

Can Schools Make Our Society More Cohesive?

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‘Cohesion’ is a growing concern for policy makers and society and this raises questions for the role of schools. This mini-report asks how, and whether, schools should respond.

We draw on academic and policy research, think-pieces and perspectives from the LKMco Big Debate 2016 *‘Can Schools Make Societies More Cohesive?’* and ask:

1. What is social cohesion?
2. What influences levels of social cohesion?
3. What are schools currently doing to improve social cohesion?
4. How can schools make society more cohesive?
5. What stands in the way of schools doing more?
6. What barriers do schools face in doing more?

Panelists in the debate were

- **Hywel Jones** – Head teacher of West London Free School
- **Mashuda Shaikh** - Community Heritage Officer, Kirklees Council.
- **Russell Hobby** - General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers
- **Rebecca Parrett** - Deputy head, The Connaught School



We highlight three key insights:

- Schools are uniquely placed to develop social cohesion – but co-operation from many other stakeholders is equally important and poverty undermines cohesion.
 - Effective ways for schools to foster cohesion include: ensuring pupils feel safe; establishing a strong foundation of general knowledge and understanding of current affairs; developing critical thinking skills and fostering a positive whole-school ethos.
 - Equal access to educational opportunities for students from all socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds plays an important role in fostering social cohesion.
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Introduction

A long running preoccupation

The recent 'Brexit' vote precipitated a flurry of concerns regarding a divided nation but this is nothing new. Cohesion also topped the agenda following riots and disturbances in 2001 and 2011. Concerns about immigration, racism, and the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks too exacerbated fears around extremist ideologies and the radicalisation of young people.

Young people and social cohesion

Attempts to promote cohesion have often centered on young people, either because they are seen as part of the problem, part of the solution or both. As a result, schools are frequently highlighted as key sites with significant potential for promoting social cohesion¹.

Timeline

- **2000:** Race Relations Act requires schools to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and promote good relationships and equality of opportunity
- **2002:** Community Cohesion Unit set up by government to review existing policy and encourage good practice on the local community level
- **2004:** Standards of community cohesion published by Home Office with four strategic aims: 1) To close achievement gaps for students from various backgrounds; 2) To promote common values of citizenship; 3) To build positive community relations; 4) To remove access and participation barriers .
- **2006:** Education and Inspections Act enforces statutory duty of governing body of schools to promote community cohesion, and of Ofsted to ensure schools are contributing to this area
- **2007:** Guidance for schools on promoting community cohesion published². Each school was encouraged to develop its own approach, reflecting its needs and the the schools' socio-economic and cultural context.

Britain needs a 'new deal' to bring divided country together after Brexit

The Guardian, 4th October 2016

The Brexit vote reveals a country split down the middle

The results paint a picture of an angry country divided by class, age and region

The Economist, 24th June 2016

After the Riots:

Taking Tottenham Forward

Recommendations of the Tottenham Community Panel

February 2012

7/7's Legacy on Multiculturalism and Muslims

The Huffington Post, 7th July 2016

¹ CLG, 2008

² DCSF/CLG, 2007

The 2007 Guidance for schools highlights three areas for schools to address:

- 1) **Teaching, Learning & Curriculum:** Lessons promoting common values and challenging prejudices and stereotypes; enrichment activities (e.g. visits/fieldwork in different ethnic communities); involving pupils in decision making.
- 2) **Equity and Excellence:** Encouraging schools to eliminate barriers to success for students from all backgrounds, and to eliminate variation in treatment of different ethnic groups (e.g. through school policies on bullying and harassment as well as by following the School Admissions Code).
- 3) **Engagement and Ethos:** Creating school-to-school partnerships to share good practice and encourage mixing between ethnic groups; working with the community to help students make their voice heard in local decision-making and lead in the community; providing services to help students from different ethnic groups mix and opportunities for their parents (e.g. through ICT/English as a second language classes); maintaining strong links with other agencies (e.g. police, youth support service, social care professionals).

Whilst this guidance focused on race and faith, it also encouraged schools to mitigate other forms of inequality (e.g. on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, disability and age). The Duty on schools came into effect on 1 September 2007 and inspection by Ofsted commenced in September 2008. However Ofsted has now stopped inspecting this Duty, due to concerns about school freedoms³.

- **2007:** The Diversity and Citizenship Curriculum Review, led by Sir Keith Ajegbo, made recommendations for promoting diversity across the school curriculum and for the content of citizenship education. The Review suggested including 'Identity and Diversity: living together in the UK' as a strand of Citizenship Education.
- **2007:** The Commission for Integration and Cohesion encouraged local authorities to consider ways they might improve community cohesion and support schools in fulfilling their duty to encourage community cohesion
- **2007:** *Aiming High for Young People: ten year strategy for positive activities* was published by the government. This document stressed the importance of positive activities that can facilitate interactions and improve relationships across races
- **2008:** *Learning together to be safe: A toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism* was published by the government, which looked more specifically at implementing counter-terrorism measures through school
- **2009:** Publication of an updated citizenship curriculum following the Ajegbo review reasserting "*the role of history in promoting national identity and national cohesion and making learners familiar with British values and culture...[it assumes] that minorities need to learn how 'we' behave and understand 'our' way of doing things⁴.*"
- **2010:** Equality Act extends legal responsibilities of schools to support community cohesion through providing fair access to educational opportunities and practicing fairness in its treatment of students
- **2011:** PREVENT launched as government's counter-terrorism strategy for schools

³ Runnymede Trust & Think Global, 2011

⁴ Osler, 2011



1. What is social cohesion?

Social cohesion is no longer merely about ‘assimilation’ - something that was a greater focus back in 2001. More recently, the focus has instead been on moving beyond ‘antidiscrimination laws and initiatives’ towards ‘flourishing together’ and equal outcomes⁵.

A cohesive community has therefore been defined⁶ as one where:

- 1) There is a **common vision** of social/economic progress.
- 2) All communities share a **sense of belonging** – founded on **common identity** and resting on an “inclusive sense of Britishness”⁷ where diversity is understood but commonalities between communities recognised too. However, despite attempts to define it, ‘Britishness’, remains a nebulous and contested concept.
- 3) People from different backgrounds have **similar life opportunities** (although having good individual life chances alone is “not enough”)⁸.
- 4) **Strong, positive relationships** are developed between people from different backgrounds, in workplaces, schools and neighbourhoods. Overall, high levels of **trust** - trusting one another and local institutions to act justly. In other words the ability to ‘get on well together’.
- 5) Widespread knowledge of each citizen’s **rights and responsibilities**.

‘Community’ is characterized as four-leveled and includes: the school community; the community the school is located in; the UK community and the global community.

Research has also attempted to derive measures to capture the multi-scalar nature of social cohesion. Demack et al.⁹ argue there are two kinds of cohesion:

- 1) **Local cohesion:** measured by whether *“people from different racial and ethnic and religious backgrounds mix well together”* and whether *“people round where I live usually respect each-others' religious differences”*
- 2) **Societal cohesion:** a response to the criticism that the ‘local level’ definition does not account for young people’s sense of belonging on different scales (local, national and global). Measures of societal cohesion include: sense of citizenship, having the same life opportunities, trusting institutions and one another to act fairly and having a sense of belonging to Britain.

While different strategies are recommended for improving local and societal cohesion, both are mutually reinforcing; there is a strong positive correlation between feelings of local cohesion and societal cohesion¹⁰.

⁵ Saggar et al., 2012

⁶ Home Office, 2005; LGA et al, 2002 & LGA 2004; CLG, 2008

⁷ Home Office, 2005:20

⁸ Home Office, 2005:20

⁹ Demack et al., 2010

¹⁰ Ibid.



Nonetheless, various challenges in conceptualising ‘social cohesion’ remain. Two issues will be highlighted here, one with implications for researching cohesion and the second with implications for enacting strategies for social cohesion.

Firstly:

- Is ‘social cohesion’ a static endpoint, or a dynamic process whereby immigrants and communities continuously adapt to one another¹¹?
- If it is a process, how do we measure progress, or, if it is an endpoint, how do we define the ideal endpoint? Can we use objective indicators to measure it?

One way of defining an ‘endpoint’ is that a cohesive society is achieved when “society only minimally perceive themselves and others in racial or ethnic terms, when these attributes have little impact on opportunities and life chances, and/or when quality of life concerns in neighbourhoods do not include issues pertaining to immigrants”¹². However, in referring to ‘opportunities and life chances’, it is not obvious which indicators should be used to assess progress; should they be economic, social or cultural or a composite indicator? Furthermore, some ask where ‘social cohesion’ is tangible and quantitatively measurable at all.

The second major issue in conceptualising a cohesive society is the extent to which cohesion should relate to *Britishness*, *patriotism* and *national identity*¹³. How should diversity and integration be balanced for example? And who and how might ‘Britishness’ be defined? This has major implications for attempts to design a curriculum for cohesion or events intended to foster cohesion.

Panelists at the ‘LKMco Big Debate’ argued that cohesion is about preparing young people for the real world; developing ‘critical thinkers’ was commonly cited as a crucial component of social cohesion. Deputy head Rebecca Parrett, for example argued that cohesion involves offering “opportunities to access and experience learning and thinking and involve yourselves in history, and think about the ‘what ifs’”. She defined the ideal endpoint as: “young people who are equipped and empowered to actually make choices and actively and proactively rather than reactively, shape their communities.” General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) Russell Hobby argued that question-asking, decision-making and critical thinking were crucial but could merely be transactional unless allied to ‘engaged citizenship’ involving empathy, understanding, and a willingness to debate without criminalising the other.



¹¹ Saggar et al, 2012

¹² ibid

¹³ ibid

2. What influences levels of social cohesion?

There have been myriad studies of the influences on *local* cohesion levels¹⁴. Whilst recognising that factors vary between areas, studies tend to highlight both **individual characteristics** (e.g. ethnicity, household income, GCSE attainment) and the **characteristics of the community people live in** (e.g. ethnic mix and pupil-teacher ratio in schools, crime rates and population size of local authority district). Perceptions of cohesion appear to be driven by interaction between these two types of factors. Socio-economic deprivation and crime (including racist attacks) are particularly strong negative predictors of local cohesion but there are also inconsistencies in the data: for instance, the extent to which ethnicity acts as a predictor of feelings of cohesion.

There have been two major, robust, nationally representative studies of factors influencing perceived social cohesion in the UK in recent years. Laurence and Heath's¹⁵ statistical study of individual characteristics that influence cohesion analysed potential socio-demographic and attitudinal predictors of cohesion and concluded that **regardless of levels of ethnic diversity in a community, socio-economic disadvantage undermines perceptions of cohesion**; even in white, homogenous areas, disadvantage undermines feelings of cohesion. They argue that **disadvantage is a stronger negative predictor of cohesion than race**. However, other important explanatory variables worth noting include crime (negative influence), having friends from different ethnic groups (positive influence), feelings of empowerment – i.e. feeling they could influence local-level decision-making (positive influence).

Demack et al.'s 'Longitudinal Study of Young People in England' (LSYPE)¹⁶ focused specifically on young people from different ethnic group's perspectives on perceived cohesion and the factors informing any variation. Unlike Laurence and Heath, Demack et al. introduced multiple scales (local and societal cohesion) and explored how different factors influenced perceptions of local and societal cohesion. They conclude that the most important factors influencing young people's feelings of both local and societal cohesion, are related to *individual* characteristics and circumstances. Factors include:

- Demographics: e.g. ethnicity, age, religion, presence of disability;
- Socio-economics: e.g. parental social class and household income;
- Educational experience and engagement
- Wellbeing and behavior
- Social, political and cultural perceptions: e.g. perception of crime in the local area and whether young people are treated fairly by media.

School and local district authority characteristics influenced feelings of cohesion, but they influenced feelings of *local* cohesion to a greater degree than societal cohesion, and overall, influenced both local and societal cohesion to a lesser degree than individual characteristics. A key implication from these two studies is that **schools should focus on removing barriers to success related to socio-economic disadvantage (e.g. inequality of access to schools), as well as race and ethnicity**, in order to raise feelings of empowerment for those from

¹⁴ Lloyd, 2010; Ipsos-Mori, 2007; DTZ, 2007; Wedlock, 2006

¹⁵ Laurence and Heath, 2008

¹⁶ Demack et al., 2010



deprived areas, and thus improve perceptions of cohesion. Yet, to date, government drives for cohesion have focused more on race and ethnicity.

Demack et al¹⁷ also note that a more nuanced picture of correlations is needed. They find that while the positive relationship between mixing and perceived cohesion is true for *particular types* of ethnic mixing, some types are linked to lower cohesion. For instance, students in schools with a low proportion of white students, and which are very ethnically mixed, tend to report high levels of cohesion. However, students in schools with medium-to-high proportions of white students, in which high proportions of two other ethnic groups are also present tend to report low levels of cohesion.

Case Study from the 3FF report “Encountering Faiths and Beliefs: The role of Intercultural Education in schools and communities”

Trethewey and Menzies, 2015

In one ‘Encountering Faiths and Beliefs’ session in Sweden, a young Muslim woman shared her experience of putting on the Hijab.

The young woman began her story by describing her previous prejudices against the Hijab and how her attitudes changed as a result of interactions with friends. She then recounted her experience when she decided to put on the Hijab and others’ reactions to her.

This example highlights the difference between sharing ‘lived faith and culture’ – an approach that focuses on complexity and empathy, as compared to learning about religious doctrines.

“It is a powerful story, there are Muslim women wearing a Hijab and the question is how are you curious, how do you get in touch and how can you start asking these questions? In this session their world views and their ideas about some Islamic traditions were really crushed just from this simple encounter and meeting.”

Anneli Radestad

¹⁷ Demack et al, 2010



3. What are schools currently doing to improve social cohesion?

"Schools do amazing work around community cohesion"

Mashuda Shaikh

In 2010 Phillips et al.¹⁸ found that the main approaches schools took to improving community cohesion were as follows:

- Schools are **mainly using broad, whole-school approaches**, and a variety of strategies – not just one-off activities.
- Almost all schools aimed to promote community cohesion through school ethos and values (97%), through the pastoral curriculum (94%), curriculum subjects (94%) and assemblies (93%).
- Use of **curriculum** to promote community cohesion was common, as was use of enrichment activities. More than half of primary, secondary and special schools said they used curriculum and enrichment activities in 'equal measure'. However, significantly fewer said they used the curriculum to prevent violent extremism.
- Schools were less confident in their understanding of PREVENT (the government's counter-terrorism strategy through schools) and how to implement it, compared to their statutory duty for community cohesion. It seems **schools are more focused on promoting cohesion, than preventing extremism**¹⁹. Schools mainly aimed to implement PREVENT through ethos and values, internet safety policies/processes, and through PSHE or the pastoral curriculum
- A **large number of subjects** were used to promote cohesion. This suggests that most schools were embedding the promotion of cohesion across the curriculum.
- The opportunities most often offered to pupils to foster cohesion were: **Student council (94%) and after-school activities (89%)**. Also used (but more so in secondary schools than in primary or special schools) were mentoring and volunteering.
- 91% of schools reported **practising self-evaluation** of their cohesion-related work. Secondary schools (71%) and special schools (70%) frequently used Ofsted feedback as a monitoring tool.
- Community cohesion **very often featured in School Improvement Plans** (over 80% of primary, secondary and special schools reported this). Written policies on community cohesion were also present in over half of primary (75%), secondary (68%) and special (61%) schools.
- This will of course have been affected by the Ofsted frameworks in place at the time and is likely to have changed since this was revised.

Phillips found that schools' were working with numerous partners to promote community cohesion. Phillips et al. note that: *"Most schools have links with local charities or community groups (86%), the police (83%) or another school (or schools) with a different demographic profile (70%). Slightly fewer have links with training partners (60%) or their locality partnerships (52%)."*

¹⁸ Phillips et al. 2010 (Based on responses from 804 schools across England randomly sampled from the DfE's database for all schools)

¹⁹ *ibid*



In contrast to the seemingly positive portrait that emerges from Philips et al's research²⁰, Osler argues that the limited research available on schools' work on cohesion suggests that schools' goals on cohesion "are often unclear and not evaluated." She suggests that school leaders see community cohesion as an additional, optional requirement.

Mashuda Shaikh shared her experience of working with schools as a Community Heritage Officer for Kirklees Council

"To me it's about engaging with people, it's about people, where they live and what they can contribute to their communities, locally, nationally and internationally"

Mashuda described a "My Country My Vote" project that brings people together for a common purpose, involving young people in campaigns that they can take to their local council.

As she puts it "a lot of our schools are quite monocultural" she therefore helps bring them together, for example through a school twinning programme or a "Bloom and Grow" project in which schools created a garden in the city centre together.

In another example she took an Israeli Jewish conscious objector into a predominantly Muslim girls' school. As she puts it:

"It did wonders - that's what cohesion's about, it's about getting a different perspective."

²⁰ Osler, 2011



4. How can schools improve social cohesion?

The case for schools' improving social cohesion

Avenues for developing social cohesion in schools include citizenship training; promoting a shared sense of belonging; offering opportunities for ethnic and socio-economic mixing and offering opportunities to acquire skills and knowledge that can equip students to be engaged and active citizens²¹.

Schools are clearly seen as key sites for cultivating cohesion by policy makers and most academic analyses and think-pieces support the role of schools, alongside other efforts, in improving cohesion²².

"Schools and colleges have a key contribution to make to cohesion by giving young people the skills to adapt to change and deal with difference, alongside giving them a sense of belonging. Schools also provide an environment which brings together people from different backgrounds."

Department for Communities and Local Government²³

However, the challenge is that schools are inevitably torn between different roles.

"Because we're compulsory, statutory and some of us are comprehensive, schools have the opportunity to be a bit like Heineken, they reach some of the people that some of the other organisations don't get access to... but at the same time it's not our job... my label is that I'm a teacher, I'm not necessarily there to teach social cohesion. But if I don't - we've all been on the receiving end of disputes between families or factions in the community that have spilled over into school."

Rebecca Parrett

Nonetheless, schools have "profound responsibilities" in fostering cohesion according to Rebecca. Meanwhile, Russell Hobby described schools as having a "privileged position" both physically and in terms of the public's generally positive perception of schools:

"Schools are in a privileged position... they're one of the more positive aspects of public life... most parts of government you go to when something has gone wrong. You go to school for something that goes right"

Russell Hobby

Safe spaces

Rebecca Parrett went on to describe schools as potential 'safe spaces' which offer unique opportunities for students to form relationships with people from other backgrounds – opportunities which might not exist outside of school. In this way, Rebecca describes schools as capable of "[making] possible understandings of community and self and identity that [students] wouldn't have had otherwise".

²¹ Demack et al, 2010

²² Berkeley, 2008; Runnymede Trust & Think Global, 2011

²³ DCLG 2008: 18



Mashuda Shaikh also employed the language of ‘safe spaces’ to explain that schools were perhaps the only ‘safe space’ for young people to have difficult conversations about controversial issues.

Intentionality

Explicit and deliberate promotion of cohesion may however not be the best way forward. Hywel Jones felt that education’s core mission is to introduce students to, and inculcate them into different school subjects’ and disciplines’ traditions and customs. Shared understanding of a corpus of history might therefore come to form the foundation of cohesion. Similarly, Russell Hobby argued that ‘cohesion’ was a beneficial side-effect that flowed from a generation of students who were ‘well-educated’ and aware and adept at handling sensitive issues. The critical ability to look beyond ‘post-truth’ politics might therefore be a solid foundation for cohesion. Thus, social cohesion should not ‘crowd-out’ schools’ core business, instead it should shape the design and implementation of curricula and school-led activities – both in terms of the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ this is done.



Case Study from the 3FF report “Encountering Faiths and Beliefs: The role of Intercultural Education in schools and communities”

Trethewey and Menzies, 2015

The ‘Think Project’ in Wales supports encounters between young people considered vulnerable to far-right ideologies and people from different faith communities.

“Rather than simply teaching someone about migration and about the reality of an asylum seeker’s life in Britain etc. you create experiences that can shape their world view.”

Vidhya Ramalingam

These experiences might include:

- Visiting a Polish shop in the neighbourhood to talk to the shopkeeper and learn about their experience coming to the UK.
- Bringing an asylum seeker in to talk to young people and break misconceptions.
- Involving a youth worker from a Muslim background who has been trained to talk about their identity.

“It’s all about relationship building in order to undermine myths rather than simply teaching someone about it from a book. Our research has very much shown that experiential learning is much more effective in changing people’s minds”

Vidhya Ramalingam



5. How schools can make society more cohesive?

1. School Ethos

The importance of ethos was emphasised by all the panelists at the 'LKMco Big Debate' and is also emphasised in research.

"[It's] not the explicit stuff that you do...not the projects that you do around community cohesion that make a difference. It's the day to day, this is just how we are, this is the expectation. It's that tone-setting I think that makes the difference."

Rebecca Parrett

Demack et al.²⁴ argue that a positive school ethos reinforces cohesion. They argue that good behaviour, discipline, order and safety, fairness in treatment of students from different backgrounds and high-quality teaching are key, since negative perceptions of discipline and teaching quality are linked to lower perceptions of cohesion.

Hywel Jones described how in the aftermath of Brexit, a xenophobic hate crime was committed outside the Polish National Centre near the West London Free School.

During school assembly all pupils left messages in a card which was sent to the Polish National Centre to show support for the Polish community, and assure them they were part of the local community. This helped to create a positive ethos that supported cohesion in the community.

2. School Safety

Since perceptions of safety and low crime are related to higher levels of cohesion²⁵, strategies to increase feelings of safety and decrease perceptions of crime (such as whole-school anti-bullying policies, and ensuring students' journeys to and from school are safe) can be beneficial. After-school patrols, when there are higher levels of crimes committed by young persons, can help to increase feelings of safety²⁶.

How Schools Can Encourage Cohesion: Case-studies of best practice: QCDA, 2010

- Constant self-monitoring and self-evaluating of social cohesion schemes – track changes in attitudes and behaviours
- Create curricula that visibly celebrates contribution of different cultures to the school, the nation and beyond
- Involve schools with different community groups or with partners such as faith leaders or faith ambassadors, to enrich students' learning experiences of diversity
- Set up links with other schools in the region (e.g. through the Schools Linking Network), to facilitate ethnic mixing

²⁴ Demack et al, 2010

²⁵ Ibid; Laurence and Heath, 2008

²⁶ Demack et al, 2010



3. Well-Being and Anti-Social Behaviour

Anti-social behavior is related to lower levels of cohesion. Demack²⁷ therefore argues that schools can reduce anti-social behavior by increasing opportunities for extra-curricular activities, which helps to occupy young people in healthy activities.

4. Curriculum

Citizenship classes should aim not only to help young people understand their rights, but to learn how to negotiate processes that might prevent them from exercising these rights²⁸. This is crucial in developing a feeling of empowerment, which is a strong positive predictor of social cohesion²⁹. Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) is not discussed in depth in existing research, but panelists at the 'LKMco Big Debate' noted its value in promoting cohesion. In particular, Russell Hobby argued that making PSHE compulsory would help ensure students had opportunities to learn about controversial issues and how to discuss them. At present, the lack of compulsory PSHE means that school leaders who do not want to risk conflict with the community can avoid teaching PSHE. Therefore, a requirement to teach PSHE from the government would shift responsibility away from more vulnerable public servants such as teachers working in areas of community tension, to politicians who are further removed.

Furthermore, as Russell Hobby and Hywel Jones note, the entire curriculum has the potential to reinforce cohesion. Literacy, for instance, should not simply aim at functionality, but at equipping young people to engage with fiction and to learn empathy.

"One of the best ways we have of extending empathy that we have in our society is the ability to see the world through someone else's eyes... and engaging with fiction is one way of doing that"

Russell Hobby

As we saw in section 4, a strong foundation of general knowledge, which encompasses history, geography and current affairs – including an understanding of the “triumphs and tragedies of humankind” - from the Siege of Leningrad to World War Two, could help to foster a greater sense of social cohesion, according to Hywel Jones. However, panelists emphasised that it is not merely content, but *how* the content is taught and how teachers present issues that matters, including their sensitivity and how they facilitate discussion around controversial matters.

5. Promote ethnically and socio-economically-mixed schools

Panelists emphasised that ethnically and socio-economically mixed schools improve social cohesion. Russell Hobby for example argued that schools where students from different socio-economic backgrounds can learn alongside each other and where there are high expectations for all foster mixing, increasing empathy and understanding. Hence, comprehensive schooling can support social cohesion.

²⁷ ibid

²⁸ ibid

²⁹ Laurence and Heath, 2008



As we saw in section 2, the relationship between mixing and cohesion is in fact complex, but Demack et al.³⁰ nonetheless find that students attending comprehensive schools were more positive about (local) cohesion compared to those living in areas operating selective education and attending either grammars or secondary moderns. They therefore recommend ending selection and covert processes of selection in comprehensive schools, and increasing the provision of comprehensive schooling.

³⁰ Demack et al, 2010



6. What barriers do schools face in doing more?

Schools face several barriers in promoting cohesion:

1. Pursuing cohesion can conflict with the community's prevailing values

Russell Hobby noted that some school leaders (particularly those serving mono-cultural communities), face challenges in attempting to “broaden people’s horizons” because:

“They’re actually to a certain extent setting themselves apart from the community that they’re rooted in... Some groups welcome that, and other people find that really uncomfortable, because they want to continue to raise people in the way they’ve always been raised.”

Russell Hobby



He argued that Heads are sometimes not just there “to please the community” but must challenge prevailing views. However, he notes that it is not an easy task.

Schools also need to adapt their local communities’ needs of local communities, as Mashuda Shaikh pointed out, but this does not entail compromising schools’ overall drive to develop engaged, cohesive citizenship.

2. Limits on what schools can do

Living in an area of deprivation and having low socio-economic status powerfully undermines perceived cohesion³¹. While schools can remove some barriers to accessing quality education, socio-economic disadvantage can continue to create feelings of disempowerment through other channels such as restricted opportunities on the labour market and the high incidence of crime in disadvantaged areas³². Other public services and policy areas therefore play a crucial role in any long-term, large-scale change³³.

3. Lack of infrastructure for support

The support available to schools varies substantially and three-quarters of schools say their senior leaders *and* staff need more training on preventing violent extremism³⁴. However most training in the area is currently focused on senior leadership.

Part of the problem may be a lack of awareness of existing resources relating to cohesion such as the Schools Linking network website and organisations like 3FF³⁵). Initial Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development therefore play a vital role.

³¹ *ibid*; Laurence and Heath, 2008

³² Demack et al, 2010

³³ Ipsos-Mori, 2007

³⁴ Philips et al, 2010

³⁵ Runnymede Trust & Think Global, 2011; <http://www.3ff.org.uk/>



4. Policies encouraging school freedom and choice

Policies that encourage greater school freedom and choice are “both threats and opportunities to cohesion in schools”³⁶. Such policies might be opportunities in the sense that they provide schools with room to take the initiative and tailor provision to their specific needs and context. However, these policies may also be threats given that encouraging choice and freedom may lead to increased segregation between schools. Furthermore, there is a risk that the ending inspection of the statutory duty for community cohesion may have given licence to patchy and variable provision. The 2011 curriculum review may have exacerbated this by slimming down the curriculum and giving rise to a view that cohesion is an optional add-on³⁷.

5. Lack of compulsory PSHE

Panelists (and most of our audience of teachers and educationalists) were opposed to compulsory lessons on cohesion. Instead, panelists emphasised that it was the mission and ethos of the school – how school leaders and staff behaved, the tone of assembly, how pupils were made to feel valued – that mattered.

However, whilst panelists and the audience generally felt that a statutory duty to implement social cohesion was unnecessary, Russell Hobby noted that the lack of compulsory *PSHE* was problematic (as we saw in section 5) since compulsion would help school leaders to justify their actions without it appearing they were pushing their personal agendas.

6. Unclear and controversial philosophical underpinnings

The philosophical and theoretical basis of public policy on cohesion remains confused and vague³⁸. Unanswered questions include

- To what extent should we promote Britishness or teach cohesion through British history?
- Are there really a set of ‘common values’ that people from all backgrounds share, and who decides what is or should be common?
- How do we strike the right ‘balance’ between diversity and integration?

Many also criticise the cohesion agenda for over-emphasising *integration* into British values, suggesting this is a subtle form of imperialism and racism. Ultimately, a lack of clarity on ‘shared vision’ at a policy (and theoretical) level inevitably translates into a lack of clarity in school-level policies and practices³⁹.



³⁶ Runnymede Trust & Think Global, 2011

³⁷ Runnymede Trust & Think Global, 2011; Berkeley, 2008; Ousler, 2011

³⁸ Berkeley, 2008

³⁹ *ibid*

7. Conclusions and recommendations

- A wide range of factors, from individual to community-level characteristics, influence perceptions of cohesion.
- Schools are in a unique and important position to foster cohesion, but a **broad range of partners** need to help out in order to strengthen school-level initiatives. These include the wider community, the government, local authorities and charities/social enterprises.
- **Socio-economic disadvantage** is a particularly powerful negative predictor of feelings of cohesion and schools cannot tackle this link alone. Government should not sit back and wait for schools to solve the problem.
- Schools' approaches should be tailored to their context, but all schools should ensure students (regardless of their background) acquire a **strong foundation in general knowledge** (history, geography, politics and current affairs). Developing their critical thinking, in particular their ability to demand and scrutinise evidence, is essential if they are to be insulated from the dangers of 'post-fact' politics.
- Students have a greater sense of cohesion when they **feel safe**. In order to promote cohesion, schools therefore need to protect pupils from bullying and build a secure environment for learning.
- Schools should involve students in **decision making**, for example through student voice. This gives pupils a sense of belonging and ownership which can promote cohesion. Ideally, activities should involve participation in the wider community, not just within school.
- Promoting cohesion does not require whole-scale curriculum change or new frameworks, but an **element of compulsion** (e.g. mandatory PSHE) may ensure schools feel licenced to approach controversial topics. This can create opportunities to foster pupils' sensitivity and criticality when handling challenging topics.



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This report was written by the education and youth development 'think and action tank' LKMco. LKMco is a social enterprise - we believe that society has a duty to ensure children and young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood.

We work towards this vision by helping education and youth organisations develop, evaluate and improve their work with young people. We then carry out academic and policy research and advocacy that is grounded in our experience.

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“Society should ensure that all young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood”