



Spiritual and Moral Development

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FOREWORD

In April 1993 the National Curriculum Council (NCC) published *Spiritual and Moral Development - a Discussion Paper*. This document is still much in demand and I have decided that SCAA should re-publish it. In doing so I would like to acknowledge the work of David Pascall and the staff of NCC in producing it.

I have no right to intrude a personal view on these issues but, at the risk of admonishment, it seems to me that as a society we need to be much concerned for the moral and spiritual dimension of our civilisation. I hope you will agree that schools, in partnership with parents, can make a distinctive contribution through the process of education to the moral and spiritual growth of our children, and provide foundations for the responsibilities of adult life. May I commend this discussion document to you as offering assistance to schools in the discharge of their important responsibilities in these areas?

Sir Ron Dearing CB

Chairman, School Curriculum and Assessment
Authority

September 1995

INTRODUCTION

The 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) sets education within the context of the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and of society. These dimensions underpin the curriculum and the ethos of the school. Their importance is reinforced by their place in the inspection framework for schools which derives its authority from the Education (Schools) Act 1992. This Act requires Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools to keep the Secretary of State informed about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. Registered inspectors are also required to comment on these matters.

Schools have concentrated over recent years on implementing the National Curriculum and this has heightened awareness of the mental and physical dimensions of education. Although many schools have always recognised the importance of the spiritual and moral dimensions, with the statutory framework of the National Curriculum now in place, there is an opportunity to give closer attention to these issues.

This paper is intended to guide schools in their understanding of spiritual and moral development and to demonstrate that these dimensions apply not only to Religious Education (RE) and collective worship but to every area of the curriculum and to all aspects of school life. This paper has been written particularly for use by maintained schools without a religious foundation, although denominational schools may also find the paper helpful.

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

The Education Reform Act refers to a dimension of human existence which is termed the 'spiritual' and which applies to all pupils. The potential for spiritual development is open to everyone and is not confined to the development of religious beliefs or conversion to a particular faith. To limit spiritual development in this way would be to exclude from its scope the majority of pupils in our schools who do not come from overtly religious backgrounds. The term needs to be seen as applying to something fundamental in the human condition which is not necessarily experienced through the physical senses and/or expressed through everyday language. It has to do with relationships with other people and, for believers, with God. It has to do with the universal search for individual identity -with our responses to challenging experiences, such as death, suffering, beauty, and encounters with good and evil. It is to do with the search for meaning and purpose in life and for values by which to live.

There are many aspects of spiritual development.

- **Beliefs** -The development of personal beliefs, including religious beliefs; an appreciation that people have individual and shared beliefs on which they base their lives; a developing understanding of how beliefs contribute to personal identity.
- **A sense of awe, wonder and mystery** - Being inspired by the natural world, mystery, or human achievement.
- **Experiencing feelings of transcendence** - Feelings which may give rise to belief in the existence of a divine being, or the belief that

one's inner resources provide the ability to rise above everyday experiences.

- **Search for meaning and purpose** - Asking "why me?" at times of hardship or suffering; reflecting on the origins and purpose of life; responding to challenging experiences of life such as beauty, suffering and death.
- **Self-knowledge** - An awareness of oneself in terms of thoughts, feelings, emotions, responsibilities and experiences; a growing understanding and acceptance of individual identity; the development of self-respect.
- **Relationships** - Recognising and valuing the worth of each individual; developing a sense of community; the ability to build up relationships with others.
- **Creativity** - Expressing innermost thoughts and feelings through, for example, art, music, literature and crafts; exercising the imagination, inspiration, intuition and insight.
- **Feelings and emotions** - The sense of being moved by beauty or kindness; hurt by injustice or aggression; a growing awareness of when it is important to control emotions and feelings, and how to learn to use such feelings as a source of growth.

Most people can relate to these things, but they differ in their interpretation of them and in the meaning they ascribe to them. Some people attribute these experiences and feelings to physical, sociological or psychological causes. Others find explanations for them in the teachings of their religion and indeed there is evidence to suggest that the majority of people in Britain have some belief in God.

