

# 'Fundamental British Values'

## Origins, controversy, ways forward: a symposium

Compiled by Robin Richardson and Bill Bolloten for Race Equality Teaching, January 2015

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### One Friday recently

'My school, along with others,' wrote a headteacher in mid-November 2014, 'received notification one Friday recently of changes that were to come into force just three days later in the way we look after pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.'<sup>1</sup> He continued:

There had been a consultation over the summer holiday, but the sudden implementation left some of us feeling breathless. Governors must henceforth, we were told, ensure that schools 'actively promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs'.

... At a time when the UK government is sending bombers to the Middle East, we had a weekend to think what the "fundamental British values of democracy" might actually be. Are British values different from French or Swedish ones? How can governors really ascertain the level of our activity in promoting these values, whatever they might be? Can we look at values without seeing how these are translated into action? And should we really promote an unquestioning adherence to the rule of law?

Many other headteachers and school governors in England asked similar questions, and voiced similar concerns, during the second half of 2014. So did many observers, academics, columnists and public intellectuals. This symposium in Race Equality Teaching, compiled at the end of 2014, recalls the circumstances in which the phrase 'fundamental British values' was introduced into public discourse, and the range of views that were expressed. Also, and even more importantly, it suggests various constructive ways ahead, bearing particularly in mind the duties which schools have under the Equality Act 2010. It is intended to be of use to headteachers and school leaders, as they embark with colleagues and governors, and with pupils, their parents and wider society, in conversations about fundamental British values in their schools – FBV for short.

The structure of the symposium is as follows:

#### 1 Origins

Reminders that the term fundamental British values (FBV) entered policy discourse in 2011 as a component in Home Office deliberations about the nature and prevention of violent terrorism; entered then the world of education in 2011-12 with the publication of a statement about teachers' standards which came into force in September 2012; and in 2014 became

well-known from 9 June onwards following a speech in the House of Commons by the then secretary of state for education in England, Michael Gove.

## 2 Criticism and controversy

Reminders of the range of comment, criticism and concern that greeted the government's new plans and proposals for schools to actively promote FBV, and of the role played by FBV in the context of the government's controversial counter-terrorism strategy.

## 3 Ways forward

Principles for moving forward from confusion and controversy, including discussion of the requirement to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development, and the need for national and local conversations, as distinct from top-down directives from government.

# 1 ORIGINS

Much of the comment in the press about FBV in summer 2014 seemed to assume the term had only just entered public discourse and that the context for its use was essentially educational. In point of fact the term was coined in 2011 and the original context had nothing directly to do with education, for it occurred within a definition of extremism formulated by the Home Office.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the definition was to explain how the Home Office would decide in future whether or not to talk to, work with and fund certain organisations and individuals, particularly in its relationships with Muslim groups and communities. It was based on the theory that the root cause of terrorist acts perpetrated by people of Muslim heritage is the ideology or narrative known as Islamism. The theory is plausible to some but – as recalled later in this symposium – is considered simplistic, insufficient and counter-productive by others. The Home Secretary wrote:

... We will respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat from those who promote it. In doing so, we must be clear: the ideology of extremism and terrorism is the problem; legitimate religious belief emphatically is not. But we will not work with extremist organisations that oppose our values of universal human rights, equality before the law, democracy and full participation in our society. If organisations do not accept these fundamental values, we will not work with them and we will not fund them.<sup>3</sup>

To elaborate on this intention, the Home Office provided a definition of extremism. It appeared in full in a glossary appended to a policy document containing more than 100 pages, and in a shortened form in a footnote in the main body of the document. The full version in the appendix was this:

Extremism is vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas.

The Home Office sees extremism, as thus defined, as a component and consequence of what it refers to as the Al Qa'ida narrative or global extremist narrative and which it summarises with these words:

... the particular interpretation of religion, history and politics that is associated with Al Qa'ida and like minded groups. The narrative connects 'grievances' at a local and/or global level, reinforces the portrayal of Muslims as victims of Western injustice and thereby purports to legitimise terrorism. It combines fact, fiction, emotion and religion and manipulates discontent about local and international issues.<sup>4</sup>

The Home Office definition of extremism was conceptually unclear, since its key terms – 'rule of law', 'liberty', 'democracy', 'tolerance' are open to conflicting interpretations, and over the years have had different meanings at different times and in different contexts. None of them refers to an absolute value. The lack of conceptual clarity was compounded by the unclear punctuation, for the reader could not know whether 'liberty' and 'mutual respect' were joined with the word 'and', or whether 'liberty' and 'tolerance' were, or whether three separate values were being listed – a) liberty b) mutual respect and c) tolerance. But these deficiencies were arguably unimportant in view of the Home Office's essential purpose. If its terminology were challenged, courts of law would lay down interpretations. Conceptual and grammatical clarity is, however, required when the professional careers of teachers are under consideration, and the reputation and good standing of schools, and the education received by children.

