National equality priorities and challenges

Introduction

The Equality Act 2010 requires all public bodies, including local authorities, schools and other educational settings, to promote equality and good relations with regard to age (though in education only in relation to employer functions), disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, religion and belief, and sexual identity.

In addition to the general duty there will also be specific duties from April 2011. One of these is likely to be that every public body should publish and pursue equality objectives in the light of relevant evidence.

The previous administration intended that schools and other educational bodies should take into account, when deciding their objectives, national priorities by the Secretary of State.

The coalition administration that came into power in May 2010, however, does not intend to state national priorities on a routine basis. Many schools and local authorities will nevertheless wish to be aware of national and regional needs.

This paper lists points which schools may wish to consider. It is derived from discussions at six national conferences organised by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in the period 2008–2010. It has no official standing – simply, it is a paper for reflection and discussion.

The priorities and challenges are presented here with titles for ease of reference, and in alphabetical order of titles – the order has no other significance. They are grouped under seven headings:

A) Generic possibilities relating to disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, religion and belief, and sexual identity

B) Specific possibilities relating to disability

C) Specific possibilities relating to ethnicity

D) Specific possibilities relating to gender

E) Specific possibilities relating to gender identity

F) Specific possibilities relating to religion and belief

G) Specific possibilities relating to sexual identity

Most of the generic priorities are repeated, though with slightly different phrasings as appropriate, in the lists of specific priorities. This is for the reader's convenience, so that each list of specific priorities can be read on its own, if the reader wishes, without having to refer back to the generic list.

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A. Generic priorities relating to all equality strands – disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, religion and belief, and sexual identity

Clarifying concepts and terminology
Developing a shared understanding of legal requirements and of the key concepts underlying them.

Curriculum
Including equality and diversity issues and positive images of under-represented groups in curriculum materials, modules and topics, wherever possible and appropriate, in all subjects and subject areas, and at all key stages

Data
Collecting and using a range of quantitative and qualitative evidence, and maintaining a robust information base, to show the extent and nature of progress towards greater equality.

Equality impact assessment (EQUIAs)
Using EQUIAs to make positive changes to promote equality.

Ethos
Supporting schools and other settings to enable them to create an inclusive ethos for staff and learners.

Governing bodies
Providing support for governors in their role of taking legal responsibility for how schools promote equality.

Involvement and consultation
Ensuring that members of under-represented groups are involved in the design and implementation of measures and projects intended to be of benefit of them – 'nothing about us without us' – and listening to their views and voices.

Narrowing gaps in attainment
Planning and implementing programmes which will close the gaps in achievement between relevant groups, and increase the participation of under-represented groups in higher and further education.

NEET
Reducing the over-representation of groups and communities which face disadvantage and discrimination among those who are not in education, employment or training.

Ofsted
Ensuring there is coverage of national equality priorities in the training of Ofsted inspectors.

Olympics
Using the Olympics and the Paralympics to highlight ways of promoting equality.

Partnerships
Developing closer partnership working between the education and children's sector and other sectors.

Prejudice-related bullying and behaviour
Reducing levels of prejudice-related bullying and harassment, and in this connection moving towards standardised ways of recording and reporting incidents.

Review of schemes and policies
Conducting reviews of the effectiveness or otherwise of equality schemes and policies for disability, ethnicity and gender created in accordance with the Race Relations Amendments Act 2000, the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and the Equality Act 2006,

and identifying good practice that needs to be retained in the light of the Equality Act 2010.

School improvement partners
Training for school improvement partners to help them understand what objectives, action planning and effective practice in the promotion of equality look like.

Sharing good practice
Encouraging EHRC and others to respond swiftly to the post Equality Act world by identifying and sharing examples of objectives and action plans that show effective practice in local authorities, schools and other settings.

Support network
Setting up a network for local authorities and others to share information, support and challenge.

Training and professional development
Training for staff in schools and other settings, for inspectors and school improvement partners, and for students in initial teacher training, to increase their awareness of equality priorities and of the Equality Act, and help them understand what objectives, action planning and effective practice in the promotion of equality look like.

Workforce development
Increasing the representation of disadvantaged groups and communities in the education and children's workforce.

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B. Specific priorities relating to disability

Access to information
Writing documents so that they are easily readable by all, including people with learning difficulties, and in this connection using easyread approaches.

Clarifying concepts and terminology
Becoming clear on the differences and overlaps between disability and special educational needs

Curriculum
Making disabled people and disability equality issues more visible in curriculum materials, modules and resources in all curriculum subjects and at all key stages

Disability Equality Week
Creating a focus for promoting a whole school approach to all aspects of disability equality through an event such as a disability equality week.

Equality impact assessment (EQUIAs)
Using EQUIAs to make positive changes to promote disability equality.

Ethos
Supporting schools and other settings to enable them to create an inclusive ethos for staff and learners.

Exclusions
Reducing the disproportionate number of school exclusions among disabled pupils.

Funding for reasonable adjustments
Ensuring that capital funding covers reasonable adjustments and specialist support services to enable access to learning for disabled learners.

Governing bodies

Providing specific support for governors in their role of taking legal responsibility for how schools promote equality.

Information, advice and guidance
Developing information, advice and guidance (IAG) for disabled people, so that they are fully aware of learning and career opportunities, and of funding and assistance available to them.

Involvement and consultation
Ensuring that disabled people are more actively involved in the design, development, review and delivery of policies that affect them.

Looked after children
Providing support for disabled looked after children.

Mental health
Raising the visibility of mental health issues and providing counselling and information on social model approaches.

Narrowing gaps in attainment
Reducing attainment gaps between disabled learners and national averages and increasing the meaningful participation of disabled people in higher and further education.

NEET
Reducing the over-representation of disabled young people among those who are not in education, employment or training.

Olympics
Using the Olympics and the Paralympics to highlight ways of promoting disability equality.

Partnerships
Developing closer partnership working between the education and children's sector and other sectors

Play
Increasing access to play and enhancing the opportunities for disabled children and young people to play alongside their non-disabled peers.

Prejudice-related bullying and behaviour
Reducing levels of prejudice-related bullying and harassment directed against disabled people, and in this connection moving towards standardised ways of recording and reporting incidents.

Public awareness
Addressing low levels of awareness and understanding of disability issues amongst the general public, and promoting wider understanding of the social model of disability.

Sharing good practice
Encouraging EHRC and others to respond swiftly to the post Equality Act world by identifying and sharing examples of objectives and action plans that show effective practice in local authorities, schools and other settings.

Social model
Training for school leaders and other sector staff so that they are confident in understanding and applying the social model of disability in their settings.

Support for families
Negotiated support for disabled children and their families, including support through short breaks and providing information on support for local engagement.

Support network
Setting up a network for local authorities and others to share information, support and challenge.

Training and professional development
Training for staff in schools and other settings, for school improvement partners and inspectors, and for students in initial teacher training, to increase their awareness of equality priorities and of the Equality Act, and help them understand what objectives, action planning and effective practice in the promotion of equality in this strand look like.

C. Specific priorities relating to ethnicity

Childcare and early years play and learning activities
Identifying, analysing and removing barriers to take-up of childcare and early years play and learning activities, in the light of the low take-up by African, Bangladeshi, Gypsy, Pakistani, Roma and Traveller families, in order to ensure high quality provision is available and accessible to all groups and communities, and most especially to those who are vulnerable to under achievement as identified in the foundation stage profile.

Clarifying concepts and terminology
Becoming clear on the differences and overlaps between the categories of belief, ethnicity, religion or belief, race and religion; the similarities and differences between colour and cultural racism; the specificities of Islamophobia, antisemitism and anti-refugee racism; the distinction between street racism and institutional racism; the causes and causal factors underlying violent extremism.

Cohesion
Making close links between community cohesion and the promotion of equalities and in this connection ensuring a consistent definition of community cohesion is shared by the DCSF and Ofsted, and is based on promoting equality and responding to prejudice-related issues.

Curriculum
Making ethnicity equality issues more visible in curriculum materials, modules and resources in all subjects and subject areas and at all key stages, and in this connection including student voices, parents and carers, community and special interest groups having first hand knowledge and experience of equality issues.

Data
Improving the information base, and in this respect monitoring by gender and by religion or belief as well as by ethnicity, and by region as well as nationally; looking more closely at, and defining, who are in the groups 'black other' and 'white other'; adding categories so that all local authorities have monitoring categories relevant to their communities; and generally going beyond a simple white/ethnic minority dichotomy.

Equality impact assessment (EQUIAs)
Using EQUIAs to make positive changes to promote ethnicity equality.

Exclusions
Reducing the disproportionate number of school exclusions among certain communities.

History
Supporting and challenging schools in the effective teaching of history, including black history, world history and local community history, in ways that promote and do not risk undermining equality.

