



The Prevent Duty and teaching controversial issues: creating a curriculum response through Citizenship

SUMMARY FOR CITIZENSHIP TEACHERS

Developed by the Expert Subject Advisory Group for Citizenship
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Why further guidance?

The recently published DFE advice on the Prevent Duty explains what schools should do to comply with their duties in relation to the prevention of terrorism and extremism. The DFE advice in essence explains two important roles for schools:

1. A security role that concerns the duty of care schools have to identify children vulnerable to radicalisation as part of their wider safeguarding responsibilities (see the final section of this guidance).
2. The DFE also encourages schools to undertake a wider educational role to build the resilience of all children to radicalisation and enable them to challenge extremist views. The DFE and Ofsted recognize that Citizenship has a unique and particular contribution to developing pupils' capacity as active, informed and responsible citizens based on a commitment to the values that underpin democratic citizenship.

This guidance focuses on the second of these roles and specific contribution of Citizenship in relation to the Prevent duty.

The DFE advice highlights the importance of discussing and not avoiding controversial issues with pupils.

“It is not intended to stop pupils debating controversial issues. On the contrary, schools should provide a safe space in which children, young people and staff can understand the risks associated with terrorism and develop the knowledge and skills to be able to challenge extremist arguments.”

To accomplish this, teachers will need to use a range of strategies to handle issues sensitively and appropriately. A key consideration is the way in which the tension is resolved between facilitating the discussion of controversial issues (which implies there are a variety of valid viewpoints) and the need to challenge some views or even report them to senior colleagues (which implies some views are forbidden).

We have developed a fuller document explaining the ideas referred to in this checklist alongside some examples of lesson ideas to demonstrate the guidance in practice. We recommend you read this guidance in conjunction with this checklist. These are available at: www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk

Why should we teach controversial issues in the Citizenship classroom?

Before we discuss the specifics of teaching about Prevent as a controversial issue, it is useful to remind ourselves why controversial issues are so important to the subject of Citizenship.

- Reason 1: Schools provide a safe space to develop the habits of public discussion.
- Reason 2: Controversial issues are central to citizenship in society and school.
- Reason 3: Education is not value-free.
- Reason 4: Children are interested in these issues and ready for it!
- Reason 5: Teaching can compensate for the way issues are presented publicly.

Checklist

Stage 1 Creating a safe Citizenship classroom

The DFE advice on the Prevent Duty says, 'schools should provide a safe space in which children, young people and staff can understand the risks associated with terrorism and develop the knowledge and skills to be able to challenge extremist arguments' (p5). In order to do this teacher and pupils need to be clear about what is allowed and what gets ruled out. Teachers regularly need to do this in Citizenship lessons. For example, in a discussion about racism, the teacher may have to explain why some opinions are unacceptable in the context of the school and explain why some comments that may cause offence have to be tolerated.

- ✓ Have you established round rules for discussing controversial issues?
- ✓ Do you know the children well enough to understand what issues are likely to be sensitive or difficult?
- ✓ Do children know how to let you (and others) know if they are feeling uncomfortable?
- ✓ Are you clear where you should draw the line and how you will communicate this to children?
- ✓ Does everyone understand their right to participate and their right to be quiet or keep information private?
- ✓ Have you already practised debates and discussions and reflected on how to make them successful?
- ✓ Is there a departmental / school policy which supports teachers in tackling controversial issues?
- ✓ Are you and the students clear where you will draw the line and what will happen if this is crossed?

Stage 2 Planning

a. Establishing learning intentions

Before teachers start to plan individual lessons or activities in response to the Prevent duty it is important to be clear what the purpose of such teaching might be. These could include:

- develop knowledge about the threat of extremism, radicalisation and terrorism and its impact within the broader historical and political context (to ensure pupils know basic information about what has happened and why);
- develop understanding of why and how radicalisation and extremism can take place, not to condone such acts but to understand what drives individuals to extreme acts;
- explore different responses to extremism and radicalisation and why there are different views on whether these create cohesion or marginalisation;
- deepen knowledge and understanding of democratic principles in balancing rights, safeguarding freedom and democracy;
- develop dispositions that support tolerance of diversity and vigilance against terrorism and explore the personal implications of this.