In retrospect, it can be seen that the Home Office's choice of the term FBV was most unfortunate. The phrasing ought to have been something like 'the fundamental values and principles which underlie public life in the United Kingdom'. A formulation such as this would have achieved the Home Office's aims. Further, and in the current context more importantly, if such a formulation had been adopted by the Department for Education, much confusion, anxiety and stress in schools would have been avoided. Also much stress and uncertainty would have been avoided if, before engaging in confused and confusing talk about British values, the DfE had had due regard for its public sector equality duty to think about eliminating discrimination, and about advancing equality of opportunity, and about fostering good relations.

### Teachers' standards

In 2012 the Department for Education adopted some of the phrases in the Home Office definition of extremism as a basis for establishing the standards required of professional teachers. 'A teacher is expected,' the DfE said, 'to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct'. It then provided three statements defining 'the behaviour and attitudes which set the required standard for conduct throughout a teacher's career', the first of which was 'Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by ....' There then followed five bullet points, the fourth of which was:

- o not undermining fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs<sup>5</sup>

The punctuation in the original formulation had been tidied up with the addition of a comma after respect, and the phrase 'tolerance of different faiths and beliefs' had been expanded to 'tolerance of those [italics added] with different

faiths and beliefs'. The comma was a useful clarification, though was not widely adopted in other government publications. But the other change still left questions unanswered. 'Different' from what? What are the limits of tolerance, and who decides? Why was the original wording about tolerance changed?

Statements about teachers' standards had been first issued in 1984, and had then appeared again in 1989 and 1992 under the Conservative government and in 1997, 2002 and 2007 under Labour. It was not until 2011/12, however, that the term FBV was used. The 2012 document became well-known in teacher training institutions but it was not until 2014 that the term British values began to be well-known in contexts associated with schools. Before then it had appeared in documents providing advice on spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development in academies, free schools and independent schools.<sup>6</sup>

On Monday 9 June 2014 it featured prominently in a speech in the House of Commons by the secretary of state for education in England, Michael Gove, and in media coverage about this speech. The context was a statement about Ofsted reports on, as it had become known, the Trojan Horse affair in Birmingham. Mr Gove said:

We already require independent schools, academies and free schools to respect British values. Now we will consult on new rules that will strengthen this standard further, requiring all those schools actively to promote British values, and I will ask Ofsted to enforce an equivalent standard on maintained schools through changes to the Ofsted framework.

Six days later (15 June) there was an article by the Prime Minister in the Mail on Sunday. Entitled 'British values aren't optional, they're vital'. it began as follows:

This week there has been a big debate about British values following the Trojan Horse controversy in some Birmingham schools – about what these values are, and the role they should play in education. I'm clear about what these values are – and I'm equally clear that they should be promoted in every school and to every child in our country.

The values I'm talking about – a belief in freedom, tolerance of others, accepting personal and social responsibility, respecting and upholding the rule of law – are the things we should try to live by every day. To me they're as British as the Union flag, as football, as fish and chips.

Of course, people will say that these values are vital to other people in other countries. And, of course, they're right. But what sets Britain apart are the traditions and history that anchors them and allows them to continue to flourish and develop. Our freedom doesn't come from thin air. It is rooted in our parliamentary democracy and free press.

Our sense of responsibility and the rule of law is attached to our courts and independent judiciary. Our belief in tolerance was won through struggle and is linked to the various churches and faith groups that have come to call Britain home. These are the

institutions that help to enforce our values, keep them in check and make sure they apply to everyone equally.

Another week later, the DfE launched a consultation. Extracts from the press release about this are quoted in Box 1. They show that 'not undermining British values' and 'encouraging pupils to respect British values' had been changed to 'actively promoting British values'. Further, it stressed that 'actively promote' includes 'challenging pupils, staff or parents expressing opinions contrary to fundamental British values'. It may be significant, alas, that the press release referred at one stage to the 'Equalities Act' rather than, as it should have done, to the Equality Act. Such carelessness is by no means uncommon. But inevitably it implied that the senior civil servants who drafted, checked and signed off the press release had a negligent attitude not only towards factual accuracy but also towards the rule of law itself.

