

Extra support to safeguard political impartiality in schools

New guidance to support teachers in tackling sensitive issues in the classroom in a politically impartial way is being published today, Thursday 17 February.

Teaching about political issues and the differing views on these is an essential part of the curriculum, helping pupils to form their own opinions and prepare them for later life.

The new guidance will help teachers and schools navigate issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the legacy of the British Empire or societal responses to racism in accordance with the law, which states that teachers must not promote partisan political views and should offer a balanced overview of opposing views when political issues are taught.

It follows commitments made last year to develop specific guidance on this issue.

Practical examples include:

- When teaching about the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the UK, teachers should not present discriminatory opposing beliefs held at the time in an uncritical manner or as acceptable in our society today;
- Teachers should not present opposing views to the fundamental underpinnings to our society, like freedom of speech and protection from violence and criminal activity;
- When teaching about racism, teachers should be clear that it has no place in our society – but should avoid advocating for specific organisations that have widely contested aims or views;
- When teaching younger students about historical figures with contested legacies, it may be advisable to focus on what these figures are most renowned for and factual information about them, if teachers think pupils may not be able to understand the contested aspects of their lives, beliefs and actions;
- Schools might invite local political figures, including MPs, councillors, or former pupils involved in politics, to talk to pupils, which can be balanced by inviting a range of people with differing views, or by teaching directly about other candidates and political parties; and
- Following a complaint, it may become clear that during a lesson a teacher suggested to pupils that it is an objective fact that the political system of a certain country is the 'fairest' and 'best' in the world. A proportionate response may be to ask the teacher to clarify during their next lesson that this was their own personal political view.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

I know one of the reasons many teachers feel so passionate about the profession is the remarkable role they play in young people's lives, helping them understand more about themselves and their views of the world.

I don't want there to be any barriers – real or perceived – to teachers' vital work in this space, which is why I am reinforcing that no subject is off-limits in the classroom, as long as it is treated in an age-appropriate way, with sensitivity and respect, and without promoting contested theories as fact.

Clearer guidance on political impartiality is just one part of my wider work to give children the best possible education as the government continues to prioritise skills, schools and families, to enable young people to reach the full height of their potential.

In the rare cases where parents or carers have concerns about teaching of politically contentious issues, the guidance will provide a plain English reference point for discussions with head teachers, helping resolve issues more quickly and easily.

The guidance makes clear that in identifying political issues, teachers should be mindful that they sometimes do not relate directly to government policy, for example a campaign for a business to boycott trade with a certain country.

It also clarifies the requirement for teachers to make a 'balanced presentation of opposing views' on political issues does not mean that pupils must be taught about an opposite view to every view which is covered, or that different views must be given equal time in teaching or that those views cannot be critically assessed.

The new guidance is expected to provide reassurance to the vast majority of schools that they are already meeting the legal requirements in place.

Chief Executive of Star Academies Sir Hamid Patel CBE said:

Schools play a crucial role in equipping pupils with the skills and knowledge to debate topical issues in an informed way.

This guidance provides helpful clarification on securing impartiality, with examples that will support teachers in their decision making about the curriculum and its delivery.

Chief Executive of Outwood Grange Academies Trust Martyn Oliver said:

The requirement for schools to act with political impartiality has existed for many years and the vast majority of schools manage this with great sensitivity and expertise.

This guidance is a welcome addition to these duties placed on schools as it provides practical examples and will help school leaders consider political neutrality in their curriculum design.

The guidance does not seek to limit what schools can and should teach to children but helps them when faced with teaching contested events and navigating 'fake news' and clashing opinions and truths.

The guidance applies to all schools, including academies and independent schools, but not early years settings, 16-19 academies, further education colleges or universities. A short leaflet for schools and the full guidance will be available on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).