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Benefit or Burden? How English Schools Responded to the Duty to Promote Community Cohesion¹

This paper discusses results from a small scale qualitative study of how primary and secondary schools in three English local authorities responded to the introduction and subsequent inspection of a legal duty to promote community cohesion, following a series of ‘race’ riots in 2001 and the London bombings of 2005. The policy itself is seen as reflecting wider discourse and is shown as shifting in focus during the period it was officially inspected between 2008 and 2011. Schools responded differentially to the duty and its inspection, with those in more multi-cultural areas responding with higher degrees of confidence than those in mono-ethnic areas. Some policy ‘slippage’ is seen to occur in the way schools re-framed the duty. Over time, most schools came to identify the curriculum and the school’s ethos as the most important weapons in their armoury. Teachers embraced the new duty with different degrees of enthusiasm – for some it confirmed the importance of holistic approaches to education which they felt had been sidelined in recent years, whilst other showed various forms of resistance. Teachers encountered some subtle and challenging professional dilemmas in the course of discharging the duty. Overall, the respondents in this study felt that the imposition of the duty and its inspection had been more of a benefit than a burden.

Keywords

Community cohesion, citizenship education, education policy, multi-cultural education, inspection

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The statutory duty on English schools to promote community cohesion was enacted in 2006 and came into force in 2007. From September 2008 it was inspected by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). ‘Community cohesion,’ by that name, first emerged as a high profile area of British social policy in 2001 after a series of enquiries into disturbances in towns in northern England suggested that many communities were fractured along ethnic, religious and cultural lines and that different ethnic groups were often living ‘parallel lives’ (Independent Review Team, 2001) with little

¹ This research was carried out under the auspices of the Citizenship Foundation, London, in association with the University of Leeds. It was generously funded by a grant from CfBT Education Trust. The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily endorsed by CfBTET.

contact across entrenched community divides. Some areas that had hitherto been thought of as diverse and multi-cultural were now viewed as collections of mono-cultural communities, living in close proximity but rarely engaging in positive interaction. Following a national review of the state of race and community relations (Independent Review Team, 2001), a number of recommendations were made to address these problems. Recommendations ranged from police and local authority interventions (scaled up in the wake of the July 2005 London terrorist bombings) to a number of specifically educational initiatives, including the statutory duty on schools to promote community cohesion.

At the time of writing, the duty to inspect schools on how they promote community cohesion has been lifted and it was not included in Ofsted's revised Framework which came into force in January 2012. Hence, the data reported in this study, gathered in the spring and summer of 2011, throw light on the relatively brief period (September 2008–December 2011) during which schools were inspected on their attempts to implement the statutory duty.

1.2 The Study

Broadly speaking, the study set out to examine a) how teachers understood and operationalised the duty in the context of their own schools and catchment areas and b) how they responded to being inspected on it. The research team aimed to gather the views and experiences of school leaders, subject heads and subject advisors in both primary (5-11 years) and secondary (11-18) schools in three Local Authority (LA) areas in England. The three LAs in question were varied in nature: one being a multi-racial city authority in central England, and the other two being large county authorities, containing conurbations with multi-cultural populations but also with many towns and villages with low numbers of ethnic minorities. Three or four primary and two to three secondary schools were sought in each area. Overall, 35 teachers from 27 maintained schools took part. Six were schools with a religious character (Church of England, Roman Catholic and one Jewish) and the other nineteen were community schools.

In two of the Local Authorities, initial focus group discussions were held which were then followed up by a number of one-to-one semi-structured interviews with volunteer respondents. The interview schedule covered the following areas:

- How teachers interpreted the meaning of the duty
- What they felt they were already doing to promote community cohesion
- What new steps were taken, if any, following the introduction of the duty
- What challenges had been experienced in implementing the duty
- What benefits had resulted from implementing the duty
- Their experiences of inspection
- Whether, overall, the duty was felt to be more of a benefit than a burden.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analysed. Drawing on 'grounded theory' (Glaser, Strauss 1967) we used a process of open coding to identify the key concepts and themes in the data. We then interpreted these data in the light of official policy and guidance plus key ideas drawn from the sociology of educational policy. In the focus groups, discussions covered the main topics but, in addition, teachers were asked to write down their own preferred definitions of the term 'community cohesion' and, towards the end of the sessions, to record their views as to whether the imposition of the duty was felt to be more of a benefit than a burden. They were also asked to indicate where the balance lay for them using a Likert scale graded from 1 to 5.

All interviewees were informed of the purpose of the interviews and consented to the use of their responses in any publications or reports the research team chose to publish. They were assured their responses would be anonymised and that the identity of schools and the Local Authorities would be withheld.