Involvement and consultation
Ensuring that people from a wide range of backgrounds are more actively involved in the design, development, review and delivery of policies that affect them.

Multiple identities

Recognising and supporting the development of mixed identities – for example, Black British, Pakistani British, British Muslim, bilingual, multilingual.

Narrowing gaps in attainment and achievement
Reducing and removing inequalities in success rates between different communities by raising the attainment and improving rates of progression in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2 and GCSE for certain communities, particularly those of African-Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Gypsy, Pakistani, Roma, Somali, Traveller or Turkish heritage, with a view to greater participation in further and higher education.

NEET
Reducing the over-representation of certain communities and groups among young people who are not in education, employment or training.

Networks
Setting up an equality network for local authorities and others to facilitate sharing of support and challenge for effective practice.

Prejudice-related bullying
Monitoring and reducing levels of prejudice-related incidents, bullying and harassment around racism, culture, religion or belief background, Islamophobia, antisemitism, anti-refugee racism and national origin.

Promoting effective practice
Identifying and sharing effective practice in promoting ethnicity equality, for example the LA initiatives shared at previous DCSF events for the sector, and the Stephen Lawrence Standards shared at the January 2010 conference in Leeds.

Sharing good practice
Encouraging EHRC and others to respond swiftly to the post Equality Act world by identifying and sharing examples of objectives and action plans that show effective practice in local authorities, schools and other settings.

Special events
Observing, supporting and promoting special events such as Black History Month, Interfaith Week, Islam Awareness Week and Refugee Week, and making these a focus for work in the curriculum and the general life of a school.

Training and professional development
Training for staff in schools and other settings, for school improvement partners and inspectors, and for students in initial teacher training, to increase their awareness of equality priorities and of the Equality Act, and help them understand what objectives, action planning and effective practice in the promotion of equality in this strand look like.

Workforce development
Recruiting more staff, particularly at senior levels, from groups and communities that are at present under-represented.

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D. Specific priorities relating to gender

Clarifying concepts and terminology
Developing a shared understanding of legal requirements and of the key concepts underlying them, including in this connection the long-term relevance of education to reducing the pay gap between women and men and to ending violence against women and girls.

Curriculum
Making issues of gender equality more visible in curriculum materials, modules and resources in all curriculum subjects and at all key stages

Data

Improving the information base, for example by collecting and analysing data which cross-tabulates gender with disability, ethnicity and social class.

Equality impact assessment (EQUIAs)
Using EQUIAs to make positive changes to promote gender equality.

Information, advice and guidance
Tackling gender stereotyping and segregation in education and training through information, advice and guidance (IAG) in relation to subject choices and careers.

Governors
Specific support for governors, in their role of taking legal responsibility for how schools promote gender equality.

Literacy
Raising attainment levels in literacy for boys

Narrowing gaps in attainment
Reducing and removing inequalities in success rates between girls and boys

NEET
Reducing the over-representation of young men among young people who are not in education, employment or training.

Networks
Setting up an equality network for LAs (and others) to facilitate sharing of support and challenge for effective practice.

Pregnancy
Raising attainment levels for pregnant school girls and young mothers, and also for young fathers.

Prejudice-related bullying and violence against women
Reducing and removing violence against women and girls, including teenage relationship abuse and sexual bullying.

Science
Addressing the under-representation of women in science (including computer science), engineering, construction and technology (SECT)/Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), as learners, teachers, researchers and practitioners, and on SECT/STEM-related public bodies.

Special events
Observing, supporting and promoting special events such as International Day for the Elimination of violence against Women and International Women's Day, and making these a focus for work in the curriculum and the general life of a school.

Training
Improving the participation of young women in government training schemes such as Apprenticeships, particularly in construction and engineering.

Training and professional development
Training for staff in schools and other settings, for SIPs and inspectors, and for students in initial teacher training, to increase their awareness of equality priorities and of the Equality Act, and help them understand what objectives, action planning and effective practice in the promotion of equality in this strand look like.

Work-related learning
Ensuring that work experience and work-related learning give both girls and boys an opportunity to expand their horizons by trying out non-traditional work.

E. Specific priorities relating to gender identity

Events
Using events such as LGBT history month as hooks on which local authorities, schools and other settings can hang whole school, whole year work to promote gender identity equality. Creating and publishing an equalities calendar.

Monitoring
Finding ways of recording and reporting the views and experiences of young trans people that allow the sector to gather meaningful evidence, without risking confidentiality.

