

NO OUTSIDERS IN OUR SCHOOL

Teaching the Equality Act in Primary Schools

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Introduction

The Equality Act 2010 states that it is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy or maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation.

(Government, 2010, 1)

The site www.equalitiesprimary.com links to news, new books and other useful resources including updated lesson plans for teaching the Equality Act in primary schools.

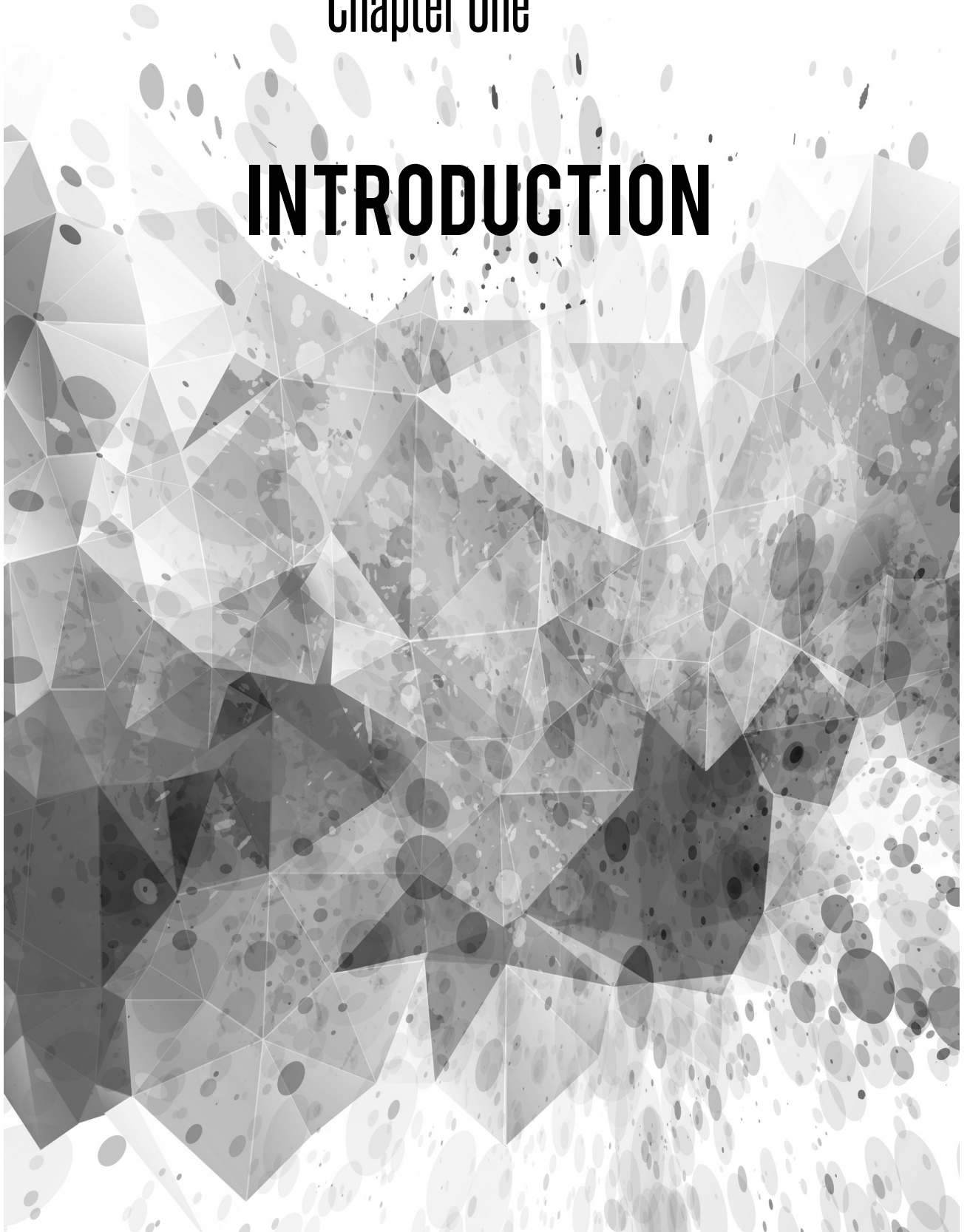
Contact andy@equalitiesprimary.com for advice or training.



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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION



Introduction

In 2007 I wrote a sequence of lesson plans to help teachers deliver lessons on equality with a lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) focus, called *Challenging Homophobia In Primary Schools: An early years resource*. Since then I have continually rewritten and adapted these resources and taught the lessons in many different schools. The opening line of the resource was, 'We need to teach five year olds that gay and lesbian men and women exist' (Moffat, 2007, 1). We are eight years further in to the new century and I am overjoyed to say that I've changed my mind about this first line.

Seven years on I don't believe that we need to be teaching children that gay men and lesbian women exist because children know that already. Any child who has a television has seen a gay couple or a gay character. Any child living in a family, in contact with uncles, aunts, cousins, stepbrothers and stepsisters, or in a street where neighbours talk to one another, is going to have been in contact with a gay person. What we now need to be teaching is that homophobia once existed but we don't have it in our school today, and that to be a person who is gay or lesbian or transgender or bi-sexual is normal, acceptable and OK. Children also need to be learning that they may identify or may not identify as LGBT as they grow up, and that whoever they grow in to as an adult is also perfectly normal and acceptable.

Another shift for me since 2007 is in the particular way that I deliver this work in my school. No longer should we separate LGBT education from education about other equalities; equality is best taught in the context of British law, where all protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 are included in a curriculum that celebrates difference. So not only are people of different sexual orientations welcome in our primary school, people of different ethnicities, genders, gender identities, religions, ages and abilities are also most welcome. There are no outsiders in our school; to quote the South African social rights activist Desmond Tutu (2004), 'Everyone is an insider, no matter their beliefs, whatever their colour, gender or sexuality' (No Outsiders Project Team, 2010, ix).

I am not the only one to have changed since 2007; the law around this work has shifted dramatically in eight years: we now have legal gay marriages across the UK and Ireland, for example. In fact, Ireland became the first country to hold a referendum on equal gay marriage in 2015 and the 'Yes' vote signalled more than ever the public perception on equalities. The Equality Act 2010 makes quite clear that discrimination is not to be tolerated in society and we now have Ofsted asking schools to demonstrate how they are tackling homophobic bullying, teaching about different families and promoting British values.

However, at the same time we have a perceived worrying rise in the radicalisation of young people and there is currently little clear guidance on how schools can meet the needs of children who are hearing different messages outside the school walls to the messages of equality that they hear inside. The election campaign of 2015 threw up an interesting dialogue between British Labour MP Tristram Hunt and a schoolboy, as reported by *The Independent*:

'Do you know who you'd vote for?' asked the man hoping to become the next Education Secretary.

'Ukip,' came the response from the schoolboy.

'You'd vote Ukip? Very good,' a panicked Mr Hunt replied.

'Why's that?'

'It might get all the foreigners out,' the kid explained.

(Dathan, 2015, n.p.)

At the time this was seen as an embarrassing blunder for a Labour MP on the campaign trail, but of course for educators it also demonstrates the presence of ideas in schools that we don't want to hear. How can we ensure that these ideas are not the accepted norm on the playground? We can't be simply telling children that their beliefs are wrong or unacceptable; we have to be delivering a curriculum that enables children to understand the benefits that exist in a society where diversity and difference is celebrated. Furthermore, we need our children to want to be part of that society, and we have to sell it to them; that desire may not come naturally by itself.

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In conclusion, the aim of this resource is to provide teachers with a curriculum that promotes equality for all sections of the community. But more than that, this resource aims to bring children and parents/carers (hereafter referred to as 'parents') on board from the start so that children leave our primary schools happy and excited about living in a community full of difference and diversity, whether that is through race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, age or religion. Children must be excited about living in a diverse twenty-first century, and want to keep it like that – not fight against it.

The 'no outsiders' quote by Desmond Tutu formed the basis for a project that ran from 2006 to 2008 supporting primary teachers to develop strategies to address lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender equality in primary schools. The 'no outsiders' project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and paved the way for this resource. Most of the ideas in this resource originated within those two years and I would like to thank that fantastic and brave team for starting me on my journey.

I also want to thank Hazel Pulley at Parkfield Community School in Birmingham and the school staff team for being so brilliant, Mark Jenett for being so full of good advice and Annie Hargreaves for giving me the idea in the first place. Also thanks to David for being so supportive.

Chapter Two

PREPARING YOUR PATH—CREATING THE WHOLE—SCHOOL ETHOS

Preparing your path – creating the whole-school ethos

One of the main things I have learned from the three schools where I have delivered this resource is to ensure that work on equalities is embedded across the school. For this work to succeed there needs to be a whole-school ethos to which everyone signs up.

How do we create an ethos?

Governors

First, the governors need to be on board. Transparency is critical and the school leadership team (SLT) needs to be clear of the vision and aims in order to take it to the governors. Take a copy of this resource and all the books it makes reference to to a governors' meeting and give everyone half an hour to read the texts. In my current school some governors borrowed books to take home and read in detail, in order to be confident about the proposals. Be clear that we are not asking for governor permission to do this work; the government is already asking schools to promote equality and diversity, and Ofsted are judging schools on strategies they are using. But at the same time we do need our governing bodies to be moving with us and in full understanding of our aims and expectations.

Staff training

Once the governors have been informed of the vision, aims and proposals, staff training is essential to ensure that all staff (including teaching assistants (TAs) and lunch-time supervisors) have the skills to deliver the messages we are promoting. We need a common language to be used by all staff across the school and on the playground to challenge any discrimination or prejudicial behaviour that arises and to promote the vision we are creating.

Of course some staff may not feel comfortable with some of the messages. It is unlikely that anyone will have tensions arising from saying to children that a person who uses a wheelchair or hearing aid is welcome at the school, but a person's faith may provide a tension with saying that it is OK to be gay. This is where the Equality Act 2010 is helpful. The Act clearly states:

The public sector Equality Duty came into force across Great Britain on 5 April 2011. It means that public bodies have to consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees.

It also requires that public bodies:

- have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination
- advance equality of opportunity
- foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.

(Government Equalities Office, 2013, 1)

The wording of this makes plain to public bodies (ie schools) that promoting some of the protected characteristics of the Equality Act while ignoring others is simply against UK law. So we cannot promote an ethos where people of diverse faith are welcome but people of diverse sexual orientation are not. Similarly, children need to be taught that this is the law, as when children eventually leave school and get a job they will not stay employed for long if they say to black colleagues, 'I am racist, so I don't want to work with you!' or to gay colleagues, 'As my faith says homosexuality is a sin, I don't want to work with you.'

The lesson plans in this resource are all based on children's picture books, and I have aimed to make them as accessible as possible for following and delivering. Hold a staff meeting and give out the books for everyone to read. Try out the role plays and games and have the discussions around challenging potential questions (see Chapter 5: 'Simple answers to challenging questions'). By far the most effective schools are those that have taken these plans and made them their own. Some schools teach

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these lessons as one-offs during personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), while some spend a whole week on a text in literacy lessons, teasing out language and developing inference skills. Both strategies work; it's the way that the school embraces the ethos that is critical rather than individual lessons. My advice is to identify a senior staff member to be responsible for overseeing the delivery of this resource and to monitor the delivery and whether the aims are being met throughout the school year.

Schools may want to lead their own training or there are many trainers available around the country who will happily come in for a half-day or staff inset. Some trainers will use their own materials, but the messages will be consistent, so it doesn't really matter which plans you use as long as your ethos is clear. It is very useful to have open discussions in staff meetings, particularly if some staff are uncomfortable with some of the messages, but keep in mind that opting out of the ethos is not an option for staff; we can have the discussion but the bottom line is that UK law says that schools need to promote equality of opportunity and that includes all equality.

Making the message clear

Mission statement

As visitors enter the school building there needs to be some signal that here is a school that promotes diversity: we are a place where everyone is welcome and all difference is celebrated. A mission statement makes the school ethos clear and also needs to include reference to behaviour that is not acceptable, that is, discrimination and bullying.

The Parkfield Community School mission statement is below (see Figure 2.1). It is put up around school so that the message is loud and clear.

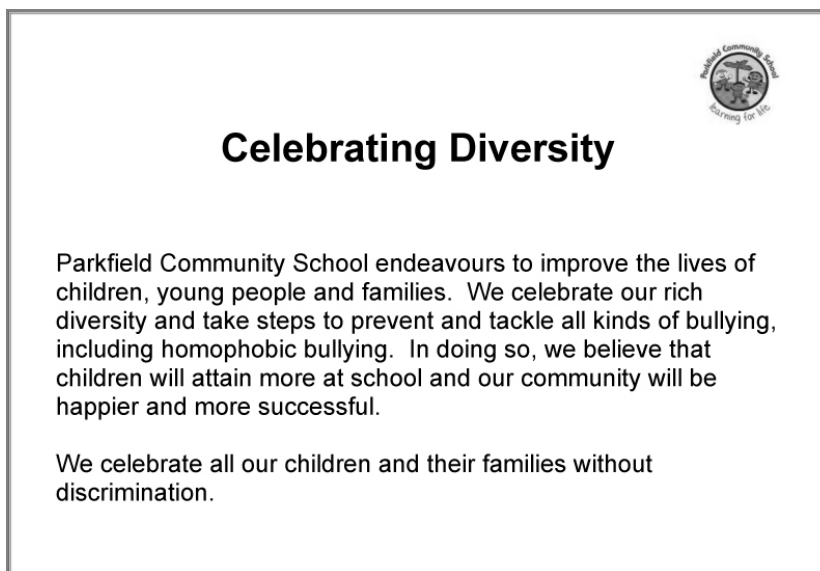


Figure 2.1: Parkfield Community School mission statement

Signing-in to school

All schools have a signing-in system. Some signing-in is simply a book where you clock in and clock out; other systems demand that you agree to a conduct of behaviour. At my current school, as visitors sign in they are asked to read and agree to a visitor agreement (see Figure 2.2).

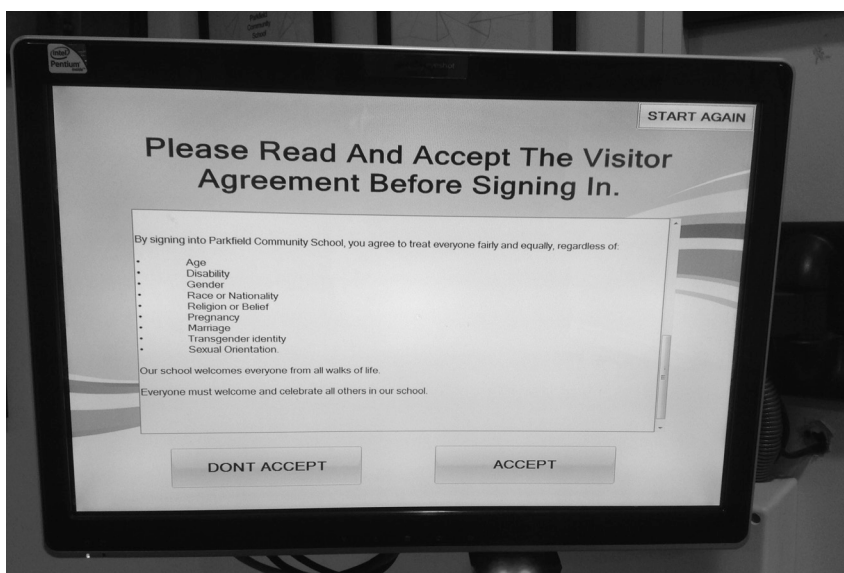


Figure 2.2: Parkfield Community School's signing-in system

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This makes clear where the school stands on discrimination and equalities: regardless of your opinion on equalities, if you want to come in here, you sign up to ours; after all we are following guidelines set out in British law.

Equality Act posters

We have Equality Act posters (see Figure 2.3) on every outside wall so that when parents pick up their children they see the posters every day.



Figure 2.3: Parkfield Community School Equality Act poster

There are six posters in total – each in weatherproof casing – around the school perimeter. The wording is simple and to the point and again makes quite clear that we protect all equalities at our school. Around each poster I have quotes from Year 6 pupils that I sourced at the start of the academic year by asking for quotes about the Equality Act. Among these quotes are:

'Respect each other. Don't be racist. Everyone is equal.'

'No matter what colour you are you are welcome here.'

'Everybody is equal due to the Equality Act.'

'We respect each other's gender and if you are gay or straight.'

'We respect everyone's religion and gender.'

'Do not judge people by the colour of their skin.'

'I believe that having no outsiders is a great thing because no one should be left out.'

The quotes stay up all year and will be replaced by new Year 6 quotes at the start of the next academic year.

Displays around school

Children need to be surrounded by a consistent message: there are no outsiders here; everyone is different; we like being different; we are all equal in our difference; I can get along with you even though we are different; we live in the UK and the law says this.

Many children's books that support a message of difference provide a great stimulus for classroom displays; some are included in this resource like *This is Our House* by Michael Rosen.

At a previous school I asked every child to draw a self-portrait on a postage-size stamp, stuck them up under a 'This is our school' banner, asked Year 6 to name the groups of people who were welcome at our school – black, white, people who wear glasses, Asian, Irish, gay, ginger hair, female, male and so on – and then asked them to put those groups up under the subheading 'Everyone is welcome at our school'.

Figure 2.4 shows a simple lesson that was delivered by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) team at my current school using *Red Rockets and Rainbow Jelly* by Sue Heap and Nick Sharrat.

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Figure 2.4: Parkfield Community School's 'We all like ...' / 'Some of us like ...' display

The Early Years children also added their own quotes to the equalities poster outside their entrance rather than use quotes by Year 6. The quotes read, 'There are no outsiders', 'We are all different and that is ok"', 'We are all friends' and 'We like different things and that is ok'.

Figure 2.5 shows a display created by a Year 2 class who used *The Other Ark* by Lynley Dodd to create a display about making sure that no one is left out despite each of us being different.

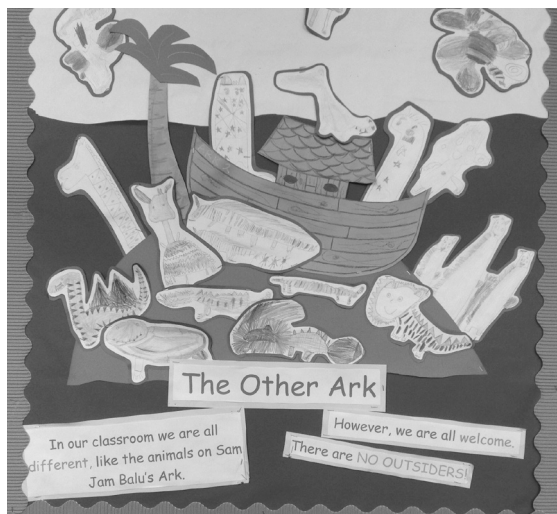


Figure 2.5: Parkfield Community School's 'No outsiders' display

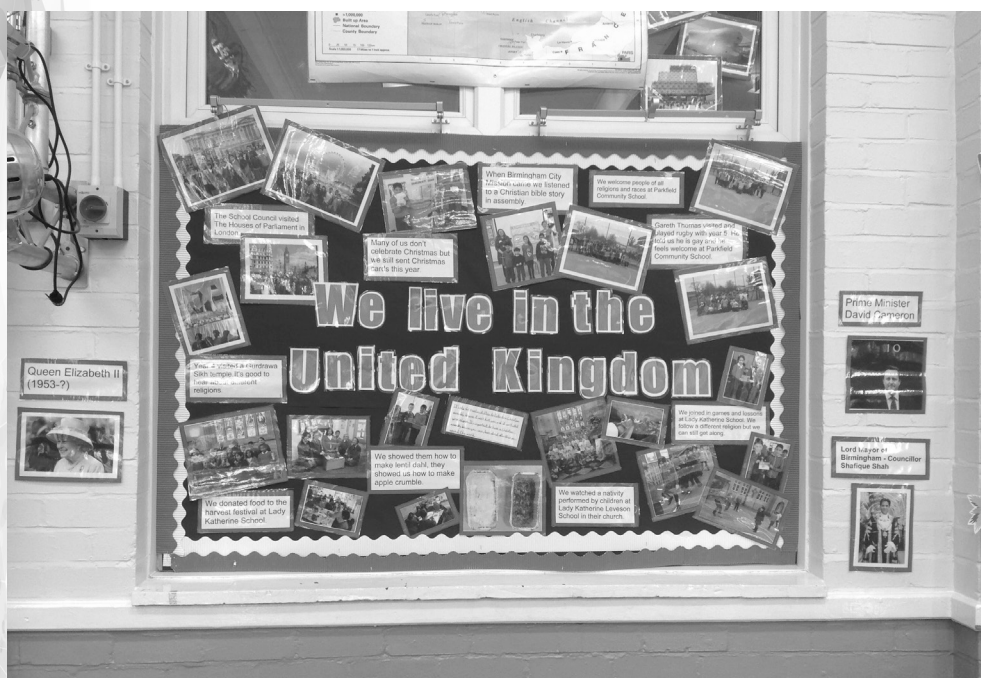


Figure 2.7: Parkfield Community School's promotion of British values display

One photo on the display features the retired Welsh professional rugby player Gareth Thomas, who we arranged to visit us through a deal with a supply teaching agency. I asked Gareth to play rugby with children all afternoon and then to come out as homosexual in an assembly later that day. This worked incredibly well (see Chapter 6: 'Coming out in primary schools') and the paragraph next to the photo of Gareth with Year 5 reads: 'Gareth Thomas visited and played rugby with Year 5. He told us he is gay and feels welcome at Parkfield Community School.'

There is another photograph showing a Christian mission group in an assembly with a display of artwork showing a bible story. I asked a child to write a note about listening to a Christian bible story as a Muslim and to justify why learning about other religions is important. The child wrote: 'It's ok for Muslim children to listen to a Christian assembly because it won't hurt you and it won't affect your religion. It's important to have a Christian assembly because you can learn about other things around the world.'

We have a 'Learning to be safe together' display in the main corridor. Our school also follows the Prevent agenda, which aims to stop radicalisation of children and young people.

We asked children around the school to fill in details about likes and dislikes, ethnicity, family details and experiences of different families to show the wealth of diversity around school despite most children following the same faith. Each child completed a form during an information and communications technology (ICT) lesson and imported a photograph. The forms are up for the year and will be replaced next year.

Also on the board is a reference to the Equality Act. A child was asked to describe what the Act meant for our school and the resulting note was: 'All groups are welcome at Parkfield School. If you are black, white, Christian, Muslim, gay. We are all treated equally.'

The Equality Act should be referenced as much as possible to remind children and the community that equality is British law.

Reward the ethos

We have 'No outsiders' stickers that midday supervisors give out to children who are demonstrating behaviour on the playground that promotes the ethos, that is, making sure children are not left out and that there is no name calling or discrimination.

There is also a 'No outsiders' certificate, designed by a child in the school, used to promote the desired behaviour.

Support from the local authority

It made a huge difference to the work at Parkfield School to be able to say that the same work was being done in schools across the city, and indeed the country. In March 2015 Birmingham City Council sent out a letter to all headteachers and chairs of governors in which they stated: 'We expect that all schools in Birmingham will prevent and tackle homophobic, biophobic and transphobic bullying and language and talk about different family models.'

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This was a wonderful green light that demonstrated to any parents concerned about our plans that we were not alone in doing this work. The resource I wrote in 2007 was now a full primary school pack including lesson plans from Reception to Year 6, and known as CHIPS (*Challenging Homophobia in Primary Schools*). It was being rolled out across the country by 'Educate and Celebrate' (see www.educateandcelebrate.com) and we were able to point to schools in other cities around the UK that were doing the same work. Every school that takes on the lesson plans makes the journey easier for the next, as schools realise that they are not alone, and furthermore that there is a danger that they will be left behind if they are not promoting equalities in their curriculum.

Rehearse difficult conversations

The head teacher and I are aware that for some members of our community this work presents a tension, and we rehearse difficult conversations before meetings. In this way we are prepared for what may arise and unflustered if and when it does. I recommend sitting with the Senior Leadership Team and doing a 'worst-questions' scenario discussion where answers to potential questions are planned. This strategy has been a huge help to us in the last year. Some suggestions as to questions to discuss are included in Chapter 5.