2 Findings

2.1 The Duty as Understood by Policy Makers

The wording of the statute itself, contained in the Education and Inspections Act, 2006,² stated baldly that governing bodies of maintained schools in England shall 'promote community cohesion.' The Act itself provided no further clarification of what was to be understood by 'community cohesion' and yet the term is highly problematic. Which communities and what form of cohesion were intended? Furthermore, what are the practical limits to activities encouraged under such an open-ended injunction? All the 'policy noise' at the time suggested that communities which were 'internally cohesive precisely because they are (or feel) isolated' (Breslin, 2007) and forms of cohesion based on ethnic homogeneity were not to be promoted but, rather, undermined. As Ball (2000, 1831) points out, policies must be seen as far more than text – the influence of the dominant discourse, with its intense focus on social fractures of an ethnic, cultural and religious nature, is very marked. Thus, the non-statutory guidance, published jointly by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCSF/CLG, 2007), clarified policy makers' definition of community cohesion as a process of:

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

² Inserted retrospectively into the Education Act of 2002.

The guidance stressed that the term 'community' was multi-layered, comprising the school itself, its local community, the UK and the global community and it suggested that schools' contributions to the cohesion agenda would manifest themselves in three general areas:

- 1) teaching, learning and curriculum – helping children and young people to learn to understand others, to value diversity whilst also promoting shared values;
- 2) equity and excellence – ensuring that there are equal opportunities for all to succeed at the highest level possible and working to eliminate variations in outcomes for different groups;
- 3) engagement and extended services – providing reasonable means for children, young people, their friends and families to interact with people from different backgrounds and build positive relations.

The guidance therefore identified areas and activities already covered in part by the statutory duty to promote positive relations between people of different backgrounds, faiths and beliefs contained in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. However, the guidance made it clear that schools should interpret 'community cohesion' widely and that whilst differences arising for ethnic, religious or socio-economic reasons were central, inequalities based on gender and sexuality should also be seen as a focus of the duty. These latter areas were already inspected under schools' general duties to promote equality under the Equality Act 2006. Notwithstanding these existing duties, the duty to promote community cohesion was clearly intended to go beyond the removal of discriminatory practices to include community building across the full social spectrum.

2.2 Teachers' Understanding of the Term 'Community Cohesion'

In the focus groups, teachers were asked to write down their own working definitions of community cohesion. There was considerable uniformity of response of which the following are typical:

Helping individuals to feel part of the community (at all levels) and helping them to realise how they can contribute to that community and benefit from it. (Primary head).

To me, community cohesion means understanding that we are all uniquely different and yet share fundamental similarities that draw us together as a society/community, be it local, national or global. (Primary head).

To me, community cohesion means providing children with a clear

understanding of who they are, where they are from, a confidence in themselves and an awareness and understanding of the world they live in. It's about developing empathy and respect, understanding your rights and responsibilities and a sense that they are global citizens and also members of a range of communities. (Secondary head).

A recurrent phrase used to define a cohesive society was one in which everyone is able to 'get along with' other people. Further, where the guidance talks of encouraging students to 'value' diversity the teachers preferred words such as 'respect' and 'tolerance.' This difference in emphasis suggests a set of more realistic aspirations than those envisaged by the duty.

2.3 The Importance of Building a Strong School Ethos

Hand in hand with the focus on personal values, was a strong emphasis amongst both primary and secondary teachers, on the influence of the ethos and culture of the school. This had not been strongly foregrounded in the non-statutory guidance. Many school leaders we spoke to saw the creation of a cohesive school community as a key focus in meeting the duty and this provided a common sense and practical limit to the range of activities embarked upon:

And what we've really concentrated on is not suddenly doing more things in the community because we didn't think that was the right thing to do, we weren't suddenly going to become good citizens and go visiting people (we already do a little bit of that) but that's not really how I saw it, I saw it as actually bringing together our school community.

Many teachers pointed to strong student voice as an instrument to generate cohesion, a sense of belonging and also of social agency. In one local authority, much work had been done across the phases to introduce a programme called 'Rights, Respect and Responsibility' (Covell, Howe 2001) which promotes a rights-based approach to school discipline, behaviour and participation based on the universal values contained in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Basing school discipline and relations on an explicit code which is continuous with values expressible in the wider community, was seen as equipping students with the values and social skills they need to become mature, self-disciplined, tolerant, respectful and participative citizens. This national project, promoted by UNICEF UK, (UNICEF UK 2011) is one example of important existing national initiatives which teachers saw as overlapping in significant ways with the duty to promote community cohesion. One of the local authorities in our sample had systematically promoted the 'Rights, Respect and Responsibility' approach right across the age phases because this framework was clearly understood to provide continuity and to be important developmentally. The head of an infant school (4-7 years) told us how she used the concepts of:

[...] rights, respect, responsibility and class charters, where it's sort of negotiated what our expectations are of each other. There's a big emphasis on choice and responsibility and then that would be the sort of self-discipline that would carry you through life, rather than something that is rule governed.

