

- Schools should reiterate to teachers, pupils and parents their policies and procedures for tackling racial harassment. Reference should also be made to the EIS anti-racist guidelines.
- Any racist taunting or abuse on grounds of assumed ethnic group or religion should be firmly and sensitively dealt with by teachers as part of their whole school approach to tackling discrimination and racism.
- It may be appropriate if tensions are observed to hold a class discussion as necessary, to deal calmly and informatively with the situation, so that pupils can voice their feelings in a controlled and secure atmosphere. The situation may require opportunities for individual pupils to receive counselling away from the classroom on a one-to-one basis.

Support for pupils

Many schools are likely to have pupils who have relatives or close family friends who are in the armed forces especially in Iraq or who reside in the Gulf region. Pupils may have particular worries about their relatives' or friends' safety, which may affect their emotional well-being and ability to concentrate or participate fully in school life.

It is important for teachers to respond sensitively to the worries and fears of all pupils. Helping them express those fears may help them cope. It may also be useful to give pupils an opportunity to discuss their worries openly and help them, in getting the dangers into perspective.

Teachers will know how best to respond to the individual needs of their pupils. Some will benefit from discussion in class whilst others will need an individual approach. It is important that teachers provide a calm, rational approach to the needs of pupils. Teachers will have an important role to play in such difficult times.

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Advice from the Educational Institute of Scotland

Islamophobia

Our world today is faced with the continuous instability in the Middle East, the continuing effects of September 11 2001, and July 7, 2005. There are increasing levels of racism and xenophobia evidenced by the statistics showing an increase in all parts of the UK of racist attacks.

Scotland is proud to be a multi-cultural society. Only by remaining vigilant against threats against this society, and by working together, can we continue to provide the best educational opportunities for all our young people, no matter what their cultural, religious or ethnic background.

The advice contained in this guidance is relevant to all schools in all communities in Scotland. While some of these challenges relate to short-term measures that may need to be addressed during the course of any military conflict, there are longer term issues around anti-racism that can be addressed through the curriculum and promotion of a positive school ethos.

Challenges for schools

These extraordinary circumstances challenge the work of teachers and are fuelled by the extensive media coverage. In these circumstances it is important for teachers to be prepared for any challenges that may arise.

Teachers may need to tackle particular issues such as Islamophobia and anti-semitism within the framework of each school's more general work on racism.

The potential challenges that schools face relate to:

- Minority ethnic pupils who may be targeted by other pupils and adults both within and outside the school;
- the possibility of growing tensions within the school community on issues such as Islam, asylum and immigration particularly in the context of "terrorism";
- pupils whose parents or siblings are in the armed forces, particularly if and when they become engaged in military action;
- pupils with connections in the Middle East;
- the need to deal with questions from pupils following any armed conflict and issues around democracy, justice and human rights.

A whole school approach

It is suggested that teachers within schools consider collectively the issues they may face. A whole school approach, developed within local authority guidelines, could be developed aimed at providing support to individual teachers faced with pupils experiencing difficulties. Schools should endeavour to maintain as normal an atmosphere as possible: a stable environment will assist pupils to cope with stress arising from their personal circumstances.

Although the response of schools to military conflict will depend upon circumstances and the individual needs of pupils, it is worth noting that racist attacks increase at times of tension and war. Addressing the issues with pupils may help to avoid racist attacks and abuse and ensure that pupils are given a more balanced view than may be provided by the media.

Support from outside agencies

In looking at issues around anti-semitism and Islamophobia, schools may want to involve the wider community including parents, and community groups to provide an outside perspective to pupils on the impact of racist abuse and vandalism.

Information on appropriate agencies which can offer additional support to staff should be made available in the school. For example:

- bereavement-counselling;
- educational psychologists;
- local authority support services with expertise in race equality matters, citizenship and religious education.

Supporting teachers

Teachers may be faced with the additional responsibility of helping pupils deal with their emotional responses to military action in Iraq. Teachers also may need assistance with coping with the emotional demands made on them. Some teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds may be particularly vulnerable in schools, both from pupils and parents. Teachers may also have family members in the Gulf region or in the armed forces. Hence, the need for staff support to be built into the whole school approach.

Tension between different ethnic groups

A major issue which may arise is the possibility of heightened tension between different ethnic and religious groups which has already been seen in wider society. This is particularly true where negative and stereotyped views of Islam and Muslims are held. The EIS advises that in dealing with any tension between different ethnic groups, including racial harassment, schools should bear in mind the points below.

- Teachers should be especially vigilant for any signs of name calling, abuse and bullying, particularly of Muslim pupils, and for any signs of tension between pupils from different ethnic groups.
- Early recognition and action to deal with the problem will help to defuse the situation before it escalates.