

Anti-Semitism in the UK

Anti-Semitism in the UK is rising.
What role can schools play in
tackling anti-Semitism?

A submission to the All-Party Parliamentary
Inquiry into Anti-Semitism in the UK
from the National Union of Teachers



**...do not
tolerate
intolerance**



**Racism, Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia:
Issues for Teachers
and Schools**

NUT Guidance for schools on anti-Semitism
is available on the NUT website at
www.teachers.org.uk

FOREWORD FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY



Our cultural diversity is our greatest asset and strength. It combines and unites a multiplicity of talents, abilities, insights and skills without which we would be deprived of an essential part of our humanity. At the same time, it constantly challenges us to become what we are supposed to be – human beings united in diversity.

Yet anti-Semitism is on the rise, Islamophobia is increasing. What is the connection between the two? I believe they are two central aspects of racism. What is the implication of this assertion for schools and teachers?

Schools' anti-racist activities need an integrated approach – tackling anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as part of their joined-up approach to anti-racism.

The fight against racism is indivisible. An attack on one particular minority group is an attack on all.

I commend to you our submission to the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Anti-Semitism in the UK as a central aspect of our unwavering commitment to tackling racism in all its forms.

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Steve Sinnott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steve Sinnott
General Secretary

INTRODUCTION

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) welcomed the opportunity to respond to the House of Commons' All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Anti-Semitism in the UK, based on the on-going work of the Union. The NUT, established over 130 years ago, is the largest teachers' organisation in Europe with over 255,000 members in England and Wales. The NUT admits to membership persons with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and those on courses or in posts leading to QTS. It is therefore well placed to speak on behalf of the profession.

The NUT is a trade union and a professional association, working on professional and curricular issues as well as on conditions of service and pay. Contained within the NUT's membership are a significant number of Jewish teachers and teachers from other religious and ethnic groups representing the entire spectrum of the diversity of the teaching profession.

The NUT welcomed the opportunity to provide a written submission to the All-Party Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into anti-Semitism. The NUT will also present oral evidence to the Inquiry at the appropriate time.

The NUT has a long and proud tradition of promoting anti-racism and equal opportunities in schools, education and in society more widely. The NUT believes that all forms of racism are unacceptable. Anti-Semitism has both connections to, and similarities with, other forms of racism.

Anti-Semitism is a form of racism in which hostility towards culture and religion is a major factor, which manifests itself as a strong dislike or unfair treatment of Jewish people. The Runnymede Commission on Anti-Semitism states that '...modern anti-Semitism tends to be quasi-racial, in that it is Jews as a people who are the objects of prejudice, rather than religion'¹.

Strong anti-Jewish feeling and anti-Semitism in Europe has a long history that predates Christianity and has persisted through the Middle Ages, the 19th century, and through Nazism and the Holocaust.

More recently, the on-going instability in the Middle East and the increasing numbers of racist attacks have led to fear and concern amongst minority ethnic communities, including within the Jewish community. The number of anti-Semitic incidents perpetrated in Britain have been found to fluctuate in response to events in the Middle East².

Anti-Semitism is on the rise in Britain, attacks on Jewish people have increased by 260 per cent over a two-year period³. There have been attacks on synagogues, Jewish schools, and community centres. Jewish graves have been desecrated with swastikas.

In 2004, 532 anti-Semitic incidents were recorded, of which in 28 of the incidents Jewish schools and school children were the victims, and in 21 of the incidents the targets were Jewish students and academics⁴. In Liverpool in 2003, it was reported that at a Jewish school the head of a pig had been left on the doorstep and a burning cross had been placed in a goalmouth on a sports field⁵.

¹ A Very Light Sleeper: The Persistence and Dangers of Anti-Semitism, The Runnymede Trust, 1994

² Community Security Trust Report, 2004

³ Searchlight, Feb 2003, pg 6

⁴ Community Security Trust Report, 2004

⁵ Anti-Semitism: Still Sleeping Lightly?, Steve Sinnott, Race Equality Teaching, Autumn 2003

The NUT has issued on-going advice and guidance to members about dealing with racism, including on anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, which has been well received by members⁶. This has been increasingly important with the on-going situation in the Middle East.