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#### Box 1

##### Department for Education Press Release, 23 June 2014

The Department for Education today launched a consultation on strengthening powers to intervene in schools which are failing to actively promote British values.

Independent schools, including academies and free schools, are already required to encourage pupils to respect British values through the Independent School Standards. These proposals will strengthen this standard further, and provide a stronger basis for swift intervention in schools which are not actively promoting British values.

Currently there is no similar standard applied to local authority maintained schools. Ofsted will introduce an equivalent expectation on maintained schools through changes to the Ofsted framework later this year.

A Department for Education spokesperson said: 'Keeping our children safe and ensuring schools prepare them for life in modern Britain could not be more important. This change is an important step towards ensuring we have a strong legal basis for intervening in those schools where this is an issue. The vast majority of schools already promote British values. This is about making sure we have the tools we need to intervene if children are being let down.'

... It is expected these strengthened regulations will take effect in September 2014, and will sit alongside the requirements of the Equalities Act, which also apply to all types of school. Schools will be expected to focus on, and be able to show how their work with pupils is effective in, embedding fundamental British values. Actively promoting also means challenging pupils, staff or parents expressing opinions contrary to fundamental British values.

Action will also be taken against schools where, for example, girls are disadvantaged on the grounds of their gender - or where prejudice against those of other faiths is encouraged or not adequately challenged.

...The Department for Education's governors' handbook will reflect the new advice and highlight governors' role in setting and securing an appropriate ethos, and monitoring practice in the school.

Comments on Part 2 (spiritual, moral, social and cultural development) and Part 4 (suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors) should be submitted by 10am on Monday 4 August 2014. For the remaining standards, comments should be submitted by 10am on Monday 18 August 2014.

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On 4 September 2014 the revised standards for SMSC were published for free schools, academies and independent schools, and on 27 November the DfE issued non-statutory advice on SMSC for maintained schools. There is an extract from the September document in Box 2. The terminology is almost the same in both documents, except that the learners in some kinds of school are known as pupils but in others as students. The legal basis for the new standards, however, is not the same. In free schools, academies and independent schools there are requirements relating to SMSC but in the various kinds of maintained school there is non-statutory advice. So some kinds of school 'must' follow the government's line but other kinds of school 'should'. All kinds of school, however, whatever their legal status, are required to promote pupils' SMSC development and are inspected by Ofsted.

For schools in their dealings with Ofsted, the legal difference between 'must' and 'should' is not of paramount importance! Constitutionally, however, the anomaly is arguably of great seriousness, for it implies the government does not have a coherent overview of what it wants, and leaves schools therefore in confusion and uncertainty.

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Box 2

The revised standard for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, September 2014

The standard about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school is met if the proprietor —

(a) actively promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs;

(b) ensures that principles are actively promoted which —

(i) enable pupils to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence

(ii) enable pupils to distinguish right from wrong and to respect the civil and criminal law of England

(iii) encourage pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they can contribute positively to the lives of those living and working in the locality in which the school is situated and to society more widely

(iv) enable pupils to acquire a broad general knowledge of and respect for public institutions and services in England

(v) further tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions by enabling pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures

(vi) encourage respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010, and

(vii) encourage respect for democracy and support for participation in the democratic process, including respect for the basis on which the law is made and applied in England.

Source: The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014. The document was published on 4 September 2014 and came into force on 29 September. This list was re-published on 27 November in non-statutory guidance for maintained schools, but with the word students instead of pupils and with no reference at paragraph (vi) to the Equality Act 2010.

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The most glaring difference between the September document and the November document is not to do with terminology or with legal status. It is to do with equalities. The September document for independent schools, free schools and academies, quoted in Box 2, says that schools must 'encourage respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010'. The November document for maintained schools, however, says only that schools should 'encourage respect for other people'. This anomaly is most certainly not trivial, particularly since the words missing from the November document had appeared in the handbook for governors of maintained schools published only two months earlier.<sup>7</sup>

There is a further serious anomaly in the November document. On page 4 it says that 'all maintained schools must meet the requirements set out in section 78 of the Education Act 2002 and promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of their pupils'. But this is not an accurate account of what section 78 actually says, for the Act in fact refers to 'spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development'.

To point out there is a small difference between what the Act actually says and what the DfE says it says may seem unnecessarily pedantic. But a government that rightly refers to the importance of the rule of law cannot expect to be trusted and believed if it makes inaccurate statements about what the law requires. In any case there is absolutely no reference to fundamental British values in section 78 of the 2002 Act. Even more seriously, from a legal point of view, the November document for maintained schools refers to 'the requirement to actively promote British values in schools' without drawing attention to the fact that the requirement does not legally apply to maintained schools, but only to free schools, academies and independent schools!

In essence, the revised standards published in September for some schools and in November for others were precisely as indicated in the press release quoted in Box 2. In other words, they did not take into account any of the submissions which were made in response to the consultation document, or any of the criticisms which were made of the government's overall approach.

To a consideration of these criticisms and expressions of concern this symposium now turns.

## 2. CRITICISM AND CONTROVERSY

Mr Cameron and Mr Gove, quoted above, did not make explicit reference to cultural diversity. This was, however, the central focus in much of the press coverage, probably inspired by an off-the-record briefing from the DfE press office. 'Trojan Horse: schools must promote British values, says Gove', ran a headline in the Daily Telegraph (9 June) and a few days later (14 June) a column by Janet Daly in the same paper was headed 'Don't "teach" British values – demand them' and the introductory summarising sentence for this column was: 'We must insist that ethnic communities change their habits and expectations in order to become active participants in their new homeland'. There is an extract from the body of the column in Box 3.

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### Box 3

'Here we are with a genuine problem'

US presidents may address their people as 'my fellow Americans'. French national leaders can open their speeches with an appeal to the 'men and women of France'. Try to picture a British prime minister saying something of the kind and it will probably make you laugh. Which is why it is so very difficult to imagine how we might 'teach children to be British': the British themselves having arguably the most un-solemn, unselfconscious, unobtrusive sense of national identity of any people in the known world. Indeed, it is precisely this ironic diffidence which could be regarded as the essence of the British national character. So how do you go about teaching people that the key to being genuinely British is not to take being British too seriously?

But here we are with a genuine problem. There appear to be people at work in our society – and most pertinently in our state education system – who are attempting to impose values and attitudes that are anathema to what is embodied in this country's life and historical institutions. In order to inoculate the children of incoming ethnic groups against this seditious separatism, there is a proposal to make 'Britishness', and the values that it embodies, a systematic part of schooling. Being British, of course, those advocating this are not demanding the explicit teaching of patriotism per se: simply the inculcation of basic mores that are inherent in our communal lives and our democratic traditions.

Nothing alarmingly jingoistic here: what we want is just an explicit stating of principles that would undermine the dangerous isolation of minority communities. All of which sounds fine (and very British) in its understated, reasonable manner. But then political leaders try to offer something that might constitute a core curriculum in the virtues of this country's culture – and they end up uttering vacuous nonsense.

Source: column by Janet Daly, Daily Telegraph, 14 June 2014

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The extract in Box 3 shows that even a newspaper usually supportive of the coalition government expressed the view that Mr Gove and Mr Cameron were uttering 'vacuous nonsense'. Columnists and commentators situated elsewhere on the party political spectrum were even more critical, as shown in Box 4. Amongst the criticisms, however, there were recommendations and proposals for better ways of addressing the issues to which, in general terms, Mr Gove and Mr Cameron drew attention.

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#### Box 4 Criticisms of the government's proposals on education

##### Parochial, patronising and arrogant

Dear Mr Gove, I see you're going to require all your schools to teach British values. If you think you're going to have the support of all parents in this project, you'll have to count me out. Your checklist of British values is: "Democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect, and tolerance of those of different faiths and beliefs." I can't attach the adjective "British" to these. In fact, I find it parochial, patronising and arrogant that you think it's appropriate or right to do so.

Michael Rosen, the Guardian, 1 July 2014

##### Weaving them into the curriculum

In her recent appearance before the Select Committee on Education, Nicky Morgan said that "we must not be shy about talking about fundamental British values." She added that schools should promote values like mutual respect and equality between girls and boys; and that ideals such as democracy and tolerance must be "woven" into the curriculum. If these are British values, I'm a Dutchman. The ones she mentions are those of liberal democracy. They are prized as much in Helsinki or Washington as they are in London. It is excellent that the new Secretary of State is backing them in our schools and that she is not giving them lip service, but suggesting how this should happen. She is right that weaving them into the curriculum is the way forward.

John White, Institute of Education blog, 16 October 2014

##### A much deeper public conversation

We wholeheartedly support the idea of schools being required to promote the values of tolerance and respect for those coming at things from a different perspective. However, 'British Values' cannot be allowed to become a test or an assessment of whether somebody in a community is 'safe' or 'loyal'. Indeed, the nature of 'British values' requires a much deeper public conversation around the country than has been possible over the summer ... The ways we, as communities and a nation, develop the language and practices of equality, diversity, community and the individual have changed rapidly in recent years and we need to build confidence and coherence in the wake of changes that have been unsettling for many and remain in many ways unresolved.

Nigel Genders, Church of England blog, 12 November 2014

##### Open, honest and difficult public discussion

Islam is rejuvenating British values, the former Archbishop of Canterbury has claimed, while lambasting sections of the press for presenting Muslims as 'un-

British'. Rowan Williams was giving a speech at the annual Living Islam Festival in Lincolnshire on Friday, discussing what British values were and how Muslims could affect them. He said one of their greatest gifts to Britain had been bringing back 'open, honest and difficult public discussion'... [He] praised both Christianity and Islam for working towards community cohesion and promoting a sense of duty. But ... he also objected to the notion of British values, saying they should be more universal. 'The setting-up therefore of British values against any kind of values, whether Muslim or Christian, just won't do,' he said.

News item in The Independent, 2 August 2014

### An imaginary binary opposition

There has recently been a lot of talk about 'British values' from some senior British politicians and how British Muslims must embrace them. Whenever politicians and others speak of the need to instil 'British values' into British Muslims, there is often an assumption that Muslim traditions are incompatible with such values. Since British values are never clearly defined in a manner that makes them uniquely British, many Muslims often adopt an oppositional stance whenever references are made to 'British values'. They too assume that, when defined, such values will inevitably be at loggerheads with the fundamental teachings of their faith, especially when politicians attempt to bind British values to a single, monological perspective of British history

... [T]he context and manner in which the debate on British values is taking place are viewed by many young British Muslims as being rooted in the 'othering' of their communities as part of a social process of exclusion ... The issue of great concern for most Muslim communities is not that they see a conflict between 'Muslim values' and 'British values' but that their children are growing up in a society in which such an imaginary binary opposition is constantly propagated by both politicians and extremist elements within their communities.

Michael Mumisa, Huffington Post, 19 June

### Perversion of British history

The government's crusade to embed British values in our education system is meaningless at best, dangerous at worst, and a perversion of British history in any case. It's meaningless because our history is the struggle of many different Britains, each with their own conflicting sets of values ... My own values ... are inspired by a variety of Welsh, Scottish, English and foreign socialists. Where modern Tories promote dog-eat-dog individualism, ruthless competition and the supremacy of private profit, I believe in solidarity, collective action and a fundamental redistribution of wealth and power.

Owen Jones, The Guardian 15 June

### Healthy doubt

Children do need safeguarding. But one of the most important safeguards is the capacity to critically analyse messages, particularly in this instance, religious messages ... While a country's security comes partially from counter-terror activities, in the long term and educationally, it comes from citizens able to exercise critical doubt about the communications they receive, and to argue for change through democratic, non-violent means. If there is such a thing as a British value, then the tradition of scepticism, satire, gentle mockery and self-deprecation is one to cherish. A healthy doubt about what both politicians and religious leaders tell us is the best safeguard against dogmatism and acceptance

of authoritarianism. Healthy doubt cannot start too young ... Let's have a Healthy Doubt Week.

Lynn Davies, Connect Justice blog, 11 August 2014

### Empowering and meaningful

If David Cameron really does want all schools to become 'far more muscular in promoting British values and the institutions that uphold them', he could make sure that every school, irrespective of status, type or governance, upholds and delivers the rights of students and support them in discharging their responsibilities to themselves, to the learning community and to the wider society. 'British values' will thus be uncoupled from the jingoistic, post-colonial image of Britain he seeks to have Muslims own and identify with and become more empowering and meaningful to young and old alike.

Let us hope that we all succeed in ensuring that Ofsted is not allowed to continue making pariahs of Muslim communities and no government is allowed to set Muslim children apart and demonise them under the guise of 'keeping our country safe'. Indeed, those structural forms of racism, Islamophobia and xenophobia are so dangerous that whether or not schools begin and end with the 'prevent' agenda, the country by default will end up grooming untold numbers of resentful, angry, embittered and radicalised young Muslims, men and women, and they need not have been anywhere near a Muslim 'extremist'. It is ironic that education secretaries and the rest talk about teaching history and demand that a certain corpus of historical works is taught in schools, but they appear to have no capacity whatsoever to learn from history.

