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Guidance

Political impartiality in schools

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This guidance explains the existing legal requirements relating to political impartiality in schools.

It will help those working with and in schools to understand how these legal duties might impact teaching and extra-curricular activity. It does not include any new statutory requirements.

Within this guidance, the term 'schools' is used to refer to all those subject to legal duties including:

- local authorities
- school proprietors
- governing bodies
- academy trusts (including senior managers and academy trustees)
- headteachers and executive leaders (for maintained schools and academies)

Secretary of State foreword

Schools play an important role in preparing children and young people for life in modern Britain, and teaching them about the society and world they grow up in. At school, children and young people are often first exposed to important political issues. Some of these issues might define their future, proving to be the building blocks of a passion which goes on to shape their longer-term interests and career.

Teaching about political issues, the different views people have, and the ways pupils can engage in our democratic society is an essential part of a broad and balanced curriculum. It is an important way in which schools support pupils to become active citizens who can form their own views, whilst having an understanding and respect for legitimate differences of opinion.

Over the last few years, there has been much discussion about political impartiality in schools, often in the context of specific political issues and movements. I know that this has at times been difficult for school leaders, teachers, and staff, as they navigate how to handle and teach about these complex issues sensitively and appropriately. That is why I'm pleased this government is publishing clear guidance explaining schools' existing legal duties on political impartiality.

I hope this guidance can offer assurance to most schools that their legal duties in this area are being met without issue. For other schools, the guidance should help them put in place the necessary processes to ensure adherence going forward.

Legal duties on political impartiality ultimately help schools command the confidence of our whole diverse and multi-opinioned society. Parents and carers want to be sure that their children can learn about political issues and begin to form their own independent opinions, without being influenced by the personal views of those teaching them. I know teachers themselves feel similarly.

Where concerns do arise, from parents and carers, or others in the school community, it is important that these are treated seriously and handled with the necessary sensitivity.

Importantly, I hope this guidance helps all parties to understand how schools should go about meeting their legal duties, allowing issues to be resolved through constructive dialogue and agreement rather than unnecessary escalation. I encourage everyone to read through this guidance, and to keep in mind that in most cases simple steps can be taken to address any issues relating to political impartiality that arise.

It is also important to remember that nothing in this guidance limits schools' freedom to teach about sensitive, challenging, and controversial political issues, as they consider appropriate and necessary.

Schools should also continue to reinforce important shared principles that underpin our society, whether that be upholding democratic rights or more generally promoting respect and tolerance. Understanding where views and opinions go further than this and where the legal duties on political impartiality may be relevant, is an important part of doing this effectively.

Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP
Secretary of State for Education

Introduction

This guidance does not include any new statutory requirements and is based on legal duties on political impartiality that have been in place for many years, and which we know most school leaders, teachers and staff already consider in their work.

We are clear that this guidance does not seek to limit the range of political issues and viewpoints schools can and do teach about.

This guidance should support those working with and in schools to understand the relevant legal duties. It provides advice on how they can be considered when teaching about political issues, working with external agencies and beyond the curriculum. It should also clarify the role of the specific bodies and individuals subject to the legal duties.

The scenarios included are designed to support an understanding of how schools' legal duties on political impartiality can be met. This includes in difficult and sensitive circumstances where the boundaries of what is and isn't appropriate and in line with the legal duties, may not be clear. They are illustrative and not intended to be prescriptive guidance on which political issues schools should teach or specify set actions all schools must take.

Meeting the legal duties on political impartiality is possible with reasonable and proportionate steps. It will always rely on teachers and staff using their judgement and expertise effectively.

Most schools will have no difficulty meeting their legal duties on political impartiality and will be confident in the way risks to political impartiality are managed. For those schools, no action may be needed after reading this guidance, but we hope it still serves to support decision making where necessary and as assurance about how these legal duties are being met.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to consider how:

- to ensure political impartiality as part of a school's existing processes
- teachers and staff can best be supported in this area through training or other means

Given the changing nature of political issues and how they are taught, schools may wish to consider reviewing their approach to political impartiality even where issues have not already emerged.

It is important that all schools treat concerns about impartiality from parents, carers, or others seriously. Schools should take steps, where necessary and proportionate, to rectify any breaches of these legal duties on impartiality that are brought to their attention.

The law

Existing statutory requirements on political impartiality cover all schools, regardless of type or funding arrangement. This includes independent schools.

These legal duties mean schools:

- must prohibit the promotion of partisan political views
- should take steps to ensure the balanced presentation of opposing views on political issues when they are brought to the attention of pupils

For maintained schools, these legal duties are set out in [Section 406](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/406) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/406>) and [Section 407](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/407) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/407>) of the Education Act 1996. Most academies will also have a specific clause in their funding agreement which requires adherence to the same provisions.

For independent schools, the legal duties are set out in Part 2 of the [Schedule to the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/made>). These requirements also apply to academies.

Legal duties on political impartiality do not supersede schools' other statutory requirements. Schools should take a reasonable and proportionate approach to ensuring political impartiality, alongside their other responsibilities.

This includes legal requirements under the:

- Equality Act 2010 (including the Public Sector Equality Duty for state-funded schools)
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Prevent duty

Schools are also required to actively promote the fundamental British values of:

- democracy
- the rule of law
- individual liberty
- mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs

Schools designated with a religious character are free to teach according to the tenets of their faith. We do not consider principles or views in line with these tenets to be covered by statutory requirements on political impartiality.

There are existing arrangements for the regulation of teachers' professional conduct. Under the [teachers' standards](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/made>), teachers must ensure that personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit pupils' vulnerability or might lead them to break the law. Teachers can also be subject to a prohibition order if their actions or behaviours undermine fundamental British values.

The Secretary of State also has the power under section 128 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 to prohibit an unsuitable individual from participating in the management of independent schools, including academies. We have published guidance on [barring unsuitable individuals from managing independent schools](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/barring-unsuitable-individuals-from-managing-independent-schools) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/barring-unsuitable-individuals-from-managing-independent-schools>).

Understanding terminology

School leaders, staff and teachers will need to interpret the terminology in schools' legal duties on political impartiality using their reasonable judgement. The following descriptions of some key terms from the legislation may be helpful in supporting this.

... forbid the **promotion of partisan political views**

In relevant case law - *Dimmock v Secretary of State for Education and Skills* [2007] - the court considered that the best synonym for the term 'partisan' is 'one-sided' and suggested that 'political views' are those expressed with a political purpose, such as to further the interests of a particular partisan group, change the law or change government policy. This could be on a wide range of matters such as economic and social issues at a local, national, or international level.

Schools should be aware that 'partisan political views' are not limited to just political parties. They may also be held by campaign groups, lobbyists and charitable organisations.

Where partisan political views – or material which promote these – are covered as part of teaching a broad and balanced curriculum, schools should ensure that these are presented with the appropriate context, which supports a balanced presentation of opposing views. Schools can teach about partisan political views effectively, without breaching their legal duties on political impartiality.

What is prohibited in the legal duties is promoting partisan political views to pupils. This means encouraging their support for, or the adoption of, these views. The promotion of partisan political views might be through overtly inappropriate conduct by teachers and staff such as encouraging pupils to support a particular political party or candidate in an election. It could also be by more subtle means such as presenting partisan political views as undisputed factual accounts and failing to explain their contested nature, where this is not obvious to pupils.

...take such steps as are **reasonably practicable** to secure that, where **political issues** are brought to the attention of pupils, they are offered a **balanced presentation of opposing views**

Determining whether a topic constitutes a 'political issue' may require careful consideration. However, some issues are clearly political, such as those relating to ongoing government activity or on which the main political parties have different views.

Some political issues do not relate directly to government policy at all, for example, campaigns for companies and other organisations, education settings or individuals to change their own policies, practices, and behaviours.

Not all areas of ethical debate are political issues. There are some concepts and views that can be considered as shared principles that underpin our society and not political issues in this context. Examples include a belief in upholding certain rights, such as freedom of speech and protection from violence and criminal activity - or challenging discrimination and prejudice, including racism.

It is important to note that many ongoing ethical debates and topics will constitute a political issue. This can be the case even when the main political parties and other partisan groups agree on a view, but there is not a wider consensus in public opinion. Instead, there is continued debate, where different legitimate views are expressed.

This guidance provides scenarios chosen in part to help build an understanding of what constitutes a political issue. However, ultimately school leaders and teachers will need to use reasonable judgement to determine what is and is not a 'political issue'.

Where schools remain unsure if a topic is a 'political issue' it is advisable to avoid promoting a particular view to pupils. Instead give a balanced factual account of the topic, in line with the legal duties on political impartiality.

The term 'balanced presentation of opposing views', does not mean that pupils must be taught about an opposite view to every view which is covered, or that different views are always given equal time in teaching or cannot be critically assessed. Instead, it means that in presenting views on political

issues, teachers and staff should take a 'fair and dispassionate' approach - in accordance with the judgement of the court in the case law mentioned earlier. See the section on [balance in teaching](#) for more information.

In this context, the term 'reasonably practicable' means that steps taken to ensure balance should be reasonable and proportionate. They should not inhibit the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum.

Any measures or policies implemented should consider the specific circumstances of the school, for example, the stage of education and age of pupils, or prevalent issues within the school community.

Teaching about political issues

Schools will need to teach about political issues in many areas of the curriculum. When planning this, teachers should consider how to ensure teaching aligns with schools' duties on political impartiality.

Any steps taken to ensure these legal duties are met should be reasonable and proportionate. School leaders, staff and teachers will need to use their discretion to make sensible decisions on how best to apply the advice in this section.

Identifying political issues

Decisions on what to teach will be driven by what teachers feel should be covered in order to teach the subject properly. Identifying political issues in teaching when planning a curriculum or specific lessons, will help ensure these are taught effectively and appropriately. This guidance should help illustrate what might constitute a political issue, but ultimately this will require teachers to continue to use their own judgement.

Political issues are particularly important to cover in certain subjects, for example, citizenship or history. However, this might also be necessary in other subjects where there are fewer and less obvious political issues in the curriculum.

Some topics may not directly require the presentation of a political issue, but teaching may lead to presenting political issues that relate indirectly to the curriculum content.

Scenario A

Teaching about climate change and the scientific facts and evidence behind this, would not constitute teaching about a political issue. Schools do not need to present misinformation, such as unsubstantiated claims that anthropogenic climate change is not occurring, to provide balance here.

However, where teaching covers the potential solutions for tackling climate change, this may constitute a political issue. Different groups, including political parties and campaign groups, may have partisan political views on the best way to address climate change.

This part of the topic should be taught in a balanced manner, with teachers not promoting any of the partisan political views covered to pupils.

Balance in teaching

This section focuses on supporting schools to meet their legal duty to take steps to ensure pupils receive a balanced presentation of opposing views, where political issues are brought to their attention.

Schools should also consider how:

- meaningful political balance across the whole curriculum and during pupils' time at school can be achieved
- to ensure pupils are taught about a diverse range of views and ideas

Teachers and staff should interpret schools' legal duties relating to balance, using their reasonable judgement. They should not take a mechanistic approach to ensuring a balanced presentation of opposing views.

It is preferable, where practical, to present pupils with a reasonable range of views on a political issue in the interest of balance and effective teaching. This means at least 2 significantly different perspectives, rather than several views that are only marginally different.

Schools won't always need to cover a number of different views when teaching about political issues and shouldn't feel obliged to do so when this is impractical. It is more important that teaching about contested views on political issues remains fair and dispassionate and pupils are presented a range of views over time, to ensure balance.

Scenario B

When teaching about an ongoing humanitarian crisis and whether the UK should intervene militarily, teachers may just outline broad arguments in favour and against this option.

Teachers are not required to teach about every possible resolution to the crisis that has ever been proposed or considered. They should however avoid presenting only various versions of arguments in favour of (or various arguments against) military intervention, instead of exploring the more significant fundamental difference in opinion on the issue.

Schools should not take steps to ensure balance if they are clearly inappropriate or would undermine effective teaching. For example, there is no need to present views which are not relevant or apply the same principles described here when teaching about topics that are not political issues. This includes those where there is a factual consensus which pupils should be aware of.

This is particularly important when teaching about historical events, including those which may have constituted political issues at the time they happened. Such topics should only be considered as political issues - and in scope of legal duties on balance - where relevant to current political issues and debate.

Scenario C

When teaching about political events from previous historical periods, such as the renaissance and reformation, legal duties on political impartiality are unlikely to be relevant.

Teachers are not required to provide a balanced presentation of opposing views on these issues, although they may wish to teach about different historic and current perspectives as part of a broad and balanced curriculum.

For more recent historical events including those which are particularly contentious and disputed, political issues may be presented to pupils. This includes many topics relating to empire and imperialism, on which there are differing partisan political views, and which should be taught in a balanced manner.

Where teaching focuses on a single view on a political issue for an extended period of time - for example, where a political ideology is a core part of the curriculum - teachers should simply avoid promoting this view, present it without bias and ensure pupils understand its contested nature.

Scenario D

Where this is part of a subject curriculum, teachers may spend several lessons teaching exclusively about a single political ideology, such as socialism or conservatism, covering political issues and partisan political views.

It is likely that critical analysis, including elements of other political ideologies, will be needed to explain and illustrate the views being focused on.

To meet the legal duties on political impartiality, teachers should simply ensure they are not presenting these ideologies as fact or promoting the partisan political views being covered.

In presenting a balanced account of opposing views, schools are not required to teach about unsubstantiated theories and conspiracies. Pupils may raise these views, particularly where there is widespread misinformation online. Teachers should be prepared to challenge factually inaccurate claims if they deem this appropriate and necessary. Teachers may also wish to proactively warn pupils about common misinformation relevant to the political issues being taught.

Teaching about political issues might cover the factual basis and validity of claims made. Teachers may wish to present the arguments and supporting evidence made by proponents of each of the political views being considered.

This would not undermine a balanced presentation of opposing views provided that, when doing this, teachers give a factual account, supporting pupils to build their understanding and make their own judgement.

Scenario E

Pupils might be taught about an upcoming general election and key policies in political parties' manifestos. This teaching might cover different partisan political views on specific plans and policies.

Teachers can explore how claims made by supporters and opponents of the policies are supported by evidence, including in economic theory, academic studies, and other sources.

Teachers should not draw pupils to a single conclusion but should correct factual inaccuracies in pupils' understanding. This support can help pupils to form their own reasoned views on the issue, based on the available evidence.

Legal duties on political impartiality should not impede methods of teaching that involve pupils adopting and arguing in favour, or against, partisan political views, such as mock and parallel elections or debates, hustings events or visits from local candidates or political party representatives. Teachers should seek to manage these activities to ensure that all pupils receive a balanced account of the political issues being covered.

Age-appropriate teaching

Decisions about how to teach about a political issue in line with legal duties on political impartiality should consider the age, developmental stage, and existing knowledge of pupils.

It may not be possible to offer a balanced presentation of opposing views or avoid inadvertently promoting partisan political views, where pupils are not old enough to understand the distinction between relevant contested views and facts.

In these instances, it is important for schools to use their reasonable judgement as to whether teaching would be age-appropriate. This does not mean that schools cannot teach younger pupils about political issues. Most can and will be taught in a balanced manner for pupils of all ages.

Where political issues are covered with younger pupils, it may be advisable to consider how they might be taught differently compared to older age groups. This could include teaching younger pupils about more general factual content, whilst older pupils could be presented with a more comprehensive overview, including contested partisan political views and claims – with both being taught in a balanced manner.

Scenario F

Schools are free to teach younger pupils about significant political figures, including those who have controversial and contested legacies.

However, it may be advisable to focus on teaching about what these figures are most renowned for and factual information about them if teachers think pupils may not be able to understand the contested nature of more complex analyses of their lives, beliefs and actions.

Discussions about these matters might be reserved for older pupils who are more likely to be able to understand and engage in this debate and develop a balanced understanding of opposing views.

The need to cover political issues in more depth, including ideas which are particularly challenging and controversial, is likely to increase as pupils progress to more advanced levels of study. See the section on [sensitive political issues](#) for more information.

Choosing resources

Schools and teachers should choose the resources they use when teaching about political issues carefully.

Before using any resources in teaching, teachers should review these thoroughly. They should consider whether, without specific additional context, the resource may undermine a balanced presentation or promote partisan political views.

Schools should be conscious of resources from external agencies that might initially appear appropriate but may contain bias and undermine a balanced account of the political issues being taught. See the section on [using external agencies](#) for more information.

Scenario G

A teacher finds a resource online designed to support teaching about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is a political issue. It is hosted by an external organisation which does not seem to have an obvious partisan political affiliation.

The resource appears to be helpful as it provides both factual content, and excerpts from statements by significant political figures from both sides of the conflict. However, on closer inspection, it does not provide a balanced account of the conflict. For instance, the apparently factual content includes partisan political views on both historical events in the region, presented without additional context

that would make clear that these are contested views. Several quotes from political figures have been inappropriately abridged to present an inaccurate version of what was really said, and important contextual information about these quotes has been omitted.

Given that it might not be clear to pupils that the resource promotes a contested partisan political view in this way, rather than providing a balanced account of the political issue in question, it may be advisable to avoid its use.

Schools may need to use resources that are politically biased or promote partisan political views, as part of effective teaching about political issues – particularly with older pupils. This is appropriate when done for illustrative purposes and when pupils understand the nature of these materials, and that they promote partisan political views.

As part of building pupils' awareness about specific political issues and political figures, it may be helpful to display political materials in the school or classroom. This is unlikely to breach legal duties on political impartiality, particularly where pupils are being actively taught, in a balanced manner, about these political issues.

Sensitive political issues

Some political issues will be more sensitive than others. It is important to remember that schools are free to include a full range of issues, ideas, and appropriate materials including where they are challenging and controversial.

Schools should focus on the needs of their pupils when deciding how to teach about controversial subjects. They should also be mindful of their responsibility to promote respect and tolerance, including actively promoting fundamental British values such as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths and beliefs.

Schools should consider the age-appropriateness of such issues and any materials used to support teaching, as well as any requisite information pupils will need to understand them properly.

For pupils further along in their education, it is increasingly likely that it will be appropriate and necessary to explore complex issues due to their advanced level of study, and in some cases, the specific course of study for qualifications. This includes those which are challenging and controversial.

Schools also play an important role in supporting all pupils to understand the society in which they are growing up and in teaching them about respect for other people. This can be done in many ways through the curriculum, including in teaching subjects like relationships, sex and health education, and citizenship.

Some concepts and views are shared principles that underpin our society and should be reinforced by schools. This includes fundamental rights, tolerance and challenging discrimination and prejudice.

Teachers should not present dangerous and discriminatory views unchallenged, and this is not a necessary part of a balanced presentation of opposing views. They should be clear about the facts including laws in place to protect groups targeted by such views, as well as risks and harms of such views. They should also be clear that they have no place in our society.

The same principles also apply to historical examples of discrimination and persecution, which are relevant to current political issues. However, teachers should also consider how best to place these topics in the appropriate historical context.

Scenario H

When teaching about the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the UK, including the Sexual Offences Act 1967, it may be important to teach about the prejudicial views held by those that opposed the change.

Teachers are not required to present these discriminatory beliefs uncritically or as acceptable in our society today. They can and should be clear with pupils on the dangers of present-day sexist views and practices, including the facts and laws about discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

When teaching about sensitive political issues relating to discrimination, teachers should still be mindful to avoid promoting partisan political views or presenting contested theories as fact. A distinction should be drawn between the shared principle that discrimination and prejudice are wrong, and partisan political views that go beyond this or advocate political reform.

Scenario I

When teaching pupils about racism, teachers should be clear that racism has no place in our society and help pupils to understand facts about this and the law.

Where schools wish to teach about specific campaigning organisations, such as some of those associated with the Black Lives Matter movement, they should be aware that this may cover partisan political views. These are views which go beyond the basic shared principle that racism is unacceptable, which is a view schools should reinforce. Examples of such partisan political views include advocating specific views on how government resources should be used to address social issues, including withdrawing funding from the police.

Schools should ensure this content is taught appropriately taking steps to offer pupils a balanced account of opposing views on these points. Partisan political views must not be promoted to pupils, including by encouraging pupils to support campaign groups advocating such views.

Schools should continue to take steps to tackle racist and discriminatory attitudes or incidents - and condemn racism within the school and wider society. Challenging intolerant, racist or discriminatory views where these are shared at school should be seen as part of schools' wider anti-bullying and safeguarding duties.

Schools and other specified authorities are also subject to the Prevent duty under Section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. Schools should provide a safe space in which children, young people and staff can understand and discuss sensitive topics, including terrorism and the extremist ideas that are part of terrorist ideology.

Schools can build pupils' resilience to radicalisation by providing an environment for debating controversial and sensitive issues, whilst adhering to requirements on political impartiality. This includes helping pupils understand how they can influence and participate in decision-making. Further guidance is available on [protecting children from radicalisation](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-children-from-radicalisation-the-prevent-duty) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-children-from-radicalisation-the-prevent-duty>).

Where there are concerns that a pupil is expressing extremist views and is vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism, staff should follow their safeguarding policies and procedures.

Expressing personal opinions

Teachers and other staff have a responsibility to ensure that they act appropriately particularly in the political views they express.

There is no blanket prohibition on teachers and staff expressing their own views on political issues that are being taught to pupils. However, there is a risk that doing so could sometimes amount to promoting a partisan political view or compromise the balanced presentation of opposing views. Teachers and staff are in a position of authority and will typically be respected and trusted by the pupils they teach, giving their personal opinions greater weight and credibility.

As a general principle, they should avoid expressing their own personal political views to pupils unless they are confident this will not amount to promoting that view to pupils.

Where staff do share their personal political views, they should ensure that this is not presented as fact and note that there are opposing views which pupils may wish to consider.

School leaders and employers will need to judge whether it is necessary or helpful to have a school wide policy on teachers expressing personal opinions on political issues in the classroom, or whether this is best left to teachers' own judgement on a case-by-case basis.

Using external agencies

External agencies, including charitable organisations, can help to enhance and supplement both the delivery of the curriculum and wider school activity.

Particular care should be taken to ensure that the external agencies used, as well as any materials and communication with pupils, are appropriate and in line with schools' legal duties on political impartiality.

Whilst the legal duties in question do not apply directly to external agencies themselves, they do apply to any teaching and extra-curricular activity arranged by a school. Ultimately, schools remain responsible for what is said to their pupils.

Schools can work with external agencies that hold partisan political views or are engaged in political activity, provided they do not undermine fundamental British values or take extreme political positions.

Schools should be aware of this information in advance of any engagement involving pupils. This will allow any necessary steps to be taken to ensure this engagement does not risk breaching schools' legal duties on political impartiality.

Under no circumstances should an external organisation attempt to engage pupils in political activity. Schools should be confident that working with an external agency will not compromise the prohibition on promoting partisan political views to pupils.

In some circumstances, it may be appropriate for external agencies to express partisan political views to pupils. Pupils must understand that these are contested views and still receive a balanced account of the political issue in question. This may require additional teaching, ideally in advance of engagement with the external agency. If pupils are unlikely to be able to understand the contested nature of such views, for example, if they are too young or no additional teaching is possible, external agencies should not express them to pupils.

Where different external agencies are frequently invited to speak to pupils, schools may wish to consider whether the organisations presented to pupils represent a fair cross-section of different political views.

One step which could be taken is to create and implement a clear school policy that sets out how visiting speakers are chosen and how political balance is to be achieved, over a period of time.

Choosing external agencies

When considering working with external agencies, either to support the delivery of the curriculum or extra-curricular, schools should thoroughly assess external agencies before agreeing to any work with them.

This can involve challenging or asking for evidence of claims made by external agencies about their work and how this interacts with schools' legal duties on political impartiality.

It is important for schools to look at the wider partisan political views held by the organisation, so they are aware of these. They can then judge whether, and how, they might be covered appropriately with pupils. This can be done as part of a basic online search, which schools will most likely do already. Schools should be mindful that some external agencies may hold more contentious and less appropriate partisan political views than may be initially apparent.

External agencies may market resources and support to schools as part of popular awareness-raising events, for example, annual history months or historical anniversaries. Schools should continue to be mindful of legal duties on political impartiality during these events and thoroughly assess both the organisations in question and any materials they provide.

In line with the guidance on [sensitive political issues](#), a distinction should be drawn between basic shared principles, such as tolerance and opposition to discrimination and prejudice, and contested partisan political views.

Scenario J

An assembly is organised to help pupils understand the importance of taking steps to prevent and eliminate racism in the school and wider society.

The school invites an external speaker to attend and use their personal experience to explain the dangers and impact of racist and discriminatory behaviour. The school learns that the speaker has publicly advocated partisan political views on issues related to race and social policy reform, which go further than the aims of the assembly.

The school may want to discuss this with the speaker, to ensure that these views are not presented in a way that would constitute the promotion of partisan political issues. If these views are likely to be mentioned, the school should consider steps to ensure that pupils are aware of their contested nature and receive a balanced account of related political issues.

The content and materials used in any engagement with pupils should be:

- reviewed and agreed in advance of any session
- age-appropriate
- aligned to the developmental stage of pupils

Schools should not hesitate to explicitly request that external agencies avoid covering certain partisan political views, where they are not deemed relevant or appropriate.

Where partisan political views are relevant, schools should take practical steps to ensure they are not promoted to pupils and that pupils still receive a balanced account of the political issues in question.

Scenario K

As part of celebrations marking the anniversary of women's suffrage in the UK, a secondary school asks a women's group to host a session with pupils to teach them about the history of the British feminist movement.

This group also has a live petition on their website calling for companies to implement a mandatory gender balance quota for their executive boards. The school should be clear that it would not be acceptable for the group to have pupils sign this petition during the session.

If the general political issue of quotas is deemed relevant to the session, the school should take steps to ensure partisan political views are not promoted to pupils, and that they receive a balanced account of this issue. This could be done either by asking the agency to avoid covering their partisan political views in the session or by the school taking steps to ensure pupils are aware of the contested nature of these views and taught about opposing views.

External agencies with extreme political positions

Schools are responsible for ensuring that speakers, tools, and resources do not undermine the fundamental British values of:

- democracy
- the rule of law
- individual liberty
- mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs

Schools should not under any circumstances work with, or use materials produced by, external agencies that take extreme political positions on these matters. This is the case even if the material itself is not extreme, as the use of it could imply endorsement or support of the organisation.

Examples of extreme political positions include, but are not limited to:

- promoting the adoption of non-democratic political systems rather than those based on democracy, for any purpose
- a publicly stated desire to abolish democracy, to end free and fair elections, or violently overthrow capitalism
- opposition to the right of freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of assembly or freedom of religion and conscience
- engaging in or encouraging active or persistent harassment or intimidation of individuals in support of their cause
- the use or endorsement of racist language or communications, including antisemitic
- promoting divisive narratives that seek to justify serious criminal activity, including violent action against people, criminal damage to property, hate crime or terrorism
- selecting and presenting information, in a biased or unbalanced manner, to make unsubstantiated accusations against state institutions to justify serious criminal activity, including violent action against people, criminal damage to property, hate crime or terrorism
- the encouragement or endorsement of serious criminal activity, including where organisations fail to condemn criminal actions that have been committed in their name or in support of their cause, including violent action against people, criminal damage to property, hate crime or terrorism

Working with such organisations is not compatible with schools' requirements to actively promote fundamental British values, and such organisations pose a high risk of undermining these values.

There are many external agencies that, whilst holding partisan political views and engaging in political activity, do not take extreme political positions. They are more appropriate to work in schools and conducive to a school ethos that promotes tolerance and respect.

Schools can still teach about the topics these organisations would cover and the partisan political views they hold. This advice is not intended to limit the effective teaching of historical or current controversial issues and extreme views. These views may be part of the curriculum in many subjects, such as advanced levels of study in history and politics and it may be appropriate and helpful to teach about them in order to build pupils' resilience to radicalisation.

Hosting external agencies

It is good practice for a teacher to be in the room whenever an external agency is presenting. This is so they know what was discussed and can follow up with their pupils.

Teachers can intervene during a session, and in extreme cases stop a speaker. In most cases, this will not be necessary, unless the views expressed are dangerous to pupils and pose a safeguarding risk.

Where an external speaker has expressed partisan political views or failed to provide a balanced account of a political issue, and this is not made clear to pupils, teachers should use their judgement to determine what reasonable and proportionate steps should be taken to ensure that this is rectified. This might be through further teaching to help them understand other views on the issue.

Scenario L

To support teaching about global trade, a school invites an external agency to present the economic challenges faced by some countries in the Global South.

Despite gaining assurances from the organisation before the session that they would present a balanced account, during the session it becomes clear that this is not the case. This is due to both the biased representation of evidence and the overt promotion of partisan political views in support of free-market economic reforms, such as privatisation and deregulation.

It is not necessary to intervene immediately and stop the session, but it may be appropriate to have a follow-up lesson with pupils in which the views expressed are put in the context of other opposing views and they are given a balanced account of the topic.

Where external agencies have failed to meet the standards a school expects, for instance by failing to stick to an agreed plan or attempting to engage pupils in political activity, schools should share this information with their local authority, academy trust and any wider school network. This will allow other schools to be alert to these risks and consider carefully whether they wish to work with the agency in question.

Schools can also work with charities and civil society organisations that hold partisan political views on wider extra-curricular activities not related to teaching or specific political issues such as charitable activities and volunteering.

Not all charities and civil society organisations will hold partisan political views. Schools should be careful to ensure that those that do are not promoting these views to the pupils they are working with or trying to engage them in political activity.

Scenario M

A school may work with a charity that separately campaigns in favour of partisan political views on welfare, economic and social reform, provided this is on non-partisan activity. This could include charity drives and volunteering in the community.

In these circumstances, schools should ensure that the partisan political views in question are not being inadvertently promoted to pupils. This includes through the distribution of materials or the advertisement of events and campaigns.

Discussing political issues

Political issues are likely to be raised outside of planned teaching and activities, mainly when pupils raise these themselves or ask and comment about live political issues.

Pupils' engagement and interest in political issues should be encouraged. Schools should not prohibit conversation about these issues, provided the political issues are age-appropriate.

Teachers and staff can help support pupils' understanding of political issues discussed and the different views held, by adhering to similar principles as outlined for teaching about these issues. This includes avoiding endorsing any partisan political views put forward.

Teachers may also wish to present opposing views to help pupils in the classroom receive a balanced account of the issue. In some cases, this may not be practical, but teachers and staff should be mindful of the risk that some pupils are influenced by the partisan political views expressed by their peers. They should ensure pupils are at least aware of opposing views on political issues that are brought to their attention.

Scenario N

Pupils begin a conversation about the construction of a new motorway in the local area. This is an issue that political candidates in an upcoming local election have campaigned on, advocating different approaches and views.

Teachers and staff can facilitate this discussion, supporting pupils to understand the different arguments on each side of the debate. They should avoid implying that a single view on the issue is correct and should be supported.

Political activity by pupils

For maintained schools, there is a direct prohibition on the pursuit of partisan political activity by 'junior' pupils (meaning those under the age of 12) within the school and in any activities outside school involving staff members or anyone acting on behalf of the school.

Although not explicitly prohibited in the Independent Schools Standards, it is unlikely it would ever be appropriate for pupils of this age to engage in political activity at any school. Given their developmental stage, this would typically be seen as a school promoting partisan political views, in breach of legal duties which apply to all schools.

For older pupils in later secondary year groups, who may have more developed opinions and a greater awareness of current affairs, there may be a desire to partake in pupil-led political activity.

Interest and engagement with political issues should be encouraged. Schools can help pupils to set up their own networks or clubs to focus on political issues, where they are deemed appropriate. Schools may wish to develop criteria or a policy to support these judgements and ensure they are

consistent.

It may be helpful for teachers and staff to play an active role in supporting pupils to understand the political issues they are interested in, as well as ways they can make a difference and be more actively involved in political action. However, it is never appropriate for teachers and staff to promote their own partisan political views to pupils or encourage them to engage in specific political activity or join specific partisan groups.

Scenario O

Schools might encourage pupils to think about environmental issues and consider how this impacts them personally. This might involve setting up a group for pupils to discuss these issues and take steps to reduce their own, and the schools', environmental impact.

Teachers and staff should support this and can help pupils to act and conduct non-political activities. Legal duties on political impartiality do not prevent initiatives which focus on addressing live and relevant issues like this within the school community.

It would not be appropriate for a teacher to suggest that pupils join a certain campaigning group or engage in specific political activity, for example, an upcoming protest. Teachers and staff can, however, explain to pupils how they can get more actively involved outside of school. This might be by:

- explaining the different partisan political views campaigning groups advocate
- telling pupils where they can find out more about this
- providing a balanced account of political issues related to the environment

Schools should consider how pupil-led activity feeds into a wider sense of political balance across the school. They should also take steps to ensure all pupils are exposed to a diverse range of views in both the curriculum and wider school activity.

School resources, including school-branded social media, should not be used for partisan political purposes. Schools should consider the likelihood of this happening when deciding whether to permit certain pupil-led activities. For instance, it would not be advisable to have a pupil-led society under the banner of a political party, as there would be a high risk of school resources being used for partisan political activity.

For other pupil-led activities, schools will have to make reasonable decisions about where the line is drawn between support for personal development and interests, and where school resources are being used inappropriately.

In some cases, pupils may have a strong personal interest in political issues and may seek to engage in political activity within school, such as protests or displaying political symbols.

Schools should ensure that any pupil-led activity is conducted sensitively, this means that it:

- is not targeted at specific groups of pupils or staff
- does not create an atmosphere of intimidation or fear for other pupils and staff
- avoids pupils feeling that they would be stigmatised for holding or sharing alternative views
- is conducted in line with the school's behaviour policy, avoiding disruption for other pupils and staff

When political issues are brought to the attention of pupils, including by the activity and political expression of other pupils, and schools are aware of this, they should offer pupils a balanced account of opposing views. This means that where there is the widespread political activity by pupils, it may be appropriate for schools to proactively address and teach about the issues being raised. This should be done in line with this guidance and requirements on impartiality.

During political events

During periods of heightened political activity and sensitivity, including around elections or in the aftermath of significant political events, staff should be mindful to avoid activity within the school that could be construed as promoting a particular partisan view.

Teachers and staff can continue to discuss political issues, including political parties, movements, and protests, that may be relevant to pupils. This must be done in a balanced manner and not involve promoting partisan political views on the issue.

