

NASUWT

Islamophobia

Advice for Schools and Colleges

England/Wales/Scotland/Northern Ireland

Tackling Islamophobia

The problem of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice and racism has intensified in the wake of the events of September 11th 2001. In certain quarters, an unacceptable and unfounded association has been made between human rights violations, terrorist networks and the Muslim communities and asylum seekers present in Britain. This has led to an inflammation of racial and religious tensions in some towns and cities, and may have contributed to the resurgence of extreme far-right political parties. All of these developments have resulted in an increased level of fear within Muslim and other communities which impacts on all pupils/students and staff in schools and colleges.

What is Islamophobia?

The term 'Islamophobia' refers to anti-Muslim prejudice and racism. Islamophobia is based upon an unfounded hostility towards Islam. It may be directed against individuals or groups because of their actual or perceived religious background or identification. Islamophobia results in unfair discrimination and harassment, and the exclusion of individuals or groups from the mainstream areas of social, economic or political life.

In recent years, the problem of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice and racism have become an increasingly common feature of British social life. This problem has intensified as a result of the events following September 11th 2001.

Anti-Muslim prejudice and racism is based upon claims that Islam is an 'inferior' religion and a threat to the dominant values of society. However, Islamophobia is not restricted to a hatred of Islam, but also prejudice and hatred directed against people who are or who are perceived to be Muslim. As such, Islamophobia cannot be separated from the problem of anti-Muslim racism.

Anti-Muslim racism may be evident in relation to employment, the provision of goods and services, and the general treatment of Muslim communities by non-Muslim individuals, groups or other bodies.

Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice and racism may include a range of behaviours and practices such as:

- direct verbal or physical attacks against individuals and groups;
- discrimination in relation to access to jobs, goods and services and other civic rights and entitlements;
- cultural or religious insensitivity which serves to exclude Muslim people from exercising their rights as citizens.

Such prejudice and racism may take the form of:

- name-calling;
- offensive 'jokes';
- verbal assault;
- graffiti;
- intimidation;

- exclusion;
- physical assault.

NASUWT ADVICE

Where members believe that they are the victims of anti-Muslim prejudice and racism they should contact their NASUWT Regional Centre immediately.

Muslims in Britain

9.9% of the British population are from minority ethnic groups. However, for the first time, the 2001 Census has identified that there is also a significant level of religious diversity within British society.

There has been a Muslim presence in Britain for at least 300 years.¹ The 2001 Census revealed that Muslims constitute the second largest religious group in Britain (3% of the population). Muslim communities are present in all Census enumeration districts in Britain, with the exception of the Isles of Scilly.

The Census demonstrates that there is extensive ethnic and religious diversity within British society. As such, all children and young people need to learn about this diversity and develop a respect for different beliefs and practices. This is as much an issue for schools/colleges with high proportions of pupils/students from minority ethnic backgrounds as it is for schools/colleges serving different pupil/student populations.

It is important for all schools and colleges to monitor the composition of their student populations and staff employed in a manner which is able to take account of ethnic and religious differences.

Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and Northern Ireland Act 1998

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 which applies in England, Wales and Scotland imposes a statutory duty on public authorities (including schools, colleges and LEAs) to:

- a) promote equality of opportunity;
- b) promote good relations between persons of different racial groups; and
- c) eliminate unlawful racial discrimination.

In Northern Ireland, section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 applies. Section 75 imposes a statutory equality obligation on all public authorities to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different religious belief, racial group and on other grounds.

¹ Runnymede Trust, Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All, 1997

All schools, colleges and LEAs (or other relevant body) are, therefore, required to have in place a race equality scheme which sets out how they will meet the general and specific duties imposed on them as a result of the new legislation.

Schools, colleges and LEAs (or relevant body) should address the issue of Islamophobia as part of their racial equality scheme. NASUWT has published separate advice for schools and colleges on the implications of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 which is available from NASUWT Headquarters.

NASUWT ADVICE

NASUWT Representatives should clarify with their school, college or LEA (or relevant body) the extent of the policies and procedures in respect of racial equality and ensure that these address the problem of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice and racism.

NASUWT Representatives should take steps to ensure that they are consulted on the development and implementation of the racial equality policy.

DfES Guidance

The DfES has published guidance for schools after the events of September 11th 2001.² Although the DfES guidance does not specifically consider the issue of Islamophobia, it is, nevertheless, relevant to understanding what actions schools and colleges can take to address this problem.

The DfES guidance makes clear the need for schools *'to provide a safe environment'* for all pupils, parents and staff. Specifically, the DfES guidance highlights the potential risk of heightened *'tension between pupils, parents and staff from different ethnic backgrounds or religions'* and alerts schools to the possibility of *'extremist groups in a locality ...[seeking] to stir up tensions in the area'*.

Excessive fear is likely to have an impact on the behaviour of pupils and staff at school.

The DfES guidance makes clear that:

- schools have a responsibility to ensure that the curriculum addresses issues of difference and diversity in ways that counter prejudiced assumptions about different ethnic, cultural and faith groups;
- schools must challenge false assumptions and stereotypes with sound factual information;
- schools should ensure that every child, young person and member of staff feels valued and secure in school;

² DfES, Guidance after the events of 11 September (<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/sept11guidance>)

- schools should promote a climate of respect for different beliefs and customs;
- schools should be vigilant for any signs of name-calling, abuse or bullying involving any member of the school community, which might have a racial or religious content;
- schools should deal with incidents promptly and sensitively.

The DfES has also published guidance for schools on bullying and on pupil inclusion. These publications reiterate the need for schools to have in place clear procedures for dealing with all forms of pupil bullying, including taking action against racist incidents. As the DfES Guidance on 'Social Inclusion: Pupil Support' makes clear:

'Staff need to take particular care if there is a possibility that an incident was provoked by racial harassment. Teachers also need to ensure that they avoid any risk of stereotyping and that they are alert to cultural differences in manner and demeanour.'

NASUWT ADVICE

In line with the DfES guidance, all staff within the school/college should be consulted on how the school/college will work to challenge Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice and racism within or outside the school/college.

Where members believe that local tensions exist that could affect the safety of pupils/students and staff, they should notify the headteacher and their NASUWT Representative.

Tackling Islamophobia in Educational Settings

Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice and racism is an issue for all schools and colleges, regardless of the number of Muslim pupils/students or staff within the establishment.

All schools and colleges should review their policies to ensure that they are non-discriminatory. Particular attention should be given to policies in respect of:

- curriculum;
- pastoral care;
- behaviour management and exclusions;
- bullying;
- admissions;
- parental involvement and complaints;
- dress codes;
- recruitment and selection, performance management, pay and promotion.

Schools and colleges should also take steps to ensure that:

- all staff, pupils/students and parents within the school/college community are welcomed and valued;
- the curriculum is relevant and appropriate to the needs and backgrounds of all pupils/students;
- the systems for school/college admission and exclusion are non-discriminatory;
- the arrangements for appointing and promoting staff are non-discriminatory;
- all staff are trained to address issues of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity;
- pupils/students have access to a curriculum which reflects and represents accurately the racial, cultural and religious diversity of Britain and the world;
- pupil/student progress and achievement is subject to assessment on grounds of ethnicity, religion and cultural difference;
- all ethnic and religious groups within the school/college community are properly and appropriately consulted on matters pertaining to the life of the school/college;
- the school's/college's processes and decision making are monitored to take account of their impact for equality on ethnic, cultural and religious grounds.

Schools/colleges should identify practical ways in which they intend to counter Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice and racism. Practical opportunities might include the use of:

- assemblies;
- tutorial time;
- PSHE and citizenship lessons;
- counselling and advice facilities for pupils and staff;
- parental meetings/home-school agreements;
- developing links with and support for parents, community and religious organisations to address the problem;
- staff INSET days.

How Schools and Colleges can Challenge Islamophobia

Schools/colleges can challenge the problem of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice and racism where there is effective school leadership and management.

Schools/colleges should seek to develop a culture and ethos in which it is clear that all forms of prejudice and bigotry will not be tolerated. This should be firmly reinforced through the application of the school/college discipline policy.

By law, each school/college should have in place clear policies and procedures for dealing with racist and other related incidents (including religious bigotry and intolerance) as part of its behaviour and security policies.

Policies and procedures should be subject to routine monitoring to identify trends and issue for further action and development.

Consultation

Each school/college should communicate clearly to all pupils/students, parents, staff and the wider school/college community its rejection of racism and other forms of bigotry, including Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice and racism.

The school/college should consult with all staff on how it intends to address racial equality and any actual or potential anti-Muslim prejudice and racism.

Parents and pupils should also be involved to ensure that they:

- understand the policy and its purpose;
- respond positively in support of the policy;
- are clear about who they should contact within the school where issues or difficulties arise.

NASUWT ADVICE

Members should be consulted on the actions that the school/college intends to take to address the problem of Islamophobia.

Involving External Bodies

Where problems exist within a school/college or where it is evident that there are tensions within the local area, the school/college should:

- inform and/or consult the LEA;
- involve the police, as appropriate;
- carry out an appropriate health and safety risk assessment;
- consult appropriate experts, including local community and religious organisations and trade unions.

NASUWT ADVICE

Members should be vigilant about Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice and racism. Concerns on such matters should be reported to the headteacher, and the NASUWT Representative or NASUWT Regional Centre.