

Inspecting maintained schools' duty to promote community cohesion: guidance for inspectors

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Introduction

1. Section 21(4) of the Education Act 2002 (as inserted by section 38 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006) states that:

'The governing body of a maintained school shall, in discharging their functions relating to the conduct of the school—

- (a) promote the well-being of pupils at the school, and
- (b) in the case of a school in England, promote community cohesion.'

2. This duty came into effect on 1 September 2007. From 1 September 2008, HMCI has a duty under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as inserted by section 154 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006) to report on the contribution made by schools to community cohesion.
3. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published *Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion*¹ to support schools in implementing the duty. This extract from the DCSF guidance defines community cohesion in the context of schools as follows:

'What is community cohesion?

By community cohesion, we mean 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 community².

Community from a school's perspective

For schools, the term 'community' has a number of dimensions including:

- the ***school community*** – the children and young people it serves, their parents, carers and families, the school's staff and governing body, and community users of the school's facilities and services
- the ***community within which the school is located*** – the school in its geographical community and the people who live or work in that area. This applies not just to the immediate neighbourhood but also to the city or local authority area within which a school is located
- the ***UK community*** – all schools are by definition part of this community
- the ***global community*** – formed by EU and international links.

¹ <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00598-2007&>

² Alan Johnson, Secretary of State for Education and Skills, speaking in Parliament on 2 November 2006. Based on the Government and the Local Government Association's definition first published in *Guidance on Community Cohesion*, LGA, 2002 and resulting from the Cattle Report in 2001.

In addition, schools themselves create communities – for example, the networks formed by similar or different types of schools, by schools that are part of the specialist schools network, or by schools that work collaboratively in clusters or in other models of partnership.

How does a school contribute towards community cohesion?

All schools, whatever the mix of pupils they serve, are responsible for equipping those pupils to live and thrive alongside people from many different backgrounds. For some schools with diverse pupil populations, existing activities and work aimed at supporting pupils from different ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds to learn with, from and about each other, will already be contributing towards community cohesion. For other schools where the pupil population is less diverse or predominantly of one socioeconomic, ethnic, faith or non-faith background, more will need to be done to provide opportunities for interaction between children and young people from different backgrounds.

Just as each school is different, each school will make an important but different contribution to community cohesion. Each will therefore need to develop an approach reflecting:

- the nature of the school's population – whether it serves pupils drawn predominantly from one or a small number of religions or beliefs, ethnic or socio-economic groups or from a broader cross-section of the population, or whether it selects by ability from across a wider area.
- the location of the school – for instance whether it serves a rural or urban area and the level of ethnic, socio-economic, religious or non-religious diversity in that area.

If a school is to successfully fulfil its duty to promote community cohesion, it should focus on the three key strands (faith, ethnicity and culture, and socio-economic factors) and demonstrate:

- that it understands the context of its own community;
- that it has planned and taken an appropriate set of actions;
- and that these actions have had an evident impact.

An effective approach to community cohesion will consider these strands at the different levels of community where action can take place – within the school itself, the geographical community or the wider national and global communities – to determine the school's contribution to community cohesion accordingly.

Guidance for inspectors

4. Inspectors will report on schools' duty to promote community cohesion by a new judgement in the leadership and management section of the inspection report: ***How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?***

The guidance is therefore built around the three core questions that inspectors should ask of schools and can be summarised as follows:

Key question to ask the school	Minimum expectations	Possible inspection evidence
1. What do you know about the context of your school in respect of community cohesion?	Schools must show that they have considered the context in all three strands of faith, ethnicity and culture, and socio-economic factors. As a minimum, they must have contrasted the school community with local and national communities.	Section 1a of the SEF should address all three strands. This should be clearly cross-referenced to 6e in the SEF. 4e may provide additional evidence.
2. Have you planned and taken an appropriate set of actions to promote community cohesion?	The school should have plans in place, clearly based on its understanding or analysis of the school's context and priorities. It must include planned actions for outreach.	Inspectors should be able to discuss the planned actions with senior staff. Their observations of, and discussions with, learners should enable them to consider whether it is appropriate.
3. What impact are you having?	The school should be able to demonstrate the impact of its actions covering faith, ethnicity and culture, and socio-economic cohesion. There should be evidence that the school is having an impact on its own community.	The quality of section 6e in the SEF will show whether this is the case. Inspectors should also consider whether learners have been able to contribute to any evaluation and what they have said. For example, do learners have an understanding of common values and how do they feel about working alongside people from different communities? This will be evidence of impact.