Scenario P

Schools might invite local political figures, including MPs, councillors, or former pupils involved in politics, to talk to pupils. This can be an effective way of engaging pupils' and building their understanding of democracy. There is no reason this should undermine requirements on political impartiality, where organised appropriately.

In certain contexts, such as in the run-up to elections, schools should be mindful of the risk and need to take reasonable steps to ensure that pupils are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views.

Failing to teach pupils about different views, either by inviting a range of external speakers or by simply teaching about other candidates and political parties, might be interpreted as promoting a particular partisan political view.

More information specifically relating to elections can be found in the [pre-election guidance for schools and multi-academy trusts](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-election-guidance-for-schools-and-multi-academy-trusts/pre-election-guidance-for-schools-and-multi-academy-trusts) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-election-guidance-for-schools-and-multi-academy-trusts/pre-election-guidance-for-schools-and-multi-academy-trusts>).

All staff have a responsibility to ensure that they act appropriately in terms of their behaviour, the views they express and the use of school resources.

School staff are free to engage in political activity, provided this is outside the school in their own time and at their own expense.

Schools should be conscious of the fact that in some instances staff behaviour outside school may become visible to pupils, particularly when social media is used. Most schools will already have policies and advice in place to protect staff and pupils from these risks, and it is important these are applied with sensitivity to political activity.

Scenario Q

Following an international diplomatic incident, protests across the country have been organised and the issue has been raised in the classroom.

Teachers may support discussion about the issue which might refer to the protests. However, they must not advocate pupils join these protests or promote partisan political views advocated by the protest movement, or its opponents.

Both pupils and teachers can freely attend legal protests outside school.

Where protests or other political activity involves criminal activity, schools should actively discourage pupils' participation.

Schools should reinforce the importance of adhering to the law. Teachers and staff may at times need to explain to pupils why this is important, particularly in a democratic state.

Public displays and communications

Schools should consider their requirements on political impartiality in public displays, such as banners and posters in public view and other communications. This includes electronic communications such as school-branded social media.

There is no reason that schools cannot have public displays and communications, to mark significant awareness-raising or community events or for other reasons, provided they do not promote partisan political views.

Scenario R

Following their efforts during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, pupils and staff at a school may wish to display a banner showing their appreciation to NHS staff.

A message such as 'Thank You NHS' or similar would not present a risk to political impartiality as it is unlikely to be perceived as promoting partisan political views or compromising the balanced treatment of political issues.

However, if the school were to display a banner demanding reform to the NHS or changes to NHS funding levels, this would not be appropriate and risks breaching their requirements on political impartiality.

Whilst legal duties on political impartiality do not extend to schools' interactions with parents, schools may wish to consider the impact that promoting partisan views to parents, either by public displays or in other communications, may have. Pupils may be inadvertently exposed to this promotion of partisan political views, where this is done. Some parents may also become concerned about the impartiality of teaching where such activity is undertaken by school leaders, teachers, and other staff. If this happens it is important that concerns from parents, carers and others are treated seriously and handled with sensitivity.

Role of local authorities, school proprietors, academy trusts and headteachers

Legal requirements on political impartiality in schools fall specifically on:

- local authorities
- school proprietors
- governing bodies
- school trusts (including senior managers and academy trustees)
- headteachers, in the case of maintained schools and academies

This does not mean that other teachers and staff should not be aware of and consider these statutory requirements. However, it is particularly important for local authorities, school proprietors and headteachers to make sure these legal duties are being met and consider what steps can be taken across their schools to ensure political impartiality in teaching.

Local authorities, school proprietors, academy trusts and headteachers should actively promote staff awareness of the statutory requirements and relevant information, including this guidance.

Where judged to be necessary and helpful, they may wish to arrange training on political impartiality for teachers and staff. This may be particularly helpful for new teachers and staff, as well as those in (or working towards) leadership positions.

It is not necessary for local authorities, school proprietors, academy trusts or headteachers to supervise or review every instance of teaching about political issues. However, they should aim to equip teachers and staff with skills to ensure their teaching is balanced and an awareness of commonplace risks to political impartiality.

Concerns about political impartiality

Schools will have processes for engaging informally with parents and carers and the wider school community. Where there are concerns about political impartiality at a school, we recommend these are raised in this manner as most issues will be able to be resolved without using formal complaints procedures.

We expect all parties to be open to engaging in constructive dialogue and reaching an agreement on a way forward. Local authorities, school proprietors, academy trusts and headteachers should attempt to resolve issues around political impartiality brought to their attention.

Often simple steps can be taken to address concerns. This might include clarification about the nature of teaching or assurances about any processes in place to ensure legal duties on political impartiality are being met.

In some cases, it may be appropriate for a school to take steps to ensure that pupils, who have been subject to imbalanced teaching, receive a balanced account of any political issues raised, as soon as possible. This may involve further teaching or some form of clarification.

Scenario S

Following a complaint, it becomes 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.

It may be advisable and proportionate to ask the teacher to clarify during their next lesson with this group that this is not an uncontested fact and was in fact their own personal partisan political view.

Where parents and carers remain dissatisfied, they can raise a formal complaint, in line with the school's complaints procedure.

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