Blog by Gus John, 18 June 2014

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### Controversy about extremism

The quotations in Box 4 refer to criticisms of the government's approach to education. Criticisms have also been made over the last 10 years, and especially in 2014, of its approach to counter-terrorism. The approach has been characterised by what one critic calls 'the myth of radicalisation'.<sup>8</sup> Myths have no scientific basis in empirical evidence, but can nevertheless be emotionally appealing and comforting, and can mobilise support for political and military leaders. They also have the potential, as critics of the government's counter-terrorism strategy point out, to do very considerable damage and can be counter-productive.

In view of the fact that the term fundamental British values has its origins in counter-terrorism programmes, and that such programmes are deeply controversial, it is essential that training sessions about values for teachers, governors and inspectors should include consideration of contesting views about the nature and causes of extremism. Ofsted does not appear to have given attention to this matter, either internally in its own deliberations about how to assess safeguarding issues or externally in how it operates when conducting inspections. On the contrary, it appears to have bought totally into the myth of radicalisation. For example, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector wrote as follows to the Bridge Inspectorate on 27 November:

The inspectorate has not ensured that inspectors are able to identify warning signs of extremism and radicalisation in school settings with enough rigour. Her Majesty's Inspectors found that

inspectors do not always probe sufficiently deeply to verify whether schools' arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective. At times, inspectors rely too heavily on the assertions of school leaders and not enough on substantive evidence.<sup>9</sup>

The criticisms of the Bridge Inspectorate may or may not have been valid. Certainly they would have been valid if applied to Ofsted itself. It was only towards the end of the school year in question (2013–14), and even then only in a tiny proportion of its reports, that Ofsted referred to issues of extremism and radicalisation in schools. Previously, it had virtually never considered this matter.

Contemplating Ofsted's behaviour during 2014 a former HMI writes:

There is no doubt that Ofsted should forsake its almost exclusive concern with measurable achievement and focus much more on how schools prepare their pupils for life in our fast-changing, pluralistic society. Schools would welcome such a shift of emphasis; senior figures in Ofsted are supportive, too, of change. The danger is that, in the light of the Trojan horse affair, Ofsted finds itself the arbiter of what constitutes extremism in schools – without any thought-through consensus on the 'fundamental values' threatened by extremism or on the propriety of investing this responsibility to an organisation whose inspectors are not trained (who could be?) to undertake the task.

However sensitive an inspection (and many are), inevitably the notion of Orwell's thought police comes to mind, especially to those singled out for criticism. The current situation is fraught with danger to community cohesion, cultural identity, school success – and also to Ofsted's *raison d'être*. To borrow religious vocabulary, Ofsted has got itself, and faith schools more generally, into an unholy mess as it trespasses on ground where any sensible angel (of whatever religious complexion) would fear to tread.<sup>10</sup>

The chief executive of the Church of England Board of Education writes:

The experience of recent inspections suggests that Ofsted is increasingly being required to make nuanced judgements about aspects of school life where there are few, if any, guidelines. This is an unreasonable expectation to place on the inspectors and is ultimately unfair on the schools and their pupils if we haven't beforehand made clear what they are looking for. Without a major rethink, the credibility of Ofsted's judgements will be quickly undermined and we will lose a valuable asset for the sector.

In the years ahead it is clear that the underpinning values our society is founded on will become increasingly important for schools whose pupils find themselves negotiating local and global contexts simultaneously. In order to ensure that all schools are giving young people a good start in life, Ofsted should focus on the breadth and quality of education provision. Whilst Ofsted works out how it measures 'British Values' and schools wonder how they might be downgraded for failing to promote them, asking Ofsted to become the schoolroom security service is a step too far. As a country we have access to both counter terrorism experts and educational

professionals. Suggesting these groups swap roles in an attempt to build a safer society needs more thought.<sup>11</sup>

Ofsted's behaviour during 2014 has been seen by many as both disappointing and alarming. Fortunately, however, progress in the education system is not solely or even primarily dependent on Ofsted. Many others have key roles too. To a more broadly-based consideration of ways forward this symposium now turns.