And a secondary school deputy head put it like this:

And I'd say that the philosophy behind the whole school can be summed up in three words: rights, respect and responsibility. And that philosophy drives everything. So every single member of staff knows about it, every single child in the school knows about it. If you were to look around the school you'd see evidence of it everywhere so it's integral to what we're about. [...] [There's] a document which staff use to guide their language with children, their behaviour, their attitudes, the ethos of the school.

This strong emphasis on the promotion of cohesion through building an inclusive and participative school ethos represents a significant difference in emphasis between the teachers' approach and the recommendations of the non-statutory guidance.

2.4 Schools' Responses to the Different Types of Community They Served

School leaders working in areas of high multi-cultural intake appeared to find it easy to identify how the concept could be applied to their school community, for example by addressing the challenges of helping the integration of ethnic or religious minority groups new to the area. The overcoming of language barriers amongst both parents and students became a priority for some of these primary schools. One school set up crash courses in English when faced with a large group of non-English-speaking newcomers. Another school made a video-based version of the school prospectus for use with parents speaking other languages. Several of the schools in our sample had found themselves in receipt of considerable influxes of children from ethnic groups new to Britain, placing demands on school staff for which they and, indeed, the local authority were ill-prepared. In a secondary school serving a large army barracks, teachers were faced with a large group of immigrant children from Gurkha families. Amongst other measures, this school had already developed a detailed monitoring system showing which children participate in what activities. This enabled the school to see how well migrant children were entering into the life of the school. Interestingly, at the same time, it showed that other groups of children, such as those who were carers at home were also at a disadvantage and at risk of becoming excluded. This group of potentially excluded young people are not mentioned as potential beneficiaries of the promotion of community cohesion in any of the policy literature.

Several schools in the study recognised the importance of addressing the needs of parents and families as well as those of the children themselves.

Some schools made efforts to appoint teachers or teaching assistants with the necessary language skills and to develop mechanisms for parents and teachers to meet as informally as possible. Many schools recognised that the very diversity of the school population provided a resource in itself in developing community cohesion. However, it was recognised that there were training implications if teachers were to be adequately briefed about students' backgrounds and the practical and time-consuming demands of teaching made this problematic. One Local Authority adviser doubted whether the local teachers sufficiently acknowledged and utilised the differences amongst students:

One of our schools has got a recommendation for action from Ofsted and it was just about not making enough of diversity. [...] There is all that potential there and it is the same in lots of things but we don't always stop and think, 'Let's make more of it.' [...] I don't think the professionals know enough about all the different groups and it is changing all of the time as well.

And one of the primary heads in the study felt that her colleagues were too inclined to see the school environment as non-continuous with children's lives outside the school:

And what we actually discovered was that many of the staff, for whatever reason, didn't have a broad enough empathy and understanding of where many children came from and what experiences they'd got. And that's improved incredibly. Do you know what they do when they get home after school? And then obviously with some groups, do you know if they go to Mosque group? Do you know which language they speak? Do you know if they actually speak English at home? Or do they never speak English from the moment they leave the building at quarter past three?

By contrast, schools with more mono-ethnic intakes appeared to find it harder to identify actions to promote cohesion and teachers reported considerable uncertainties in the early days of the duty. However, over time, they identified other forms of community fracture which impacted on the school and its students. In a number of predominantly white areas, for example, teachers recognised that relations between their students and elements of the wider community could become strained due to student behaviour which at times could be experienced as anti-social and alarming. One primary school in the study took an active approach to the problem:

We're working with the local community trying to overcome some of the -prejudice isn't the right word - but the kind of views that the older community have about children and the children have about the older residents in our community, trying to kind of break down the barriers between the two. [...] The perception from the elder community is that all young people are all thugs, badly behaved, take drugs, drink and so on and so forth. And of course from the children's point of view it's "Oh well, they're old and they moan a lot and they whinge when the ball goes in the garden." And that type of thing. So the children are going out and

visiting. Today they're in town, they're interviewing people. But we're also going to have some of the older generation coming in for visits.

Another 'white, working class' school was situated near the coast and an exclusive marina and shopping centre from which students felt excluded and unwelcome. The school was able to broker talks between students and the chief executive of the centre who frankly admitted that the whole complex was for 'people who have got money' and not young people. Our respondent told us that:

...she made the mistake of saying "Well if you come in wearing your hoodies then you're obviously going to be watched by the surveillance cameras." And they just said "For God's sake, see beyond the hoodies, see us." And she did and there were a number of things that have come from that.

In both mono- and multi-cultural schools, crime was identified as a significantly divisive community problem. In one of the inner-city secondary schools, students' anti-social behaviour was seen to create tensions which needed to be ameliorated:

And that's things like shoplifting which is a fact of life. It has been forever, but how quickly and effectively you get to it has a massive impact in the local community - your being out on the corridors, being out on the street, being out at the bus stops. [...] And then, after that, it's getting groups in, working with local churches, et cetera. We have Parliamentary youth members in the sixth forms for the local authority; we've got people - again in the sixth form and in year eleven - working with the police.

2.5 The Role of the Curriculum and Experiential Learning

There was widespread agreement amongst respondents that the curriculum is one of the most important instruments available to schools for addressing a range of issues relating to community cohesion. Citizenship education was strongly identified as a key tool. This had been introduced to the secondary school National Curriculum - and given the status of a Foundation (compulsory) Subject - by the Labour government as recently as 2002. Predominantly, according to its architect, Professor Bernard Crick its purpose had been to encourage and reinvigorate political participation, democracy itself, active citizenship and community involvement (AGC, 1998). Further, in the revisions to the National Curriculum of 2007, 'Identity and Diversity' became two of only six core concepts of the revised citizenship curriculum (QCA 2007). This concern for diversity was very much more prominent than in the earlier iteration (DfEE/QCA 1999). Thus citizenship education itself was significantly re-framed during this period, at the policy level, to emphasise its potential to create a sense of shared national identity based on cross-community participative citizenship and the

commitment of all citizens to democratic and human rights values.

Besides citizenship, our respondents mentioned Personal, Social and Health education, Religious Education and the humanities as other important curriculum vehicles for the promotion of cohesion. This view was represented in both primary and secondary schools. For example:

So when we do a lot of work in year six we are looking at the fact that we live in Britain but Britain is a very diverse community where we can see influence from other countries. We can see it in the fashions, the music, all those kind of things. We also try to look at how they can improve the community, so 'What can you do in the wider community?' and 'How can you benefit the people who live there?'

One primary school instigated a 'Global Education' fortnight to promote a sense of belonging to the worldwide community. One secondary school, serving a highly multi-cultural area, had scrutinised the whole of its curriculum as to whether it was cohesion-generating, including how the work experience programme operated. Interestingly, in both primary and secondary settings, many schools reported that they found it easier to teach about community cohesion issues at local and international level than at national level.

The duty to promote community cohesion prompted some schools to re-assess how well they were delivering the citizenship curriculum. There was recognition that not merely the amount but the quality of teaching in this area is important. The widely established practice of teaching citizenship and personal, social and health education (PSHE) through the pastoral system delivered by largely untrained form tutors has been identified by Ofsted as the source of the weakest practice (Ofsted 2006, 25). In one secondary school the requirement to introduce citizenship had chimed naturally with other developments in whole school policy, including cohesion.

I think the shift that has taken part, is the shift towards the concept of citizenship. We now talk about citizenship in year 7, citizenship in year 8, year 9, year 10 and year 11. I would say it's much more targeted and focused now towards giving them responsibility, towards understanding you know, you are a member of the community.

Some schools claim that time cannot be found for citizenship, but schools in our sample showed that time need not be an issue and that imaginative ways can be found to overcome obstacles in the way of providing more specialist teaching. For example:

Basically we deliver citizenship, PSHEE,³ careers and we deliver enterprise which is part of PSHEE. So we've got subject specialists. Three of us are experts in citizenship, four of us are experts in PSHEE. The SLT member

³ Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHEE) is the latest iteration of a portfolio subject typically offering lifeskills subjects such as citizenship, health and relationships education, careers and economic capability, though citizenship is also taught as a full humanities subject in many schools. Until 2007, when the economic dimension was added, it was commonly known as PSHE.

in our faculty, he has a qualification in careers and enterprise. It's not like some schools do on an ad hoc basis, we have a set period of time where all students throughout the school know that for six weeks they will only learn about citizenship and we rotate it so that at any given time in the year everyone gets to sample these things. We have two lessons a week, so two fifty-minute lessons a week over the whole five years, so I consider us quite pioneering and progressive.

A large number of schools were also very actively enriching curriculum learning by developing opportunities for students to meet and interact with young people of difference, along the lines suggested in the non-statutory guidance, through different kinds of school linking programmes.⁴ This is, perhaps, the one element of the non-statutory guidance and the inspection criteria (DCLG/DCSF 2007; Ofsted 2008, 5) that required some schools to go significantly beyond their existing practice. School links were made either locally or further afield but our data showed that many schools favoured international schools linking because, in both primary and secondary settings, such links can work at a number of levels and in different ways. International school links can be structured in such a way as to include whole schools or entire year groups, in ways which, perhaps, local or national links, which are more likely to require exchange visits between pupils, cannot.

In our study, the inner city authority introduced a scheme which aimed to link local schools of very different character – guidance and training was provided concerning how to manage such schemes sensitively including the logistical challenges, such as travel and the identification of 'neutral spaces' for initial meetings. These problems were considerably more challenging where school links took place on a national basis, including the problems of finding suitable partners, mutually acceptable neutral venues for initial meetings and residential accommodation. However, for the limited numbers of students fortunate enough to participate in inter-school exchanges, the experiences were often reported to be memorable and mind-expanding:

I've had verbal feedback from the students and it's been really successful and quite interesting. A lot of our [ethnic minority] students were really afraid. The main fear was that the other students were going to be racist. Completely ungrounded, I don't really know where it comes from, but it seems to be a really common thing that they expect these people are going to be racist. And they actually found that, you know, we like the same things, we do the same things, we're all human. And, you know, they got on really well and quite enjoyed it.

But such schemes are demanding of time and resources and, in practical terms, seem difficult to extend to all students as an entitlement. A number of issues were observed which underline the vulnerability of such schemes. One obstacle is finance and another is the need to find adequate time and staffing resources from within the existing establishment. For this reason,

⁴ The initial school linking project in a highly diverse local authority was rolled out nationally in 2007 through a new organisation, The Schools Linking Network, with funds centrally provided by the Department for Education and Skills and a charitable foundation. However, opportunities to participate in the scheme were not uniformly available across the country.

many teachers took on responsibilities of organising linking schemes on a goodwill basis, that is, with no extra time available. One teacher in charge of school linking admitted that, because of such constraints, the school's link exchange was run only with her own class. And it is clear that the teacher understood that there could be no guarantee that time to expand the scheme in future would be forthcoming:

The problem with it is the logistics. It's how, in a large school, I can have time off, you know - I can manage the things when they're in my lesson and I can control that fifty minutes for how we work around that. And obviously in part it's down to whether or not I can be freed from the timetable so I tend to choose slots when I'm not teaching, so it's using my time. There is a lot of reliance on staff goodwill.

When schools are under multiple pressures, including to improve standards, there is evidence of initiative 'resistance' (Bowe et al. 1992, 13) even to complying with legal duties when other priorities dictate:

If senior management said, "We want this to take place, therefore you will have time on this day, there will be no lessons on this afternoon, and everybody will do community cohesion type activities." But, at the end of the day, when we're driven by exam results, and everything else, it's going to be a pretty enlightened head that is going to take that line.

One form of 'soft' resistance, when schools are not willing or able to meet the demands of a new policy, involves the 'co-option' of existing work, which is then re-framed and presented as meeting the new duty. In the case of community cohesion, a number of schools claimed that work already in place, including work experience, sports visits to schools of different ethnic character (where student contact might actually be minimal or even antagonistic in character) and visits from varied community representatives giving career talks, all supported the aims of promoting community cohesion. At times, claims of close synergy between competing aims seem to be little better than tangential. One LA adviser told us:

One head teacher said to me, "Well, I put on classes in the evening, we let the community use our facilities from seven o' clock to nine o' clock, so I'm meeting my duty." And it was like that in the early days, until they suddenly started realising that's not community cohesion.

In such cases, it is generally not possible for outsiders to tell whether this mistaken coercion of existing practices is a failure of understanding, communication or training, or whether it is wilful.

2.6 Schools Interacting with the Outside Community

Besides stressing their codes of values and ethos, many schools were also keen to be centres of community activity in a stronger sense than merely allowing use of their facilities. Some, for example, hosted after-school madrassas for Muslim students and language classes for parents whilst others had become involved in community activities such as festivals and carnivals, which were widely seen as helping to remove barriers. Schools saw initiatives such as these, as well as active citizenship projects as generative of cohesion. Although they were very often only available to 'opt-in' groups and involved limited numbers of students, they were seen as an important complement to teaching and learning initiatives such as the provision of citizenship lessons as part of the National Curriculum. Opportunities to enrich students' experiences through community-based activities varied widely across the different local authorities and there was a considerable level of ad hoc taking of whatever opportunities became available.

2.7 Challenges to Implementation

As already noted, schools had to decide what priority to give to implementing the duty, given that no specifically earmarked resources followed the duty. Some imaginative use was made of community-based cohesion strategies, such as the government's Preventing Violent Extremism initiative. In addition, it was found that a number of other challenges were encountered for which neither the early non-statutory guidance nor a later booklet published in 2010 by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Authority (QCDA 2010) adequately prepared the teachers for. For example, dealing with parents of different cultures, faiths and beliefs created complex challenges on occasions. Some schools told us they found themselves walking a tightrope between respecting the values of other cultures (a fundamental tenet of cohesion work) whilst actively resisting particular values and practices which clash with very important British ones such as equal treatment in respect of gender and disability. For example, one primary head in a city school reported:

When we were doing work on sex education, the male community people were saying, "No, no, no." But actually, when we talked to the mothers ... they were saying, "Oh, yes please, we'd love it if you did this for us." So actually there is a gender divide that we have to address. In terms of dealing with disability, again it's very challenging within this cultural setting, because if a child is disabled, if they were, say, blind for example, there are some mosques that won't let them through the door. And that's very challenging for the parents. If we're talking about a child with special educational needs, the parents can be very resistant to acknowledging that, because that has a wider implication for their inclusion within their own community if they're not allowed into the mosque.

Thus, in a number of cases, schools found that their duty to promote community cohesion required highly professional and subtle judgements to be made and, if necessary, publicly defended.

Schools serving almost exclusively white communities, such as those subject to economic and social deprivation through, for example, the collapse of the local mining industry, reported entrenched levels of intolerance towards difference but this could be equally true of the values being instilled in more prosperous middle-class homes, and more than one of our respondents reported a recent hardening of such attitudes, the change in the wider social climate being felt in the classroom:

It's the sort of area where it is professional, the majority will go on to university, they will find themselves in very diverse communities and I think for us it's how we enable our children to recognise that at an early point. But notwithstanding that we still have in some elements a lack of tolerance so we still have parents withdrawing children from visits to the local mosque. The first time in 20 odd years of teaching I've had a parent who has withdrawn her child from any other aspect of RE apart from Christianity. And not based on any deep religious belief, it's based on – well, from my perception – a prejudice and a set of values that won't enable her or her children to learn about any other aspect of any other world faith. And that for me, after so many years of teaching in the sort of school I'm in, is really a very sad state of affairs.

Schools hoping to ameliorate attitudes of intolerance amongst their students often have to tread carefully where such attitudes emanate from the home. Teachers, whilst being required to promote cohesion, are simultaneously required to be non-partisan politically (Education Act 1996) and also, under Human Rights legislation, they must respect the rights of parents to bring children up in their own philosophical persuasions. For such reasons, when teachers encounter views which are intolerant or even racist, provided they are not unlawful as in support for right-wing nationalist parties, they need to address issues sensitively and professionally, whilst still perhaps trying to undermine values inimical to cohesion. One solution is to promote sound reasoning and critical thinking amongst students, relying on the power of reason to counteract prejudice over the longer term, as reported by this secondary deputy head:

I think we respond to that in terms of the ethos and values that we portray as a school, therefore the values which we try to develop in young people, that sort of active citizenship development. From a school point of view, one of the biggest issues that we have is that the BNP [British National Party] is a legally recognised political party in Britain and it's very hard for a school to be overtly political in that sense. What we would hope to do, would be to equip our children with the skills to discuss and analyse and reflect upon a range of different views and the values, to understand why certain views are wrong.

Another secondary deputy head put it like this:

Whilst recognising one thing that has been true since time began, which is that home is the biggest influence on children, I suppose I would see our approach to that as being about putting together the right curriculum, delivered in the right way, having the right ethos, portraying the right sorts of behaviours, giving the constant right messages about respect and tolerance and living together and accepting and valuing differences. I see that as being the most powerful way of dealing with that. I wouldn't see it as the school's role, particularly, to go out into the community and deal with those issues in that way.

The above quotation neatly articulates the way many schools in our study saw their ethos and community values as consistent with, and reinforced by, what is taught in the curriculum and the methods they used to teach it.

In addition to the challenge of addressing parental attitudes, some head teachers also reported that the attitudes of their own staff could be problematic. As one primary head put it:

I was actually really happy that this was coming through. And I thought perhaps it gives value to something that needs value. So I was happy to do it and it's something I feel passionate about. It's just as long as all your staff feel the same and they don't feel like - "Oh gosh, another initiative, let's tick this box and that box."

We found, in talking to teachers, that where overcoming obstacles to integration and cohesion are seen as key to aiding students' learning, no great tensions are seen to exist between schools' core business and the new duty. Perhaps it is true that primary schools are able to take this more holistic approach to the children's learning. This may mean that secondary schools experience the competing tensions between this and the 'standards' agenda more acutely. We asked one senior teacher about this and his reply was unequivocal:

Int: Do you detect any resistance amongst members of staff in terms of using community cohesion as a means to steer a particular curriculum one way or the other? Is that an issue at all or is that seen to be entirely acceptable?

Teacher: I'll put this way, they wouldn't do it unless it was going to help their results and that's right, you know, because that's what we're here for. But what we've always found is by being inclusive and drawing our kids' own experiences into our work and also helping them to understand what's beyond the local environment, that's what inspires them to learn.

The duty, therefore, raised issues of motivation, support and training for senior leaders. To assist and motivate staff, most Local Authorities offered what could be called 'meso-level' guidance, interpreting the national guidelines for their local schools, linking this to elements of their existing

provision and on occasions providing courses of differing lengths and depth. Some of this was offered to teachers and some to governors. We found no consistent pattern in this provision, though our sample of three authorities was small. Interestingly, in this digital age and weakened links with Local Authorities, there was also considerable evidence of schools going first to the internet, freely 'borrowing' guidance from other Local Authorities and schools. Training in many instances helped clarify the issues for teachers in our sample, though we have yet to find any guidance or training provision which acknowledges community cohesion as a potentially problematic or contested area.

2.8 Inspection of the Duty

Ofsted at first expected schools to demonstrate progress across a relatively wide spectrum, including, for example, creating cohesion with community groups not well represented within the school (Ofsted 2008). Criteria were developed that could grade schools from 'outstanding' to 'unsatisfactory.' Some of these areas of activity were seen by many teachers as, practically speaking, beyond what they felt they could reasonably attempt to do. Over the period of compulsory inspection, the criteria were narrowed by Ofsted to make them more manageable and practicable so far as evidencing is concerned. In its revised guidance to inspectors (Ofsted 2010), Ofsted focused increasingly on schools' efforts to become internally more cohesive. This was seen as more manageable and, arguably, had the effect of providing a clearer limit as to what was reasonable. Under the revised framework, schools were required to show that they understood the make-up of their school community and that they had identified issues to be addressed and developed an action plan. They were then asked to put forward evidence of impact. Many teachers told us that their early uncertainties had tended to disappear but nevertheless, the task of evidencing impact of cohesion policies was still far from easy. As one senior secondary teacher put it:

I actually feel there's lots of things going on in the school that promote community cohesion. It's a matter of pulling it together and making it work and I know that we have to show impact and that's the thing that really sort of bugs me a little bit. I mean what does that mean?

Other heads spoke of the lack of objective benchmarks, difficulties of standardisation between schools and the problems they faced in proving causal links between particular initiatives and the alleged impact for the purposes of inspection. This lack of precision with which impact can be measured was worrying for a number of schools. Some had received a disappointing grade for their cohesion work and felt aggrieved that inspectors had not recognised their efforts. One school received a better than expected grade ('Good'), even though they admitted that the evidence of impact was still inconclusive. Further, the fact that these judgements contributed to the public grading of the school on which much depended

added to the frustration:

I don't think there's anyone that would disagree that community cohesion is extremely important – but it's the fact that it's then left up to the individual schools to try and fight their way through and say “Well how are we going to do this?” A lot of it is hit and miss, it's very inconsistent [...] and yet we're judged on it, rightly or wrongly, we're judged on it.

2.9 Benefit or Burden?

Overall, the initial uncertainty, which our data suggest was widespread, gradually began to give way to varying degrees of clarity as schools sought guidance, spoke with colleagues in other schools and in their local authorities and began to address the issues which appeared to them to be most relevant in their own situations and of the highest salience within their own school communities:

Probably when it first came in it was a real burden because there wasn't enough information given to schools as to how to deal with that. So it became something else to do. How are we going to fit it in? What does it look like? All that sort of thing. But I think as time's gone on and we've looked to unpick it and actually realise that certainly for us as a school, there are a lot of things that we do do, which we may not have labelled community cohesion, but it's just part of our everyday bread and butter, because we couldn't teach these children and improve where they're at [without it].

This latter point recurred time and again in responses. Schools, particularly those in areas which are socially turbulent, deprived or fractured, recognised the need to address a whole range of issues facing the families and the communities they serve, in order to optimise students' personal development and learning. Indeed, many schools in these settings saw the duty as a welcome confirmation of the importance of the efforts they had been making in this regard over considerable lengths of time, sometimes without due credit, in view of the public emphasis on standards.

Despite very genuine objections to the time and burden of reporting on efforts to promote the duty, the overall response from our sample, was that its imposition had been, on balance, more of a benefit than a burden. (The responses averaged 2 on the Likert scale exercise, where 1 was most positive.) This kind of balanced response is well represented by the judgement of one of the primary heads in our sample who weighed things up in this way:

I hate to say it, but I don't think it would have come up to the top of my agenda had I not been pushed, because I'm so busy with other issues

that it almost has to be that before I can find the time and prioritise this. Because although I felt that I was quite good at that area – and the staff did – this year with even greater focus, we thought, “Let’s really embed it into the curriculum instead of playing at it by doing ‘culture week’ or whatever.” And so I have spent masses of time trying to embed it through the two-year cycle with the visits and something that really makes the children very knowledgeable. So I probably did need it because it would not have got to the top of my agenda in the way it has now. But I could do without the stress, yes, sure.

3 Discussion

The duty to promote community cohesion as enshrined in the 2006 legislation prompted a range of responses from teachers and advisers in local authorities. In the first instance, its formulation, especially its open-ended nature, created problems of definition and many schools found it difficult to conceive of what was expected of them and how to meet the inspection criteria. If we understand policy making as a process, or ‘discourse’ as much as ‘text’ (Ball 2000, 1831), then it is possible to see a development of understanding and practice within the time period of the study on the part of teachers and, certainly, the inspectorate, if not the QCDA. It has been noted that the non-statutory guidance was open-ended in its references to community-based activities and that Ofsted’s broad-based early criteria were later modified to focus more on the school as a cohesive community. This we have seen to be very much in line with the emerging view of the majority of schools in our sample.

