



THE RUNNYMEDE TRUST CONSULTATION RESPONSE TO:

Schools' Role in Promoting Pupil Well-being

25th September 2008

Overview

The Runnymede Trust welcomes this improved guidance but urges the government to be more explicit about the importance of promoting equality and social cohesion to pupil well being.

The Runnymede Trust welcomes this opportunity to respond to the draft guidance on *Schools' Role in Promoting Pupil Well-Being*.

About us

The Runnymede Trust is an independent policy research organisation focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic society.

Our mandate is to promote a successful multi-ethnic Britain – a Britain where citizens and communities feel valued, enjoy equal opportunities to develop their talents, lead fulfilling lives and accept a collective responsibility, all in the spirit of civic friendship, shared identity and a common sense of belonging. Runnymede has been active in the field of education for many years. Within our current education programme we devise and promote practical strategies for use in the classroom and, at community level, we aim to address and support the specific needs of minority ethnic young people. Further we focus on identifying, sustaining and augmenting improvements in race equality and social cohesion in the changing terrain of education policy and practice

Guidance on well-being

We welcome the intention of this guidance to recognise, and develop schools' role in promoting the well-being of pupils and to identify the support they can expect from their local authority and other partners in the Children's Trust. We understand that schools, as the universal service for children and their families, are uniquely well-placed to contribute to all aspects of their well-being, working with parents and other services. While excellent teaching and learning to unlock the potential of every child is the core business of schools, promoting the well-being of pupils is important for both a good childhood and the impact on children's ability to learn and develop.

Having considered the guidance we have decided that the concerns or questions it raises for us from a race equality perspective do not neatly apply to the consultation response form and therefore we have chosen to highlight the following issues:

Understanding diversity, equality and inclusion in schools

Section 5 of this document concludes by noting schools' responsibilities for vulnerable children and looked after children, and their responsibilities under equalities legislation. This identifies

our main concern with this guidance. While the guidance makes a nod towards equality, it fails to embrace the broader issues around equality, including race equality. Equality should not only be associated with a response to failure of one kind or another. The implication in this section relates equality issues solely to vulnerable groups. Diversity is presented as problematic in terms of participation and achievement and not a factor to be welcomed in schools. The section includes only a couple of sentences on the need to ensure compliance with equality legislation. Rather than taking the opportunity to reinforce the links between equality, diversity and well-being, this section seems rather cursory. This cursory acknowledgement reflects somewhat casual thinking around diversity, equality and inclusion in school. It does not make clear that in order to promote the well-being of different groups we should focus on ensuring they feel valued and have a sense of place and belonging within a school regardless of whether they maybe considered vulnerable. Clarity is required so that schools recognise and value the diversity of all their pupils and understand that meeting the needs of specific individuals or groups is important to develop *successful learner* identities which facilitate educational success and this will include for BME and white working class boys and girls (D Reay 2008)¹.

There is also a missed opportunity within this section of the guidance to make the relationship between recognising and responding to difference and promoting community cohesion and the positive impact this would have on pupil wellbeing. The section in this guidance on 'promoting school to school collaboration' could also reflect an understanding of how this could promote community cohesion and help build better understanding between pupils from different backgrounds, reduce conflict and so promote pupil wellbeing.

Interestingly, Section 6 of the guidance that gives detailed, illustrative examples of some of the practical ways in which schools can promote wellbeing more clearly reflects this broader understanding of race equality and cohesion, for example '*ensuring curriculum and teaching are culturally sensitive...*' and '*providing opportunities for children to interact, learn and work together with other children from different backgrounds*'. This understanding should be reflected in Section 5 on equalities. but even the examples of practice in Section 6 could go further as it also refers to helping pupils understand 'other faiths and cultures' but neglects to say 'different ethnic or linguistic or indeed class backgrounds'.

Effective involvement of parents and pupils

The guidance reflects the importance of effective pupil and parental voice in terms of understanding, supporting and measuring the well-being of pupils in a school but needs to recognise that different groups of parents and pupils may find schools less warm and welcoming as institutions and therefore less inclined and able to share their views.

Understanding how to draw-in and involve parents from different backgrounds will have a significant impact on partnership working to promote pupil well-being. The Runnymede Trust have produced 'Tell me what I need to know' leaflets² to help parents, particularly those from BME, Refugee, Asylum-seeking and Traveller communities to support their children's education more confidently and effectively. This has been in response to research carried out in 2006 that identified the barriers to involvement that parents experienced. Both parents and schools felt there were 'areas of misunderstanding, mistrust, sensitivity and lack of communication'. Therefore it would be helpful if this well-being guidance showed an understanding that there were barriers to effective involvement for some parents and also pupils and this has a bearing in terms of promoting race equality and well-being.

¹ Making sense of white working class educational underachievement, D Reay 2008

² Tell me what I need to know, leaflet for BME parents, Runnymede Trust 2008

Workforce Development

This guidance espouses the need to develop the children's workforce capacity and capability to meet the requirements of the well-being duty and the ambitions for the 21st Century School but talks exclusively around the skills and competencies required of the workforce and does not recognise the need to develop a more diverse workforce reflective of the children and families they serve and the importance to some pupils well being that comes from having a sense they can identify and relate to staff from similar cultural, faith or ethnic backgrounds.

We hope that these comments provide a useful contribution to developing the *Guidance for Schools in Promoting Pupil Wellbeing* and look forward to reading the result of the overall consultation once published.

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