



# The Prevent Duty and teaching controversial issues: creating a curriculum response through Citizenship

HEAD TEACHER AND SENIOR LEADER SUMMARY

Developed by the Expert Subject Advisory Group for Citizenship  
Published by the Association for Citizenship Teaching (2015)

## Purpose of this guidance

The recently published DFE advice on the Prevent Duty explains what schools should do to comply with their duties in relation to the prevention of terrorism and extremism. The DFE advice in essence explains two important roles for schools:

1. A security role that concerns the duty of care schools have to identify children vulnerable to radicalisation as part of their wider safeguarding responsibilities (see the final section of this guidance).
2. The DFE also encourages schools to undertake a wider educational role to build the resilience of all children to radicalisation and enable them to challenge extremist views. The DFE and Ofsted recognize that Citizenship has a unique and particular contribution to developing pupils' capacity as active, informed and responsible citizens based on a commitment to the values that underpin democratic citizenship.

This guidance has been developed by the Expert Subject Advisory Group for Citizenship and is published by the Association for Citizenship Teaching (ACT). The guidance is designed to support schools and teachers as they consider and develop their response to the Prevent duty. It aims to help teachers working in primary and secondary education to:

- consider how to best meet the requirements of the Prevent duty and be clear about the purpose and role of the Citizenship curriculum and the teacher in this context;
- develop understanding of the Citizenship pedagogical tools available to help them address Prevent as a controversial issue;
- feel more confident in planning teaching and learning that is appropriate within the context of their school and their pupils' diverse needs and backgrounds;
- be informed about what to do if they find a pupil is at risk of being drawn into terrorism or extremist behaviour.

To illustrate the principles set out in this guidance we have also produced a range of suggested lesson ideas. These will be published on the ACT website alongside the full briefing: [www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk](http://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk)

## The role of Citizenship in Prevent

In June 2015 the DFE published advice about the Prevent duty on schools, which became statutory with the passing of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. The advice is concerned with protecting children from being drawn into terrorism and situates this as part of a school's wider safeguarding duties. The DFE advice asserts that schools have a responsibility to *build pupils' resilience to radicalisation by promoting fundamental British values and enabling them to challenge extremist views*. It also sets out what schools should do if they suspect a pupil is at risk from radicalisation.

Citizenship is identified in the DFE advice as making a key contribution in helping schools meet the Prevent duty. Schools can build resilience by

“providing a safe environment for debating controversial issues and helping them to understand how they can influence and participate in decision-making...Citizenship helps to provide pupils with the knowledge, skills and understanding to prepare them to play a full and active part in society. It should equip pupils to explore political and social issues critically, to weigh evidence, to debate, and to make reasoned arguments. In Citizenship, pupils learn about democracy, government and how laws are made and upheld. Pupils are also taught about the diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding.”

(The Prevent Duty, Departmental advice to schools and childcare providers, DFE June 2015)

### Citizenship checklist

- ✓ Do you have a coherent approach and provision for teaching the subject of Citizenship to all pupils in your school?
- ✓ Is your provision in line with the requirements set out in the National Curriculum programme of study for Citizenship or the non-statutory framework for Citizenship in primary schools?
- ✓ Has your school appointed specialist training Citizenship teachers and/or provided existing staff with adequate training and CPD opportunities?
- ✓ Are you clear about the impact of your Citizenship provision on outcomes for pupils?

The DFE advice highlights the importance of discussing and not avoiding controversial issues with pupils.

“It is not intended to stop pupils debating controversial issues. On the contrary, schools should provide a safe space in which children, young people and staff can understand the risks associated with terrorism and develop the knowledge and skills to be able to challenge extremist arguments.”

(The Prevent Duty, Departmental advice to schools and childcare providers, DFE June 2015)

To accomplish this, teachers will need to use a range of strategies to handle issues sensitively and appropriately. A key consideration is the way in which the tension is resolved between facilitating the discussion of controversial issues (which implies there are a variety of valid viewpoints) and the need to challenge some views or even report them to senior colleagues (which implies some views are forbidden). In considering how teachers strike the right balance we also need to bear in mind the distinction between the ways in which the Prevent agenda is received and interpreted (against a backdrop of rising Islamophobia) and the actual wording of the guidance (which does not single out Islam).

## What’s the big educational idea?

### 1. Teaching fundamental concepts underpinning democracy

The public debate about the Prevent duty raises the core citizenship issue of how a liberal society places limits on rights and freedoms and the extent to which it must devise safeguards for democracy. Citizenship teaching should provide a space to explore the balance between rights and freedoms through key questions such as:

- How much freedom should people have, for example in relation to freedom of speech, association or religious expression?
- To what extent can government legitimately exercise power to curtail peoples’ freedoms in the name of countering terrorism and extremism?
- How are individual rights qualified and restricted?

The existence of extremism always forces governments and citizens to re-consider the answers to these questions, regardless of whether the examples of extremism are religious or secular; or from the right or left wing of politics.

### 2. Tackling the rising tide of Islamophobia

For some, the Prevent Strategy is controversial because of its focus on tackling Muslim extremism. However, the Government has defined extremism in the Prevent Strategy more broadly as:

“vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values including democracy, rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces” (DFE Prevent Duty Advice p5).

It is important that radicalisation and extremism are not just understood in relation to faith-based extremist ideologies but in relation to extremist political and social ideologies such as from the far right. However, teachers should also recognise the broader Islamophobia developing in the public discussion of such issues, so regardless of the fact that Muslims are not mentioned specifically in the Prevent guidance, this is clearly a

relevant issue for teachers to address as a means to analyse and critique the policy and the responses to the policy. Citizenship teachers are well placed not only to resist narrow Islamophobic readings of the policy but also to teach children about these social processes, in order to deepen their understanding of prejudice and stereotyping. Pal Sian's research (2015) has documented teachers reproducing an Islamophobic bias in their interpretation of the policy, singling out Muslims for special attention, thus demonstrating that teachers also need to reflect on the assumptions and preconceptions they bring to the issue. We recommend school leaders give a very clear message that staff should be consciously challenging Islamophobia through their teaching and pastoral responses.

## Teaching about 'Extremism, radicalisation & terrorism'

Ofsted and the DFE are clear that schools should be developing an educational response to the requirements of the Prevent duty: avoiding the issues will not be seen as adequate. There are many valid reasons for why schools need to develop their curriculum provision to respond to these issues including to:

- extend pupil's knowledge about the threat of extremism, radicalisation and terrorism and its impact within the broader historical and political context and ensure they know basic information about what has happened and why
- broaden understanding of why and how radicalisation and extremism can take place, not to condone such acts but to understand what drives individuals to extreme acts
- explore different responses to extremism and radicalisation and why there are different views on whether these create cohesion or marginalisation
- deepen knowledge and understanding of democratic principles in balancing rights, safeguarding freedom and democracy
- promote dispositions that support tolerance of diversity and vigilance against terrorism and explore the personal implications of this.

Teachers need to consider how their school should address teaching issues of extremism, radicalisation and terrorism. This might involve consultations with local authority staff and people from other relevant organisations, as well as discussions within the school, parents, and governors to ensure there is clarity about the overarching approach being adopted. Only then, is it realistic to start planning for learning. Guidance on how to teach controversial and sensitive issues and a series of lesson ideas for teaching about extremism are available alongside this briefing.

### Citizenship and Prevent checklist

- ✓ Have you discussed your school's educational response to Prevent with relevant members of the school community? (parents, staff and governors)
- ✓ Is there a school governor and membership of the leadership team with responsibility for Citizenship and Prevent?
- ✓ Are teaching staff clear about the role of Citizenship in relation to the Prevent duty?
- ✓ Are staff trained to teach controversial and sensitive issues in Citizenship?
- ✓ Is there a policy or guidance for staff to follow in relation to dealing with controversial issues?
- ✓ How do you evaluate the impact of your provision for Citizenship and Prevent?

## Child protection

Most of this guidance relates to the educational dimension of the Prevent duty, and specifically to the contribution of Citizenship. However, there is also a security dimension, which relates to individuals at risk of radicalisation. School leaders need to ensure policies and procedures for Child Protection and Safeguarding are revised, and monitored in relation to the Prevent duty. All staff should have sufficient training and be able to work within their school guidelines on safeguarding if they become concerned about a child or group of children. All schools are required to have a designated Safeguarding office and they are the first point of contact, if a teacher has a concern.

Online courses and information is widely available. Many local authorities have a safeguarding office if you are not sure what is on offer in your area.

### Child Protection and Prevent checklist

- ✓ Does your school have an up to date policy for Child Protection, safeguarding and Prevent?
- ✓ Has an effective system of monitoring and reviewing the policy been established?
- ✓ Have all staff received training in safeguarding in relation to Prevent? Do they know what to do if an issue with a pupil or group of pupils arises?
- ✓ How do you evaluate the impact of your response to the Prevent duty?

## Sources

DFE, (2015) The Prevent Duty. Departmental advice for schools and childcare providers.

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-children-from-radicalisation-the-prevent-duty](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-children-from-radicalisation-the-prevent-duty)

DFE (2014) National Curriculum in England. Citizenship Programmes of Study at KS3 & 4

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-citizenship-programmes-of-study](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-citizenship-programmes-of-study)

DFE (2014) Citizenship Programmes of Study for KS1 & 2 [www.gov.uk/government/publications/citizenship-programmes-of-study-for-key-stages-1-and-2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/citizenship-programmes-of-study-for-key-stages-1-and-2)

### Training

ACT can provide schools with tailored training in relation to Prevent, British Values, SMSC and citizenship. Please contact ACT for information [info@teachingcitizenship.org.uk](mailto:info@teachingcitizenship.org.uk)

### Safer Schools Officers

Safer Schools officers are police officers or police community support officers and some can provide training on Prevent. Contact your local officer.

**Additional sources of information and teaching resources** are included in the full guidance document: 'The Prevent Duty and teaching Controversial Issues: creating an educational response through Citizenship.'