



WALTHAMSTOW HALL
SEVENOAKS

GUIDELINES ON TEACHING POLITICAL ISSUES AT WALTHAMSTOW HALL

Including the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overview

The Education Act 1996 aims to ensure that young people are not presented with only one side of political or controversial issues by their teachers. Teachers are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that, where political or controversial issues are brought to pupils' attention, they are offered a balanced presentation or opposing views. The idea of 'balance', however, is not without problems. It could mean that every individual lesson is balanced or it could mean that there is balance over a whole topic. 'Balance' could mean that it is the teacher's responsibility to give the opposing view if the overall class perspective is somewhat one-sided. Furthermore, following Karl Popper's 'paradox of tolerance', in order to "maintain a tolerant society" we are "intolerant of intolerance" in classroom discussion, so our commitment to the promotion of 'balance' is not unqualified. For example, we would not tolerate the promotion of illegal hate speech, or indeed any views that would conflict with the school's values and ethos.

From January 2013 there is a requirement on independent schools to produce guidelines to ensure that no partisan political views are promoted in the teaching of any subject in their school.

'Partisan' is best defined as 'one-sided'. 'Political views' are views expressed for a political purpose, either directly or indirectly to:

1. Further the interests of a particular political party or
2. Procure changes to the laws in this or another country or
3. Procure the reversal of government policy or of particular decisions of governmental authorities in this or another country.

There is no intention to prevent the presentation of political views, as in, for example, showing Nazi propaganda to a History class, but there must be no active promotion of political views.

Guidelines:

[Underpinning these guidelines is the principle that schools should take a common sense approach to securing balance, ie a fair and dispassionate presentation of views]

1. Establish ground rules which are designed to provide a safe environment for pupils to express their opinions. These can include:
 - Only one person to talk at a time – no interrupting.
 - Show, within certain limits (see above), respect for the views of others.
 - Challenge the ideas, not the people.
 - Use appropriate language – no racist, sexist or homophobic comments.
 - Allow everyone to express her view to ensure that everyone is heard and respected.
 - Pupils should give reasons why they have a particular view.

2. Depending on the sensitivity of the issue, it might be appropriate to split the class into smaller groups. This will ensure that greater confidentiality exists and enables less confident pupils to express their views in a less-pressurised environment.
3. There is a range of roles which teachers can use to introduce and discuss controversial issues, but it is crucial to decide when, and if, to express their own opinions. Four possible teacher roles have been identified for teaching political issues and it is important that teachers are flexible in the choice of approach on a given occasion. Any of these roles might be appropriate at a particular time depending upon the topic, age of the children and any previous work done. The four roles are:
 - *Objective* – teacher transmits an explanation of all possible viewpoints without stating own position but adopting a position of neutrality.
 - *Devil's advocate* – teacher adopts provocative and oppositional stances irrespective of own viewpoint. This enables the teacher to ensure that all views are covered and challenged if a consensus view emerges early on. It also helps to challenge young people's existing beliefs.
 - *Advocate* –teacher presents all available viewpoints and then makes the point that it is important for pupils to evaluate all viewpoints before forming their own opinions.
 - *Impartial chairperson* – teacher ensures that all viewpoints are represented, through pupil statements or published sources. Teacher facilitates but refrains from stating own position.
4. In any teaching of political issues, it is crucial that they are presented in a manner consistent with the age and developmental maturity of the particular pupils being taught. Teachers should, where possible, avoid giving simple answers to complex questions and strive for balance and the use of precise language.
5. If the curriculum includes sessions conducted by visiting speakers, there should be consideration of prior vetting to ensure that the views they hold are consistent with the school's ethos and values and that these views are presented in a balanced and fair manner. If there is an occasion where a speaker has expressed partisan political views on a subject, it might also be appropriate to present opposing views on the subject to pupils in the course of subsequent class teaching.
6. The same requirements and restrictions for balance and non-partisan views apply to any promotional literature in the school building which relates to events which are not part of the curriculum but which pupils might see and wish to attend.

This policy has regard to the guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

Walthamstow Hall policies are approved, ratified and reviewed regularly by the Governing Body in the light of statutory requirements.

Reviewed June 2019
Date of next Review June 2020

Signed:Date:

Mrs J Adams
Chair of Governors