

Engaging with your School

The Invitation

Your government needs you. Specifically, the Department for Education (DfE) needs to ensure you are engaged with your schools and that schools build a sense of trust and shared ownership of their direction and performance with you. Since there is much to talk about and engage on, this is an invitation you shouldn't lightly refuse.

In March this year the DfE produced an updated version of the *Governance handbook: For academies, multi-academy trusts and maintained schools*. For simplicity, note that in this article only the term "schools" is used. Section 2.4 of the handbook, "Parental engagement and community leadership" has been updated "...to place stronger emphasis on parental engagement." I quote:

"As the strategic leaders of their organisations it is vital that boards [or governors] are connected with, and answerable to, the communities they serve, particularly parents/carers."

"Parental engagement can have a large and positive impact on children's learning. It should not be confused with parental representation on a board and neither should it be seen as a one-off exercise for organisations..."

"All boards should assure themselves that mechanisms are in place for their organisation to engage meaningfully with all parents and carers..."

"...Boards should aim to build productive relationships, not only with parents and carers but also with the local community to create a sense of trust and shared ownership of the organisation's strategy, vision and operational performance."

"Boards should be able to demonstrate the methods used to seek the views of parents, carers and the local community..."

Much of this is about improving children's learning; that is, more effective learning, primarily focussed on literacy and numeracy and other core subjects, since children do indeed learn better when their parents are directly (and appropriately) involved. But it is also broader than this and is in part about the social licence to educate – school governors are to be answerable to their communities. There is an indication of a need for not just passive approval, but for active approval of the school's strategy, vision and operational performance, together with an opportunity to influence them.

While the key focus is on parents/carers, it is also clear that the wider (local) community is also invited. An aspect of this wider community is more clearly outlined in another recent DfE publication providing guidance covering: *Primary school disruption over LGBT teaching/relationships education, 10 October 2019*.

In the case of maintained schools, the advice is aimed at local authorities. Amongst the advice given is:

- draft a letter for primary schools to adapt and send out to their parents, acknowledging concerns and inviting any who wish to discuss the matter further to arrange to go into the school to do so
- ensure schools have good practice examples of effective parental engagement, so that they can quickly put this in place if they have not already done so
- consider whether you can support the school in discussions with relevant faith leaders to ensure mutual understanding of the issues.

The particular context of this guidance is clear and it is not aimed at everyday engagement. Nevertheless, the preferred route to managing disruption, or potential disruption, is the same: discussion/engagement with parents, and discussion with the wider community – in this scenario faith leaders in particular, since they clearly have much to contribute to the moral position. However, faith leaders (e.g. elders and others in your church) should be encouraged to look for opportunities to engage outside of these pressured situations.

The Call

Hopefully, you will already be aware of, and concerned about, the rapid rise in the promotion of LGBT+ lifestyles generally and, in particular, teaching on LGBT in our primary and secondary schools. The concerns generated by the educational establishment's stance over sex education are substantive in their own right and are still very much with us. These concerns have now, however, over a relatively short period of time, been dramatically multiplied by the introduction of relationships education teaching LGBT content.

Sex education in our schools is often justified on the basis of promoting personal responsibility and mutual respect. The approach to doing this is often to describe sexual acts in more and more detail to younger and younger children based on the flawed notion that children can process and act on this information in ways that are good for them and everyone else. But children cannot do so because use or misuse of this information is very sensitive to context and moral strictures. Its effect (and very likely the aim of those who promote it) is to normalise and present as good thoughts and behaviour what we would consider as aberrant.

Teaching on LGBT is part of the equality/minority rights agenda and is justified on broadly similar grounds including the promotion of tolerance, inclusivity and respect. Again, the goals appear to be so important that the end justifies the means, regardless of the means or degree of moral degradation (referenced to biblical norms) reached or the longer-term societal effects. Apart from the moral considerations, the LGBT+ topic in general is ideologically vacuous, confused and confusing with no significant scientific basis.

Literacy, numeracy and the core subjects of education are important and you will want to engage with your school to ensure as best you can that your child's learning and that of other children is as effective as possible. You will also want to seek to ensure your children and the children of others are not corrupted by teaching on sex education and LGBT issues. This is a salt and light matter.

The Route

Here are a few suggestions that might help to turn concerns into actions.

You will need to be reasonably informed on the issues. There are a number of books by Christian as well as secular authors which will give you an informed background and insights into the gender, LGBT and related issues and movements. For example, *The Global Sexual Revolution: Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom*, Gabriele Kuby; *Transgender Children and Young People: Born in Your Own Body*, Edited by Heather Brunskell-Evans and Michele Moore; *God's Design for Women: In an Age of Gender Confusion*, Sharon James; *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault*, Stephen R.C. Hicks; *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity*, Douglas Murray.

Review the websites of organisations such as The Christian Institute and Christian Concern. Understand the core biblical position – God made two distinct sexes, male and female. The biblical position on sex education, equality, gender, LGBT and respect across the sexes flows from this binary biological beginning.

The counter positions are ideological creations often characterised by confused and irrational thinking and which depend on the power (and sometimes threat) of the crowd, under the guise of defending and promoting minority rights, for their influence and spread. Minority rights have largely been established; the current direction and activities of LGBT+ and other groups appear to be directed and focussed on eliminating or silencing any views counter to their own. Our children are a prime target.

As much as possible seek to understand for yourself where these groups and their ideas come from and where they are seeking to go with them. What do you think they want and why? Your reaction to them will, in part, depend on how much you appreciate the threat they pose. In doing so don't forget that some people have real issues in these areas that you will need to understand and deal with such cases sensitively. Your church is likely to be providing teaching on these subjects. Ensure you engage with your fellow Christians and your church leaders to understand and discuss these matters and work out the best

approach to engaging with your local schools. It is much better to seek mutual support, to discuss and pray over a plan together, than go it alone as a family. Think about the positives, not just the negatives. Don't just condemn what is taught but seek and suggest possible good alternatives.

Influence and persuasion work best through strong relationships and trust. You often need to earn the right to a fair hearing of your deeply-held views. Get involved with your local school and get to know the staff, understand their everyday problems and difficulties and offer to help, genuinely. Don't pursue this approach as a tactic; avoid insincerity and manipulation. They will be much more ready to listen to your views and react favourably if they have witnessed and experienced your authentic help and interest in them.

Get to know the other mums and dads and sound out their views. You may well find sympathy with your own views even though they may not share your faith.

Finally, remember, "*Boards [Governors] should be able to demonstrate the methods used to seek the views of parents, carers and the local community...*" Consequently, don't forget to ask what their methods are and seek to use them constructively.

The above article was submitted by an independent, bona fide contributor, who, for professional reasons, has asked to remain anonymous. We are happy to agree to this request.

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