

Dear Parents,

You have no doubt aware of the constant reporting in the media about extremism / terrorism in our society and how schools should be vigilant in how we develop our pupils social, moral, spiritual and cultural awareness (SMSC). I believe that this is something we do incredibly well at St John's and comments at the recent Parent Forum Meetings on the subject have confirmed that many of you feel we do excel in this area as well.

SMSC encompasses all aspects of learning, across all areas of St John's life. Our Values education continues to underpin school life through the school ethos and our focus on Christian Values. It has many implications for the kind of learners, of all ages, we wish to encourage and the society they will both inherit and shape.

Last November, the Government raised the bar in this area. The DfE published guidance on promoting British values in schools to ensure young people leave school prepared for life in modern Britain. The guidance aimed to help schools understand their responsibilities in this area. Every school now has a duty to 'actively promote' the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

Until now schools had been required to 'respect' these values, but as a result of changes brought in earlier in the year all schools must now have a clear strategy for embedding these values and show how their work with pupils has been effective in doing so.

Promoting British Values at St John's CE Primary School

The DfE recently reinforced the need "to create and enforce a clear and rigorous expectation on all schools to promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs."

The government set out its definition of British values in the 2011 Prevent Strategy, and these values have been reiterated by the Prime Minister this year.

The term 'British values' might be slightly misleading in that these values are integral to so many countries throughout the world – they differ in no way from the values of the Christian Church.

As a school, we value and celebrate the diverse heritages of everybody at St John's. Alongside this, we value and celebrate being part of Britain. In general terms, this means that we celebrate traditions, such as customs in the course of the year; for example, Harvest festival during the Autumn term. In Geography pupils learn about Britain; its capital cities and counties, its rivers and mountains. In history children learn about an aspect life in the past and how this has developed and changed over time.

At St John's these values are reinforced regularly through our ethos which is based on the core Christian Principles and in the following ways:

- Democracy:

Democracy is rife within the school. Pupils have the opportunity to have their voices heard through our School Council and Pupil questionnaires. The elections of House Captains, are based on pupil and staff votes. Our class codes of conduct & behaviour policy involves input from each class group.

- The Rule of Law:

The importance of Laws, whether they be those that govern the class, the school, or the country, are consistently reinforced throughout regular school days, as well as when dealing with behaviour and through school assemblies. Pupils are taught the value and reasons behind laws, that they govern and protect us, the responsibilities that this involves and the consequences when laws are broken. Visits from authorities such as the Police; Fire Service etc. are regular parts of our calendar and help reinforce this message.

- Individual Liberty:

Within school, pupils are actively encouraged to make choices, knowing that they are in a safe and supportive environment. As a school we educate and provide boundaries for young pupils to make choices safely, through the provision of a safe environment and empowering education. Pupils are encouraged to know, understand and exercise their rights and personal freedoms and advise how to exercise these safely, for example through our E-Safety and PSHE lessons. Whether it be through choice of challenge, of how they record, of participation in our numerous extra-curricular clubs and opportunities, pupils are given the freedom to make choices.

- Mutual Respect:

Part of our school ethos and behaviour policy has revolved around Core Values such as 'Respect', and pupils have been part of discussions and assemblies related to what this means and how it is shown. Posters around the school promote respect for others and this is reiterated through our classroom and learning rules, as well as our behaviour policy.

- Tolerance of those of Different Faiths and Beliefs:

This is achieved through enhancing pupils understanding of their place in a culturally diverse society and by giving them opportunities to experience such diversity. Assemblies and discussions supported by learning in RE and PSHE support pupils understanding of different faiths and beliefs. Members of different faiths or religions are encouraged to share their knowledge to enhance learning within classes and the school.

In a letter to the Education Select Committee in March 2014, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools, Lord Nash, explained the changes were designed to "tighten up the standards on pupil welfare to improve safeguarding, and the standards on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils to strengthen the barriers to extremism". Ofsted and the independent inspectorates now take the work of schools in this area into account during inspections.

So, at St John's, in practical terms, what are our children expected to understand and know? The following is not an exhaustive list but are key areas of focus for the school's work:

- an understanding of how citizens can influence decision-making through the democratic process
- an understanding that the freedom to hold other faiths and beliefs is protected in law
- an acceptance that people having different faiths or beliefs to oneself (or having none) should be accepted and tolerated, and should not be the cause of prejudicial or discriminatory behaviour
- an understanding of the importance of identifying and combatting discrimination

Even before this new government legislation, I hope that parents and carers will recognise the strength of the school's work in this area. St John's continues to focus on the core Christian values of Love, forgiveness, tolerance and respect which are fundamental to the promotion of British values. It aims to:

- include in suitable parts of the curriculum - as appropriate for the age of children - material on the strengths, advantages and disadvantages of democracy, and how democracy and the law works in Britain, in contrast to other forms of government in other countries
- ensure all children within the school have a voice that is listened to, and demonstrate how democracy works by actively promoting democratic processes such as a School Council whose members are voted for by the children
- use opportunities such as general or local elections to hold mock elections to promote fundamental British values and provide children with the opportunity to learn how to argue and defend points of view (we have a wonderful opportunity for the pupils to experience this aspect in May).
- consider the role of extra-curricular activity, including any run directly by children, in promoting fundamental British values

To ensure the high quality provision of SMSC, we ensure that it is planned, coherent and seen as a whole. Most key of all, we ensure our approach focuses on the impact on children.

To use the words of Lord Nash, I think we can feel satisfied as a school if, by the end of Year 6, our children are well on the path to becoming valuable and fully rounded

members of society who treat others with respect and tolerance, regardless of background.