The NUT has a good relationship with the Board of Deputies of British Jews and consulted with them prior to the publication of guidelines for schools on dealing with anti-Semitism⁷.

The National Union of Teachers has undertaken work with both the General Union of Palestinian Teachers (GUPT) and the Israeli Teachers' Union (ITU) for many years. This work has informed the Union's production of guidelines for teachers and schools in dealing with anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, which aimed to address hostile behaviour.

The NUT supports and has a close working relationship with the Holocaust Education Trust (HET). It has been engaged in several joint projects including, for example, support for the HET's initiative of organising educational visits to Auschwitz. The NUT is engaged in the development of materials for schools on the dangers of the far right.

ISSUES FOR SCHOOLS

The challenge for schools in dealing with racism has never been greater. Anti-Semitism is an issue for all schools regardless of the number of Jewish pupils or staff within the school.

The views of some parents or people in the community can affect pupils and pose problems within the school. Schools have a crucial role in helping to dispel myths and promote social justice for all pupils. Under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act schools have a duty to promote good race relations, equality of opportunity and to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination. All schools are required therefore to have a Race Equality Policy in place, which should address the issue of anti-Semitism as part of that policy. To be effective, action against anti-Semitism should be integrated with action against other forms of racism.

Independent evidence from a report commissioned by the Commission for Racial Equality on the implementation of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act in schools⁸ showed, however, that schools have been relatively slow in implementing the requirements of the legislation. The reasons for this are complex, but include principally the lack of resources and appropriate expertise to fully comply.

In terms of particular issues around anti-Semitism schools may need to address prejudice against students or staff which could take the form of:

- racist insults, by pupils and adults, both within and outside the school;
- intimidation;
- physical attacks;
- graffiti; and
- exclusion by peers.

⁶ ...do not tolerate intolerance: Racism, Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia – Issues for Teachers and Schools, National Union of Teachers, 2004

⁷ Racism and Anti-Semitism: Issues for Teachers and Schools, National Union of Teachers, 2003

⁸ Towards Racial Equality: Schneider-Ross, 2003

There is a need for schools to recognise the differences between religion, culture and ethnicity when meeting the needs of pupils. Jewish pupils may, for example, engage in Jewish events such as Passover without following Judaism, in the same way that students may participate in Christmas without identifying themselves as Christians. Pupils who do not follow Judaism or take part in Jewish cultural events may self-identify as Jewish. Conversely, others who do not identify themselves as Jewish or take part in Jewish events may be identified by others and face hostility on another basis, such as their name. Jewish identity is complex.

There is a need for all school staff to respond to any anti-Semitic language they hear even if there are no Jewish pupils directly involved, indeed staff may not be aware that there are Jewish pupils in the school. Allowing racist language to go unchallenged, whichever group it is directed against, gives racism a degree of legitimacy to other pupils.

In France, the Government has been prompted to take action to deal with racism in schools as a result of the volume of anti-Semitic incidents. According to the press, teaching about the Holocaust in some classrooms had become impossible because of hostility by students of Arab origin towards the subject.

Teachers have a responsibility to help pupils understand the scope and seriousness of discrimination. There is a need to develop pupils' views and skills to resolve conflict throughout their school life.

Schools have a responsibility to support teachers who may be personally affected by racist incidents and the personal demands this may place on them. Teachers may face pressure from parents as well as from pupils. Jewish teachers in particular may be vulnerable in schools.

Anti-Semitism has connections and similarities with other forms of racism, in particular Islamophobia. It is therefore important that action at school level against anti-Semitism is integrated with action against other forms of racism. The NUT believes that the struggle against racism, to be effective, cannot be selective about the forms of racism to be tackled. An attack on one minority group is an attack on all.

The National Union of Teachers encourages members to take a whole school approach to dealing with anti-Semitism and racism in general, by developing an understanding of fairness and social justice; the nature of prejudice; anti-social behaviour; and skills to address unacceptable behaviour in an appropriate way.

RECOMMENDATIONS

First and foremost it is vital that the DfES integrates the issue of anti-Semitism as part of its overall strategy to promote race equality. The NUT is concerned that the DfES' work on tackling racist bullying in schools, as yet, fails to cover anti-Semitic behaviour. It is of crucial importance, as stated above, that action against anti-Semitism is incorporated in action against all forms of racism and that the DfES provides a lead on this issue.