### 3. WAYS FORWARD

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#### National and local conversations

One of the implications of the arguments, criticisms and reflections summarised so far in this symposium is that there should be substantial conversation amongst teachers, and between teachers and the wider community, about ways forward. The importance of such conversation was highlighted in the Church of England's response to the DfE consultation referred to earlier. A national conversation, it said, would 'help build a stronger sense of the way in which shared values create stronger communities'. The response continued:

The common good is not just the aggregate of numerous individual goods but a shared perspective across diverse communities about the conditions for communities and individuals to flourish. Emphasising diversity without building shared values can be as damaging as enforcing uniformity where real differences exist. The ways we, as communities and a nation, develop the language and practices of equality, diversity, community and the individual have changed rapidly in recent years and the proposed national conversation on values would be one way to build confidence and coherence in the wake of changes that have been unsettling for many and remain in many ways unresolved.

The response also, incidentally, rebuked the government for confining the conversation so far to the summer holidays and for not involving maintained schools:

We believe that there is a need for an important public debate about the values underpinning our education system, and how our society engages with dissenting voices, but that a consultation on independent schools standards, held predominantly in the summer holidays, is not a sufficient vehicle for such a substantial conversation ... [W]e believe that this present consultation, narrow and technical as it is, cannot be a sufficient vehicle for addressing what is such an important issue.

In the absence of the kind of national conversation that is needed, it is up to individual schools, and groups of schools, to conduct the necessary discussions at their own grassroots levels. The conversation needs to involve communities, parents, pupils and governors and is vital at school level for taking ownership of what it means to develop a broad and balanced curriculum, and for helping map a pathway into the future.

School governing bodies and their role are critical as they are judged by Ofsted on how well they 'ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction' and how

effectively they 'ensure that they and the school promote tolerance of and respect for people of all faiths, cultures and lifestyles'.<sup>12</sup>

Box 5 contains some preliminary advice provided at a training session for governors in a London borough, November 2014. The points were introduced to stimulate discussion and to encourage governors to take an active role in initiating and sustaining school-level conversation about values, and about their school's approach to pupils' SMSC development

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#### Box 5

#### Approaches to SMSC: some do's and don't's

##### Unhelpful approaches

- Not thinking through carefully what the pupils in the school need for current and later life.
- Knee jerk reactions, without understanding properly what SMSC is about.
- Cutting and pasting a few things on the school website and ticking a box on 'British values'.
- Not acknowledging that 'British values' might be values shared by other nations, cultures and beliefs.

##### Positive approaches

- Developing a planned, coherent whole-school approach to SMSC
- Linking SMSC to school ethos and values
- Understanding that SMSC is wider and deeper than 'British values'
- Ensuring that the experiences and opportunities provided for pupils are relevant, meaningful and inclusive
- Linking SMSC to 'behaviour and safety' – one of the four key Ofsted judgements

Source: handout at a governors training session, London Borough of Ealing, autumn 2014

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In addition to SMSC (all of SMSC, not just the parts the government thinks are relevant to FBV) there are of course many other topics which require attention in the local and national conversations that are needed. A discussion paper produced in November 2014 for a local branch of the National Union of Teachers summarises some of these as follows:

Do you think teachers should be encouraged to teach about, or discuss, controversial issues and given guidance on how to do this?

To what extent do you think schools can, or should be expected to, monitor the interventions of students on social media platforms?

Do you believe that talking about 'British values', rather than values, is potentially alienating and obstructive to discussion with students?

How do you think schools should respond if they become aware that

students are making links with organisations which promulgate unacceptable views or intolerance?

Do you believe that the Muslim community is being unfairly demonised by politicians and the press? If yes, do you believe that Ofsted is part of this?

Do you think it is right that safeguarding is now given so much prominence in an inspection report and that schools can fail on this single issue?

Do you think we should organise meetings to discuss these issues and perhaps a local meeting for parents, involving local MPs and councilors?

A further extremely important topic for consideration and thoughtful conversation is the impact of the FBV controversy on Muslim children and young people, and on their parents, families and communities, and on Muslim teachers. Ofsted and the DfE show no signs, in this connection, of having had due regard for their public sector equality duty to eliminate discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations.

On 25 July, Channel 4 News reported on research conducted by Birmingham City University relating to the impact of the Trojan Horse affair.<sup>13</sup> 'Previous studies,' said the research director, 'have shown that British Muslims felt very comfortable with their identity, they felt well integrated and proud to be British citizens. But much of this has been undone by what they feel has been relentless, unfair criticism.' A mother said: 'What's the point of us trying to integrate, every time we do we are somehow told it's not good enough, or we're not getting it right.'

Researchers interviewed parents, teachers, governors and local residents. Some felt that the affair had left them feeling that everyone was looking at them and pointing at them as they walked down the street. One resident claimed that her neighbours had stopped talking to her as a result, adding: 'In fact we have seen rubbish thrown in our front garden... We have all been labelled extremists and radicals.' A huge concern was the impact of these labels on children. 'What happens when they go for a job, or try to get work experience, and employers read that they're from one of these so-called extremist schools?' asked a teacher.

Such research is a powerful reminder that much rebuilding and restorative work remains to be done. Political leaders have key roles in the urgent process of restoration and support for curriculum renewal, for example a curriculum which truly reflects and promotes fundamental human values. They have not so far been helped, and in certain respects they will be actually hindered, by the actions of Ofsted and the DfE. They will, though, be helped by the strength and goodwill of thousands of teachers, parents, governors and ordinary citizens up and down the country. The last word here goes to one of them:

... [W]hat we have had is a national debate which has discussed the education of Muslim children through the prism of national security ... And this lazy discussion (practising Muslim = extremist = on the conveyer belt to terrorism) is getting just a little tired. And for the record, I'm tired too. I'm tired of getting up in the morning and hearing of the latest Muslim plot to take over the school/the city/the world (delete as appropriate); tired of being told that praying five times a day at a mosque is extremist ...

Having a long beard or wearing a niqab may well be religiously conservative but it is not extremist. And there is no evidence that religious conservatism within Islam leads to violence and extremism. So when Michael Gove talks about the values of Britishness, I wonder whose British values he is talking about. His own, which led to a decision

to appoint a counter-terrorism expert to head up an investigation into school governance?

Or the British values that I see, live and breathe on a daily basis? <sup>14</sup>

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## References and notes

All publications in this list, apart from the book by Arun Kundnani (note 8) are available online.

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<sup>1</sup> 'British values? – pupils should be questioning the rule of law' by Michael Goodwin, The Guardian, 11 November 2014

<sup>2</sup> Home Office, Prevent Strategy, published June 2011. The definition of extremism is on p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> Home Office, Prevent Strategy, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Home Office, Prevent Strategy, p. 108.

<sup>5</sup> Department for Education, Teachers' Standards in England from September 2012, p.10.

<sup>6</sup> Department for Education, Improving the SMSC Development of Pupils in Independent Schools, November 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Department for Education, Governors' Handbook, September 2014, foot of p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> The Muslims Are Coming! – Islamophobia, extremism and the domestic war on terror by Arun Kundnani, London: Verso, 2014, pp 115-152. Short articles on this topic in 2014 included 'Drain the swamps or concentrate on the crocodiles?' by Linda Woodhead, Westminster Faith Debates, 5 June; 'Michael Gove's toxic assault on schools is based on naked discrimination' by Seumas Milne, The Guardian, 11 June; 'It is the Government's Prevent programmes and religious quietism, not radicalism, which have been driving young British Muslims into the hands of extremists' by Michael Mumisa, Huffington Post, 24 September; and 'How schools have been pushed to front in preventing extremism' by Martin Innes (director, Universities Police Sconce Institute, Cardiff University), The Conversation, 21 November.; and 'UK's flawed counter-terrorism strategy' by Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, Monde Diplomatique, 13 December 2013

<sup>9</sup> The letter is on the Ofsted website and parts of it were quoted in the Daily Telegraph on 1 December 2014. The Bridge Schools Inspectorate began its work in September 2008 to inspect schools belonging to the Christian Schools' Trust and the Association of Muslim Schools in England. According to the Telegraph headline, the letter was solely about inspections of Muslim schools, but there was no hint of this in Ofsted's letter itself.

<sup>10</sup> 'Ofsted has got itself into an unholy mess over faith schools', letter from Colin Richards, The Guardian, 25 November 2014.

<sup>11</sup> 'Is Ofsted equipped to police extremism?' by Nigel Genders, Church of England Communications Office, 27 November 2014. See also 'Trojan Horse, Ofsted and the preventing of education' by Shamim Miah, The Conversation, 1 July 2104.

<sup>12</sup> Ofsted, School Inspections Handbook, September 2014, paragraph 165, p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> 'Trojan Horse scandal wrecked community cohesion' by Darshna Soni, Channel Four News, 7 June 2014.

<sup>14</sup> 'This lazy discussion of Islam and extremism is getting just a little tired' by Shabana Mahmood, Huffington Post, 6 June 2014.