In addition, there are learning intentions related to the Citizenship curriculum, in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills, for example, your lessons could refer to rights and

freedom of speech; to Britain's role in the wider world; or to the need for mutual respect and understanding. For further examples, see the full guidance document.

- ✓ Are you clear what knowledge and understanding should be developed in this lesson?
- ✓ Are you clear what skills should be developed in this lesson?
- ✓ Are you clear what kinds of attitudes and values should be discussed in this lesson?
- ✓ Are you clear what aspect of Prevent / anti-terrorism / radicalisation you are exploring?
- ✓ Are you clear how the Prevent issues you are considering relate back to the curriculum for Citizenship?
- ✓ Are you clear how the Prevent issues you are considering relate to underlying Citizenship concepts, such as democracy, freedom, responsibilities etc.?
- ✓ Can you distinguish between the controversial issue and the Citizenship learning to be achieved through the discussion of that issue?

b. Assessment

It is also useful, when establishing learning intentions, to think about expectations and assessment. Building on the assessment guidance published by ACT following the 2014 curriculum changes, we suggest the following expectations to help teachers calibrate their expectations of children in relation to controversial issues:

- By the end of key stage 2 most pupils should be able to listen to, and understand, a range of opinions in relation to the same issue. They should be able to listen respectfully and ask questions which deepen their understanding of the person's opinions and of the issue.
- By the end of key stage 3 most pupils should be able to discuss controversial issues and acknowledge that there is a range of legitimate opinions. By listening to others, or researching their opinions, they can identify and describe differences of opinion and use this to inform their own developing views. They can begin to articulate why specific controversial issues are so controversial.
- By the end of key stage 4 most pupils should be able to engage confidently in the analysis and discussion of controversial issues, demonstrating a willingness to listen to a range of opinions and to share their own views and questions. They should be able to explain why there are different views, for example by reflecting on the different values people hold, the different experiences people have had or the evidence people use to inform their opinion. They should also be confident in using core Citizenship concepts, such as democracy, justice, rights etc. in their analysis of such issues.

- ✓ Are you clear what criteria you will use to make assessment judgements during this activity?
- ✓ How will you provide feedback and opportunities for students to improve during the activity?
- ✓ What evidence will enable you to make a final judgement about the students' learning?
- ✓ Are all the learning intentions reflected in your assessment criteria and judgements?

Stage 3 Teaching Strategies

a. The role of the teacher

In addition to the general approaches, or teaching styles, which a teacher may adopt when teaching controversial subject-matter, a number of more specialised teaching strategies are advocated in the literature. These strategies are designed for use with specific problems, such as: highly emotional discussions, polarization of opinion, expressions of extreme prejudice, unquestioning consensus, apathy and so on.

- **Distancing** – Introducing analogies and parallels can be helpful to de-emphasise personal responses, for example using geographical, historical or imaginary case studies. This is particularly useful when an issue is highly sensitive within the class, school or local community.
- **Compensatory** – Introducing new information, ideas or arguments is necessary when students are expressing strongly-held views based on ignorance, the minority is being bullied by the majority or there is an unquestioning consensus.
- **Empathetic** – Introducing activities to help students see an issue from someone else's perspective is particularly useful when it involves a groups which are unpopular with some or all of the students, the issue includes prejudice or discrimination against a particular group, or the issue is remote from students' lives.
- **Exploratory** – Introducing enquiry-based or problem-solving activities is useful when an issue is not well-defined or is particularly complex.
- **De-personalising** – Introducing society-orientated rather than person-orientated language when presenting an issue (e.g. substituting 'us', 'our', 'someone', or 'society' for 'you' or 'your' when addressing students) can be useful when some or all students have a personal connection with an issue and feel particularly sensitive about it.
- **Engaging** – Introducing personally relevant or otherwise highly engaging material or activities is useful when students are apathetic and express no opinions or feelings about an issue.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Have you planned a variety of possible strategies to use if the discussion seems too 'cool' and needs stimulation?✓ Have you planned a variety of possible strategies to use if the discussion seems too 'heated' and needs to be cooled down?✓ Do you have adequate resources to hand to use these strategies? |
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As well as thinking about these strategies, teachers need to consider their own role in teaching about controversial issues, for example:

- **Participant** where the teacher joins in the discussion as a member of the class, which allows the teacher to be open about their own views.
- **Neutral chair** where the teacher never reveals their own positions.
- **Stated commitment** where the teacher makes known their view during the discussion.
- **Balanced approach** where the teacher presents pupils with a wide range of alternative viewpoints, even if this includes providing a personal judgment to balance other views expressed.