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN AN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Spiritual development is an important element of a child's education and fundamental to other areas of learning. Without curiosity, without the inclination to question, and without the exercise of imagination, insight and intuition, young people would lack the motivation to learn, and their intellectual development would be impaired. Deprived of self-understanding and, potentially of the ability to understand others, they may experience difficulty in co-existing with neighbours and colleagues to the detriment of their social development. Were they not able to be moved by feelings of awe and wonder at the beauty of the world we live in, or the power of artists, musicians and writers to manipulate space, sound and language, they would live in an inner spiritual and cultural desert.

The notion that pupils will develop spiritually raises the expectation that this is an area in which pupils can make progress. Whilst not advocating a model of linear progression, the steps to spiritual development might include:

- recognising the existence of others as independent from oneself;
- becoming aware of and reflecting on experience;
- questioning and exploring the meaning of experience;
- understanding and evaluating a range of possible responses and interpretations;
- developing personal views and insights;
- applying the insights gained with increasing degrees of perception to one's own life.

MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Moral development, like spiritual development, cannot be defined by one simple statement. It involves several elements.

- **The will to behave morally as a point of principle** -This attitude is fundamental to moral development.
- **Knowledge of the codes and conventions of conduct agreed by society** -both non-statutory and those prescribed by law.
- **Knowledge and understanding of the criteria put forward as a basis for making responsible judgements on moral issues.**
- **The ability to make judgements on moral issues** -as they arise by applying moral principles, insights and reasoning.

A moral issue is one which involves people in making a decision on the basis of what is right and wrong. The decision will often require actions which, it is hoped, will promote goodness and minimise evil. Children need to know the difference between right and wrong although very young children will often not distinguish between the contexts in which words such as "right" and "wrong" are used. Sometimes for example, the word "wrong" will refer only to socially unacceptable behaviour (it's wrong to poke your tongue out), while at other times a moral absolute is involved. Nevertheless, children need to be introduced from an early age to concepts of right and wrong so that moral behaviour becomes an instinctive habit.

Personal morality combines the beliefs and values of individuals, those of the social, cultural and religious groups to which they belong, and the laws and

customs of the wider society. Schools should be expected to uphold those values which contain moral absolutes.

School values should include:

- telling the truth;
- keeping promises;
- respecting the rights and property of others;
- acting considerately towards others;
- helping those less fortunate and weaker than oneself;
- taking personal responsibility for one's actions;
- self-discipline.

School values should reject:

- bullying;
- cheating;
- deceit;
- cruelty;
- irresponsibility;
- dishonesty.

Young children rarely have the ability or experience to make their own decisions as to what is right and wrong. Therefore they should grow up knowing which of these things are acceptable and which are not. Young people will inevitably question why things are as they are, and will test the boundaries as did previous generations. But there need to be boundaries -some form of value system which provides the help and support to enable children to come to their own judgements.

In addition to absolute values such as these, children become aware as they grow older that life constantly throws up situations where what is right or wrong is not universally agreed. Society permits, even

if it does not promote, a range of behaviour which is considered wrong by some, often many, of its members. Examples would include drinking alcohol, smoking and gambling as well as divorce, abortion and what are called blood sports. Pupils have to make up their own minds on these and other issues, some of which will arise as part of the planned curriculum and some as a result of immediate events. The task of schools, in partnership with the home, is to furnish pupils with the knowledge and the ability to question and reason which will enable them to develop their own value system and to make responsible decisions on such matters.

Moral development in an educational context

Moral development in schools builds on the child's experience in the home. There needs to be an insistence that pupils behave in an acceptable fashion towards staff and towards each other. All schools have rules about these matters with sanctions to ensure that they are observed. These rules provide an early opportunity for pupils to become aware of and accept that an effective and just society is based on the assumption that certain rules are acceptable to a wide range of individuals. Pupils learn that there are consequences for themselves and others of infringing the rules of the community. As they get older, pupils should come to an understanding of why rules are important, and should act upon them from conviction, rather than simply from fear of getting into trouble. Pupils also learn the more difficult lessons; that rules are interpreted differently by different people, that sometimes allowances are made for people who break rules and sometimes not.

Morally educated school leavers should be able to:

- distinguish between right and wrong;
- articulate their own attitudes and values;
- take responsibility for their own actions;
- recognise the moral dimension to situations;
- understand the long and short-term consequences of their actions for themselves and others;
- develop for themselves a set of socially acceptable values and principles and set guidelines to govern their own behaviour;
- recognise that their values and attitudes may have to change over time;
- behave consistently in accordance with their principles.

HOW MIGHT SCHOOLS PROMOTE SPIRITUAL AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT?

There are three areas of school life in which opportunities arise for spiritual and moral development. They are the ethos of the school, all subjects of the curriculum and collective worship.

The **ethos of the school** reflects the values and attitudes which characterise the community, the atmosphere of the school, the quality of relationships, and the way in which the school helps pupils to deal with conflict, loss, grief or difficulties. The ethos of the school reflects the values which the community intends to promote. These values determine behaviour throughout the school and particularly in the classroom. Every school claims to value academic excellence and achievement of potential. Therefore expectations governing classroom behaviour should be directed towards provision of a positive working environment. Probably all schools state that is their aim to develop in young people a sense of respect for others regardless of race or creed. Therefore they should treat with sensitivity the views of people in the school who express their spirituality in the terms of different religious traditions. Schools should also be aware of the religious backgrounds of their pupils and should be sensitive in their response to pupils who have a religious faith.

The knowledge and understanding essential to both spiritual and moral development, and the ability to make responsible and reasoned judgements should be developed through **all subjects of the curriculum**. In most aspects of the curriculum pupils should encounter questions about

the origins of the universe, the purpose of life, the nature of proof, the uniqueness of humanity and the meaning of truth. They should be encouraged to reflect on the possibility of certainty, and to question the often exaggerated view of the infallibility of science as the only means of understanding the world, and the equally exaggerated view of the inadequacy of religion and philosophy. Moral issues will arise, for example, in science (issues of life and death), geography (environmental issues) and history (development of tolerance). In particular, schools should ensure that all pupils receive Religious Education which promotes spiritual and moral development in the light of the teachings of the great world religions. For schools teaching an agreed syllabus in line with ERA most attention should be given to Christianity which has contributed so forcibly to the spiritual and moral values of this country whilst also introducing pupils to the other major religions in our community.

Religious Education has a particularly important part to play in pupils' spiritual and moral development. Most Agreed Syllabuses require pupils to be challenged by the ultimate questions of life and death such as, "Who am I?", "What's wrong?", "What's the remedy? " , " Are there absolutes of right and wrong? " Pupils should be encouraged to address such questions elsewhere in the curriculum, but it is in Religious Education where they should be explicitly required to do so. They must be free to respond to such questions or not, and their response cannot be pre-determined. However, informed responses to such questions can only be made in the light of knowledge and understanding of the wisdom of others. Pupils should be challenged by hearing the claims to truth

offered by people with a different religious or philosophical perspective on life.

The spiritual and moral development of pupils implies the need for a variety of learning experiences

which provide opportunities for pupils to:

- discuss matters of personal concern;
- develop relationships with adults and peers;
- develop a sense of belonging to a community;
- be challenged by exploring the beliefs and values of others while deepening their knowledge and understanding of their own faith or beliefs;
- discuss religious and philosophical questions;
- understand why people reach certain decisions on spiritual and moral issues, and how those decisions affect their lives;
- experience what is aesthetically challenging;
- experience silence and reflection.

Collective worship should offer pupils opportunities to explore and share beliefs; consider the importance of prayer, meditation and silence; consider the relevance of ideas and beliefs to their own lives; think about the needs of others and develop a sense of community; and appreciate the importance of religious beliefs to those who hold them. Collective worship also offers an opportunity to re-affirm, interpret and put into practice the values of the school. It provides a time to celebrate the various achievements of members of the community that are held to be of worth.

If collective worship is genuinely to stimulate reflection and growth, it needs to involve all members of the community. This involvement requires planning, and it is important that schools can demonstrate precisely how collective worship has been planned to promote spiritual and moral development within the framework of the law.

