultural education and form a part of our distinctive Christian character. British and Christian values are regularly promoted through high quality teaching across the curriculum, within Collective Worship, and by a positive behaviour policy which allows pupils to develop and demonstrate skills and attributes that will allow them to contribute positively to life in Modern Britain. These values and attitudes are promoted and reinforced by all staff and used to provide a model of behaviour for all our pupils. The way in which the school community behave and treat others is built upon a basis of respect, individual worth and Christian love, while recognising and respecting that many of these guiding principles are present in other faiths and cultures.

Democracy

Democracy and communication is embedded in school life as the 'voice' of each pupil is valued and heard. Pupils are listened to by adults and are taught to actively listen to one another, respecting the right of every individual to have their opinions heard. Pupils have the opportunity to share opinions and ideas through the School Council and regular 'pupil voice' evaluation. Elections of the School Council members are based on pupil votes after each child has shared their manifesto. [Mock elections, Debates, Circle time, Eco committee, Responsibilities]

Rule of Law

The importance of laws, whether those that govern the class, the school or the country, are consistently reinforced. The children discuss and set their own classroom rules to ensure that they are relevant and clearly understood by all. Pupils are taught the value and reasons behind laws, the responsibility they have to uphold them and the consequences when laws are broken. [Visits eg Police and Fire Service, Rights and responsibilities agenda, Behaviour policy]

Individual liberty

Pupils are actively encouraged to make choices, knowing that they are in a safe and supportive environment. Children are encouraged to know, understand and exercise their rights and personal freedoms and are advised how to exercise these safely through many curriculum subjects, particularly in PSHE and e-safety lessons. [Forest school, Community events, Charity work]

Mutual respect

Respect is an important value to pupils and staff and is deeply embedded in learning and behaviour. Pupils understand that respect must be shown to everyone, whatever differences there may be; and to everything, however big or small. Respect underpins school life, in and out of the classroom. [Anti-bullying week, Prevent agenda, e-safety, Fair play, Manners, PE]

Tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs

Christian concepts and values form an integral part of pupils' daily learning but are taught alongside an understanding and celebration of different faiths, cultures, philosophies and beliefs. This is embedded within all subjects, particularly RE, enabling pupils to gain an enhanced understanding of the place of religion in a multi-religious world and their place in a culturally diverse society. [Multi-cultural events, RE visits & visitors, Multi-cultural resources, Creative arts, School partnerships, Festivals, cultural diversity]