- **Devil's advocate** involves the teacher consciously taking up an opposite position to the one expressed by students and advocating views they do not hold.
- **Ally** where the teacher takes the side of a student or group of students.
- Official line where the teacher promotes the side dictated by the public authorities.
- **Instructor** informing students of additional facts or testing the strength of their arguments as the discussion proceeds.
- **Interviewer** asking students questions to elicit a range of responses.
- **Observer** allowing students to debate with one another, with limited interventions.

- ✓ Which are your preferred roles and why?
- ✓ Are there any roles you will not use, why?
- ✓ How will you indicate to students that you are adopting different roles at different times?

b. Forms of talk: from debate to deliberation?

A popular form of discussion may well be the simple competitive debate model, in which students speak for or against a proposal. This has many educational advantages but a limitation, in the context of controversial issues, is that it tends to simplify and polarize the argument. It favours an exploration of the extreme opinions, and de-emphasises the middle ground. An alternative way to approach debates is the model adopted in Model United Nations activities, where a proposal may be tabled, but amendments are made by people representing a variety of perspectives, with the aim that participants can build a consensus.

These alternatives to competitive debate formats are important because they open up discussions to be increasingly explorative and educational. They encourage students to reflect on their opinions as evolving ideas rather than require them to defend simplistic positions in a binary (for / against) debate. These models of discussion are also exciting because they mirror interesting experiments in deliberative democracy, where the focus is on discussion, the development of empathy and the search for compromise rather than a simple majority wins form of democracy.

- ✓ When would you use a competitive debate to discuss controversial issues, and why?
- ✓ When would you focus on more exploratory debates and why?
- ✓ Are you clear how the rules differ between these forms of debate and discussion?
- ✓ How will you ensure children are clear about the expectations and desired behaviours?
- ✓ As well as having alternatives for how to heat up or cool down the conversation, do you have a plan for managing the behaviour?

Aside from formal class discussions and debates, will you use any of the following teaching strategies to explore controversial issues?

- ✓ **The community of enquiry** (Philosophy for Children) approach, which builds on circle time methodology, which is often embedded in primary school practice.
- ✓ **Thinking skills activities** with prepared character cards / opinion pieces / media extracts can encourage students to examine critically their own and others thinking and reasoning.
- ✓ **Fictional stories** that are age appropriate can serve as an excellent route into the exploration of controversial issues and can help to develop empathy.

- ✓ **Drama / role play** e.g. hot seating, mantle of the expert, conscience alley, persona dolls is also well-developed in many primary classrooms.
- ✓ **Structured discussion** without using whole class debates e.g. diamond 9; snowballing, circle time activities.
- ✓ In classes where discussion is getting overheated the teacher can use **displacement activities** e.g. card sorting, fact-finding to cool-off the class and promote learning.
- ✓ In cases where students are less engaged and where the discussion seems under-heated, teachers can inject some more energy and emotion through the use of **real case studies from everyday life, video extracts** etc.

c. Debriefing

After discussion teachers should provide some space and time for reflection. Prompts include:

- What kind of arguments are used by people on this issue?
- On what key issues does this debate seem to hinge?
- On what kind of values or beliefs are these arguments based?
- Were there any major arguments that did not get properly raised?
- What vocabulary, terms, concepts are used in this debate? Is everyone clear about their meaning?
- Were any factual issues raised in the debate that could usefully be explained in more detail after the debate? (Students often display only partial understanding of e.g. how the law works and it is not always appropriate to halt a discussion in mid flow.)

- ✓ Do you have a plan for managing the debrief?
- ✓ How will you explain the purpose of the debrief to children and structure the process?
- ✓ How will you manage the reflection on learning in relation to the issue itself?
- ✓ How will you manage the reflection on learning in relation to the Citizenship curriculum and core concepts?
- ✓ How will you manage the reflection on learning in relation to how the class discusses controversial issues?
- ✓ When will you reflect on the personal dimension – how students felt about the issue and the debate?
- ✓ Is there a process for adapting the rules for debate and discussion in the light of experience?

Next steps

To illustrate the principles set out in this guidance we have also produced a range of suggested lesson ideas which will be published here: www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk