

Activity 14

Every Muslim child matters

– needs and rights in mainstream schools

Summary

Young people are given a set of statements that could feature in a report by inspectors about a mainstream secondary school in Britain, or in a school's self-assessment form (SEF). They add to the list and then use it to evaluate the mainstream school they know best. They may then proceed to write letters to the school's board of governors, and may propose a debate about the issues at a forthcoming meeting of the School Council.

Why?

The benefits that young people gain from this exercise include the following. They:

- develop their understanding of what it means to be young Muslim citizen, and to consider what their rights and responsibilities are, or should be
- feel they are respected and trusted, and that they are recognized as having views and opinions which are worth attending to
- practise discussion, negotiation and cooperation skills in interaction with each other, and skills in explaining and justifying their views and ideas
- practise listening skills, skills in understanding views different from their own, and skills in reaching consensus
- see education and learning from the point of view of teachers and youth leaders, and in this way gain in empathy and maturity
- develop knowledge of the principles underlying successful advocacy, campaigns, projects, movements and struggles
- develop pride in their own identity and strengths

For more information

Relevant publications include *Understanding the Needs of Muslim Pupils*, compiled and published by the Muslim Council of Britain in 2007, and *Every Muslim Child Matters* by Maurice Irfan Coles, published by Trentham Books in 2008.

Preparation

You need a set of statements such as those in Handout 24. Other things being equal, it is useful to set the statements out in a proforma, as Handout 24.

Procedure

Young people construct a questionnaire similar to the one in Handout 24, or else use Handout 24 as it stands. They work as individuals, or else in pairs or small groups, and apply the questionnaire to the mainstream school they know best. In the column headed stage of development they write 0, 1, 2, 3 or 4, using the following code:

- 0 – The feature is not present
- 1 – Beginning to think about it
- 2 – Making satisfactory progress
- 3 – Good
- 4 – Excellent

They may then add up the figures in the left hand column in order to give the school an overall rating.

In the right hand column, they make notes on what their evidence is for the assessment they have made, and offer suggestions for what the school should do to improve.

They may then tabulate their views and suggestions in a paper which they submit to the head-teacher or the school's board of governors. In addition, or instead, they may submit a report based on their responses to the questions in Handout 25.

Identity, Empowerment and Change, Handout 24

Reviewing a School

Features of good practice	Stage of development*	Evidence, and suggestions for development
<p>1 Support for personal identity Students feel that the school supports them in their identity as young British Muslims</p>		
<p>2 Community contacts There are good working relationships with local imams, madrasahs and mosque committees</p>		
<p>3 Religious observance During Ramadan, and at other times as appropriate, the school is helpful to Muslim students</p>		
<p>4 Staffing There are several Muslim members of staff who act as positive role models</p>		
<p>5 Controversy There is shared staff policy and practice on dealing with issues on which society is divided</p>		
<p>6 Listening Muslim students and parents are encouraged to give their perceptions of the school, and account is taken of what they say</p>		
<p>7 Teaching about Islam In religious and citizenship education there is accurate and interesting information about Islamic civilizations</p>		
<p>8 Combating racisms The school has a clear policy on combating racism and Islamophobia and has a record of dealing with racism effectively</p>		
<p>9 Training Programmes of staff training and continuing professional development include the topics mentioned above</p>		
<p>10 Responsibility A senior member of staff has been designated to have responsibility for promoting the topics listed above.</p>		

* In the column headed Stage of development please use the following code: 0 – The feature is not present; 1 – Beginning to think about it; 2 – Making satisfactory progress; 3 – Good; 4 – Excellent. In the right hand column, write notes on a) evidence for the grade that is proposed, and b) ideas and suggestions for further development and action.

Identity, Empowerment and Change, Handout 25

Feelings about School – A Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out how you feel about your school. It consists of a series of statements. Please put a tick alongside each of the following which you agree with, to show your view.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. There's at least one teacher here who cares about me					
2. By and large the teachers seem to like me					
3. I feel I'm making good progress at this school					
4. I enjoy learning					
5. I expect to do well					
6. I get given a lot of responsibility					
7. The teachers seem to expect the best of me					
8. I have generally been treated fairly by the school					
9. The school shows respect for students of all races, beliefs and cultures					
10. I have never been bullied or insulted because of my race, belief or culture					
11. The school takes a strong stand against racism					
12. Most lessons are interesting					
13. The school is a good place for Muslims					
14. The teachers give me respect					