As Ball (2000, 1832) notes ‘policy texts are rarely the work of single authors or a single process of production. [...] It is crucial to recognise that the policies themselves, the texts, are not necessarily clear or closed or complete.’ The lack of policy clarity in this case was a challenge for schools to negotiate. Further, the racialised emphasis of the policy context at the time of the duty’s introduction meant that many schools struggled to see how to embed community cohesion in their own contexts. The reality was that all schools faced issues of cohesion but some were rendered much less visible by the way in which the policy was drafted, supported and discussed. However, in such schools we noted that a number of cohesion-related issues had been addressed, including inter-generational barriers, anti-social behaviour and the needs of groups such as young carers, which the guidance had not highlighted. It is worth noting that some schools had been reluctant to take part in our study – which may indicate uncertainty regarding their approach or even resistance to the initiative. We did encounter various forms of resistance to the policy, or at least to its wholehearted endorsement. Sometimes this was because other priorities were more pressing. In other schools, lack of time and resources had actually undermined teachers’ attempts to engage in activities, particularly time and resource-heavy ones such as school linking.

Across the schools in our sample, ranging from the ‘mono-cultural’ to the highly multi-cultural, teachers aspired to the view of schools as values-based

learning communities where the content of the curriculum at each stage of education is carefully scrutinised and developed to promote positive values of tolerance, respect, equality and fairness, based on methods which encourage critical reasoning and democratic discourse. This is reinforced by the values explicitly endorsed by staff and consistently worked through in policy and practice throughout the whole school community and expressed particularly in its ethos.

Pykett (2010, 98) notes how the personal and public aims of education become entangled within teachers' conceptualisations. Within the original intention of the Act is the summoning up of a particular type of idealised 'public' (Mahoney 2010) or community and yet teachers noticeably avoided defining cohesion in these terms. Instead, they focused on the personal characteristics, as they saw them, of the type of 'public citizen' (Pykett, *ibid.*) which would be required to create a cohesive community. Further, teachers held back from the language of the policy documents in respect of 'valuing' diversity, preferring instead to use words such as 'respect' and 'tolerance.' This re-framing seems to be based on a belief in the limits to which public policies can or should influence private values, in this case, those of students and parents. Also, such re-framing was in favour of practices that schools felt to be more in keeping with how they defined their work - what Goffman would term their 'primary framework' (Goffman 1974). Teachers appeared to show little interest in the macro-level policy debates surrounding whether schools should promote 'multi-culturalism,' 'assimilation' or 'integration.' However, whilst displaying great respect for cultural diversity, in practice our respondents stopped short of the full-blown multi-cultural model insofar as there were limits to their toleration of practices and values which go against certain perceived fundamental values of British society, most notably the key value of equality for all.

One of the obstacles to educational change is 'initiative overload' and an observable form of resistance in schools is to respond cautiously, waiting to see if the initiative will quickly pass. In the current example, 'community cohesion' was a Labour response to what was seen as a significant threat to social harmony. However, following the general election of 2010, the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government signalled its preference for 'integration' over 'cohesion' and for reducing the bureaucratic burden on schools. As a result, Ofsted's responsibility to inspect it was removed from the new framework introduced in January 2012 but, significantly, the duty itself remains in place. In effect, whilst this removes an administrative and reporting burden from the schools, it still requires them to conduct their affairs in ways which promote, rather than undermine, social harmony - a policy framework that the government may believe is necessary to retain given the current proliferation of faith-based schools and the consequent loss of opportunities for students to spend their formative years in multi-cultural environments. Nonetheless, removing cohesion from inspection does seem to send out a message that the present government values it less highly than did the previous administration. Further, the evidence of this study is that the inspection of schools was a significant element in achieving development in the practice of many schools. Whether these 'gains' are sufficiently embedded to survive the removal of community cohesion from the inspection framework remains to be seen.

4 Conclusion

On balance, the data gathered in this study have led us to conclude that the term 'community cohesion' resonates positively with most teachers but within certain practical and philosophical limits. Negativity largely focused around the imposition and inspection of the duty rather than the underlying principle that social cohesion should be, at least, an indirect aim of education.

For all its ambiguities, the duty and its subsequent inspection undoubtedly had the effect of focusing the attention of many schools in ways they would not otherwise have done. As a result of the duty imposed in 2007, a considerable number of schools re-doubled their efforts in this area, supported by local authority staff and assisted by a range of other initiatives, developing new structures, strategies and projects from which large numbers of students reportedly benefited. The duty encouraged and gave teachers 'permission' to look at some of the more holistic issues surrounding teaching and learning and for a significant number of teachers this was welcomed as a re-focusing of official policy away from the narrowly instrumental approach that has driven the 'tests, tables and targets' culture that has dominated policy thinking for the past two decades or more.

For these reasons, we would argue that the legacy of the period during which the legal duty has been subject to inspection is likely to have been significant, if uneven and difficult to quantify.

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