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5. Preparation for the inspection is likely to include analysing the SEF and RAISEonline for data about the school community and the community within which it is located.
- The RAISEonline chart 'Basic characteristics of your school' will show the school deprivation indicator, the level of free school meals and the proportion of pupils who do not have English as their first language – but these figures do not show the extent of variation which is crucial in considering these issues.
 - The RAISEonline chart of basic characteristics by National Curriculum year group will show how the school community changes year by year – an inspection trail might identify some of these variations and see how the school is responding to them.
 - The RAISEonline ethnicity chart provides some more detailed information, but the SEF may be more up-to-date.
 - The RAISEonline census information chart may be helpful if the vast majority of pupils are from one ward – but link this to the school's deprivation indicator.
 - Information about the achievements of different pupil groups in the SEF and RAISEonline may raise questions about equity of provision.
6. The views of pupils and their knowledge and understanding about their community and the way the school promotes cohesion within it, form an essential part of the evidence base for the judgement on how well the school contributes to community cohesion. Inspectors will need to explore within discussions with pupils how effective they feel the school's work has been in this respect by assessing their knowledge and views of the diversity of their local and national communities. It is essential to ascertain pupils' views on how well they get on with different groups within the school and local communities, and what the school has done to promote good relationships and mutual understanding.
7. Inspection focuses upon the impact that the school is having. In order for a school to be at least satisfactory, inspectors must be clear that a school:
- a) has developed an understanding of its own community in a local and national context, including an awareness of **each** of the three strands of faith, ethnicity and culture, and the socio-economic dimension
 - b) has planned and taken an appropriate set of actions, based upon its analysis of its context, to promote community cohesion within the school and beyond the school community
 - c) is evaluating the impact of its actions on the school community and the community beyond the school itself, and can demonstrate to inspectors that this impact extends across actions covering **each** of the faith, ethnic and cultural, and socio-economic dimensions

It is particularly important that school leaders have had an impact on building the school itself into a cohesive community in which learners, at the very least, accept each other's differences.

Evaluating how well the school contributes to community cohesion

Description	Characteristics
Outstanding (1)	The school has made an important and beneficial contribution to promoting community cohesion in its wider region or even nationally. Its planned actions to promote community cohesion are underpinned by an effective analysis of the school's context (including faith, ethnic and cultural, and socio-economic factors). The school's evaluation of its actions shows a significant impact on its own community. Learners have a strong sense of common values, integrate actively with learners from other groups, and are respectful of others' differences. Learners themselves make a strong contribution to the promotion of equalities and the elimination of prejudice and discrimination.
Good (2)	The school makes a strong contribution to promoting community cohesion. It has a clear understanding of what is required to promote community cohesion, based on a sound analysis – covering all three strands - of its own community and learners' needs. The school is taking effective action to engage with communities outside the school itself and its local community with evident impact. Learners engage as far as possible with their peers from different ethnic and cultural, religious, non-religious and socio-economic backgrounds and understand that they share common values. The school effectively evaluates its contribution to community cohesion in all three strands (including faith, ethnicity and culture and socio-economic dimensions) to inform its actions.
Satisfactory (3)	The school has implemented the three main steps to promote community cohesion by analysing its contextual issues, planning suitable actions and evaluating its impact. It demonstrates awareness of all three strands of faith, ethnicity and culture, and socio-economic issues. It is addressing community cohesion within the school community and is reaching out to other communities. However, there may be only limited evidence of its impact, which is inconsistent. The school's contribution to community cohesion cannot be graded satisfactory if the promotion of equalities and elimination of discrimination are inadequate.
Inadequate (4)	The school's contribution to promoting community cohesion is ineffective. <i>It is inadequate if school leaders have failed to complete any one of the three main steps to promoting community cohesion: developing an understanding of the community cohesion context, planning appropriate actions, and evaluating its impact on community cohesion. It is also likely to be inadequate if the school has failed to address any one of the three main strands of faith, ethnicity and culture, or socio-economic factors, or paid little attention to community cohesion beyond the school itself or the school's immediate community.</i> The school is doing too little to promote an understanding of common values amongst its learners and in the context of the national community. Learners from some groups present in the school may not regularly or readily engage with others or may not accept one another's differences.