Prejudice-related bullying and violence against trans people
Reducing levels of prejudice-related bullying and violence, and transphobia.

Training and professional development
Training for staff in schools and other settings, for SIPs and inspectors, and for students in initial teacher training, to increase their awareness of equality priorities and of the Equality Act, and help them understand what objectives, action planning and effective practice in the promotion of equality in this strand look like.

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F. Specific priorities relating to religion and belief

Clarifying concepts and terminology
Becoming clear on the differences and overlaps between the categories of belief, ethnicity, ,race and religion or belief; the distinction between observance, practice and belief on the one hand and affiliation, background and cultural belonging on the other; the specific features of religion-related prejudices, including Islamophobia and antisemitism; the causes and causal factors underlying violent extremism.

Curriculum
Making religion or belief equality issues more visible in curriculum materials, modules and resources in all subjects and subject areas and at all key stages, and in this connection including the voices and views of pupils, parents and carers, and community and special interest groups having first hand knowledge and experience of religious diversity issues.

Data
Improving the information base, and in this respect monitoring by religion or belief background as well as by ethnicity and gander, and by region as well as nationally.

Equality impact assessment (EQUIAs)
Using EQUIAs to make positive changes to promote equality by religion or belief.

History
Supporting and challenging schools in the effective teaching of history, including the contributions and achievements of a range of civilisations, and of religious and non-religious world-views.

Involvement and consultation
Ensuring that people from a wide range of religious backgrounds are more actively involved in the design, development, review and delivery of policies that affect them.

Multiple identities
Recognising and supporting the development of mixed identities, and in this connection recognising the role of religious and non-religious belief systems and cultural traditions.

Networks
Setting up an equality network for local authorities and others to facilitate sharing of support and challenge for effective practice.

Prejudice-related bullying
Monitoring and reducing levels of prejudice-related incidents, bullying and harassment around religion or belief background, including Islamophobia and antisemitism.

Sharing good practice
Encouraging EHRC and others to respond swiftly to the post Equality Act world by identifying and sharing examples of objectives and action plans that show effective practice in local authorities, schools and other settings.

Special events
Observing, supporting and promoting special events such as Interfaith Week and Islam Awareness Week, and making these a focus for work in the curriculum and the general life of a school.

Training and professional development
Training for staff in schools and other settings, for SIPs and inspectors, and for students in initial teacher training, to increase their awareness of equality priorities and of the Equality Act, and help them understand what objectives, action planning and effective practice in the promotion of equality in this strand look like.

Workforce development
Recruiting more staff, particularly at senior levels, from religious backgrounds that are at present under-represented.

G. Specific priorities relating to sexual identity

Beyond bullying
Providing support for schools and other settings as they move beyond anti-bullying work to increasingly pro-active approaches to promoting LGBT equality, including use of role models.

Curriculum
Making issues of sexual identity more visible in curriculum materials, modules and resources in all curriculum subjects and at all key stages

Equality impact assessments (EQUIAs)
Extending the use of EQUIAs to cover the LGBT strand.

Events
Using events such as LGBT history month as hooks on which local authorities, schools and other settings can hang whole school, whole year work to promote gender and LGBT equality. Creating and publishing an equalities calendar.

Governors
Specific support for governors, in their role of taking legal responsibility for how schools promote LGBT equality.

Monitoring
Finding ways of recording and reporting the views and experiences of young LGBT people that allow the sector to gather meaningful evidence, without risking confidentiality

NEET
Reducing the over-representation of LGBT young people among those who are not in education, employment or training.

Networks
Setting up an equality network for local authorities and others to facilitate sharing of support and challenge for effective practice.

Prejudice-related bullying and violence against LGBT people
Reducing levels of prejudice-related bullying and violence, homophobia and transphobia.

Research
Research into effective practice, especially looking at interactions between the LGBT and religion and belief strands, and including examples of faith schools with leading practice in promoting LGBT equality.

Resources
Ensuring that schools and other settings have easy access to the wealth of materials, from DCSF, LAs and the campaigning and third sectors that promote LGBT equality.

Training and professional development
Training for staff in schools and other settings, for SIPs and inspectors, and for students in initial teacher training, to increase their awareness of equality priorities and of the Equality Act, and help them understand what objectives, action planning and effective practice in the promotion of equality in this strand look like.

Support
For staff in schools who may be unsure on the law and feel insecure in their own positions vis-à-vis that law.

Workforce
Support for schools and other settings to create an ethos where LGBT staff can feel comfortable with coming out.

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