Teach ‘vive la difference’ in classrooms

THE NEWS headlines recently have told the story of certain parental resistance to an LGBT curriculum programme in a Birmingham primary school.

Six-hundred children were withdrawn from the city’s Parkfield Community School over the ‘No Outsiders’ programme in a series of weekly demonstrations by parents.

In January, more than 300 parents at the school, which is 98 percent Muslim, signed a petition calling for the lessons to be dropped from the curriculum. The concerns about the curriculum are based on parental perceptions that the school is asking children to change their moral position on sexual relationships.

The parents deny being homophobic but some feel that their children are too young to be learning about same-sex marriage.

The parental complaints have triggered an investigation by Ofsted. The complaints have been unfounded but Ofsted has recommended the school further develop its engagement with parents so they all have a “clear understanding of the school’s policies and procedures, and the curriculum content and how it is taught”.

There was no evidence that the curriculum focuses disproportionately on LGBT issues and there was no evidence that the material was not age-appropriate.

This is not the first time that sexuality and religion have clashed.

Children need to be taught a curriculum which reflects the realities of life in modern Britain. Regardless of religion, they will encounter LGBT people in schools, communities, in colleges, universities and workplaces. Children need to understand the importance of respecting differences to prepare them adequately for life in 21st century Britain.

Children need to be taught that prejudice is morally wrong and damages society. An LGBT curriculum in schools does not promote a sexuality or gender identity. It enables children and young people to recognise and respect people’s differences and it explores issues of prejudice, discrimination and bullying.

The Government’s commitment to LGBT inclusion is clear. In 2017 Prime Minister Theresa May attended the Pink News Awards. In her keynote address she demonstrated a firm commitment to protecting the human rights of the LGBTQ+ community. She demonstrated a commitment to eradicating homophobic, biophobic and transphobic bullying in schools and to providing children and young people with inclusive relationships and sex education.

Ofsted’s position is also clear. Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman said the lessons were “about making sure they [children] know enough to know that some people prefer not to get married to somebody of the opposite sex and that sometimes there are families that have two mummies or two daddies.”

The schools minister Nick Gibb has emphasised that it is important for schools to take the religious beliefs of their pupils into account when they decide to deliver certain content to ensure topics were handled appropriately.

Teaching children about different kinds of relationships should be no different to teaching children about different religions. Religious education does not attempt to promote one kind of religion above another.

It is about making children aware of different religions and helping them to understand that different people have different viewpoints.

It is about fostering a culture of respect through the positive affirmation of difference.

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