PREPARING THE SCHOOL POLICY

All schools are required to include in their prospectus a clear statement of the school ethos supporting pupils' spiritual and moral development. Individual teachers and other adults in schools transmit values to pupils consciously or unconsciously, and it is important that these values are consistent with those which the school claims to promote. Parents have a right to know, and are concerned about, the messages their children pick up, especially from teachers who are often seen as role models. Schools and governing bodies which have not already done so need to clarify the school's policy in these areas and the set of core values which define the school's approach.

A Statement of Values

The ethos of the school may be apparent through a statement which sets out the values the school intends to promote and which it intends to demonstrate through all aspects of its life. For the school, the production of such a statement provides opportunities for all those involved to engage in the spiritual and moral debate, and to agree to core values which are acceptable to all. This means that all members of staff and governors need to agree to uphold these values and exercise their authority when agreed values are ignored. Parents and children need to agree that, having selected the school in the full knowledge of those values, they are prepared to abide by them. It is important to remember that children, especially older pupils, are more likely to feel a commitment to abiding by the values of the school if those values are openly and explicitly discussed with them.

Values and Behaviour

The standards of behaviour expected by a school are those which reflect its values. It is important that a school establishes those values which determine behaviour throughout the school and particularly in the classroom. "The most effective schools seem to be those that have created a positive atmosphere based on a sense of community and shared values." (Discipline in Schools -the 'Elton Report' 1989).

Children are more likely to behave responsibly if they are given responsibility. But this can only be really effective in a community which gives that responsibility within a framework of clearly stated boundaries of acceptable behaviour, and where teachers respond firmly and promptly to pupils who exceed those boundaries.

Values are inherent in **teaching**. Teachers are by the nature of their profession 'moral agents' who imply values by the way they address pupils and each other, the way they dress, the language they use and the effort they put into their work.

Values lie at the heart of the school's vision of itself as a **community**. Procedures for giving praise, appointing officers, rewarding and punishing, all give messages about what qualities are valued. Policies about admissions, especially regarding children with special needs, are equally indicative of values.

Developing a statement of values is not simply a process aimed at producing glossy documentation. It is an essential and honest statement about the school and what it stands for. While many schools share common values, they will differ in others, and those differences are critical in affecting parental choice.

The most important point about a statement of values is that it should be implemented -that it should not only be seen but should be seen to be effective. Perhaps the most difficult task for schools is ensuring that its values truly underpin expectations and rules, and that they are taken seriously by all members of the community. The fact that some aspects of the statement should be kept permanently under review will automatically involve new members in deliberations.

PUPILS' SPIRITUAL AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT – INSPECTION CRITERIA

Inspection arrangements vary across different types of school to take account of the status of Voluntary Aided, Special Agreement schools and others.

Schools should evaluate the curriculum and other areas of school life to ensure that appropriate opportunities for spiritual and moral development are being provided. While it is inappropriate for inspectors to make a judgement on the state of individual pupils' spiritual and moral development, it is reasonable to expect teachers and pupils to come to an agreement in the context of records of achievement.

OFSTED inspects and evaluates schools' provision for spiritual and moral development and pupils' response to this provision. Evidence of such provision is gathered through:

- discussions with the head, other members of staff, and if possible with the Chair of Governors;
- observation of lessons and other aspects of the school's work;
- observation of daily collective worship.

These discussions and observations should indicate whether the school, for example:

- has an agreed approach to the ways in which spiritual and moral issues should be addressed throughout the school;
- promotes an ethos which values imagination, inspiration, contemplation, and a clear understanding of right and wrong;
- offers opportunities in the curriculum for reflective and aesthetic experience and the discussion of questions about meaning and purpose;
- makes adequate provision of Religious Education and collective worship.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Schools should evaluate the curriculum and other aspects of school life to ensure that opportunities are provided for the spiritual and moral development of pupils. The following questions may be helpful in initiating discussion.

- How would you describe the ethos of your school? In what ways, if any, would you like it to change?
- Where in the curriculum are there opportunities for spiritual and moral development?
- How does your school ensure that collective worship promotes the spiritual and moral development of pupils?
- How does your school take into account the religious background of its pupils?
- How can schools best go about defining and publicising their core values?
- What are the strategies for answering pupils' questions which have spiritual and moral development implications?
- How can governors and staff best involve parents in these issues?

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