The NUT's education statement 'Bringing Down the Barriers'⁹ affirms that education is a fundamental human right and, as such, education promotes rights and responsibilities. The NUT believes that education is a powerful force in securing equal life chances.

⁹ Bringing Down the Barriers, National Union of Teachers, 2004

The NUT strongly recommends that all teachers have professional development opportunities which aim to provide them with the tools to tackle anti-Semitism in schools. Such opportunities should recognise that schools need to reiterate policies for tackling racist behaviour; professional development should therefore be seen as on-going. Anti-Semitism and the promotion of race equality should be included as part of the Training and Development Agency for Schools' professional development strategy.

The National Curriculum should enable sufficient capacity for schools to improve pupils' factual knowledge of Judaism and an understanding of the nature of anti-Semitism. This could be through religious education about world faiths or through the study of art, literature and history.

It is vital that there should be sufficient flexibility in the curriculum to enable teachers to develop innovative approaches to addressing anti-Semitism. This would accommodate teaching and learning which acknowledges the potential for a wide variation of situations.

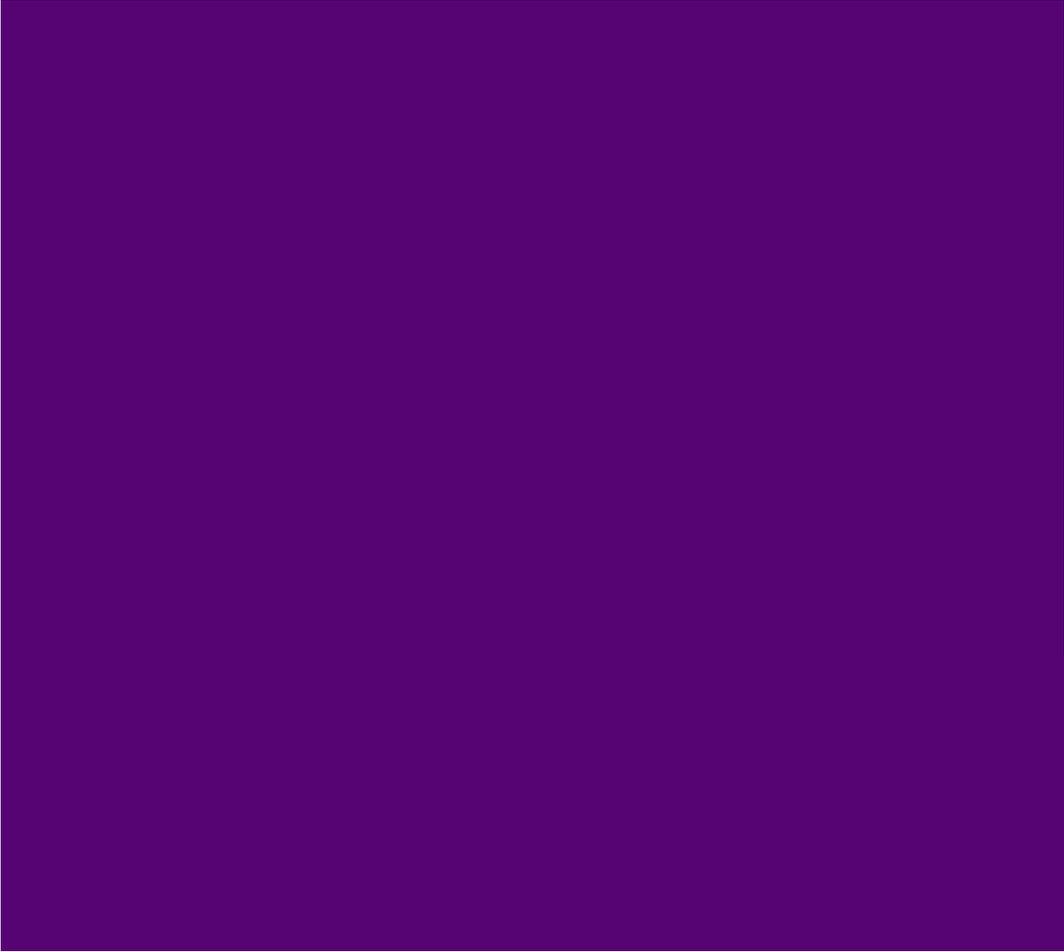
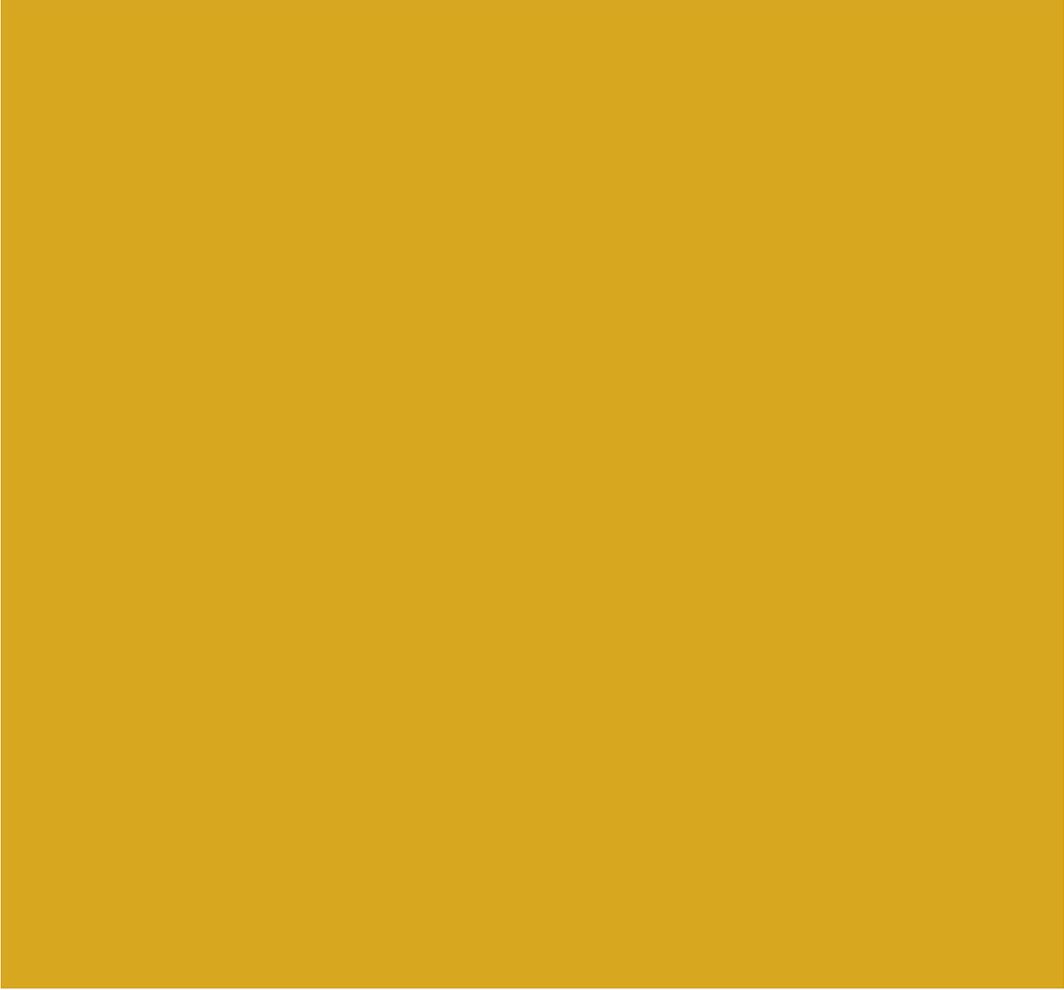
The importance of providing support to schools at an early stage in pupils' education cannot be underestimated. Foundation Stage education provides the basis on which appropriate behaviour can be built and should be seen as the optimum stage at which to communicate tolerant attitudes. Teaching young people about racism and anti-Semitism will have a profound effect on their understanding and attitudes.

There needs to be recognition at the later stages of pupils' education of the relationship between freedom of speech and freedom from intimidation. Examples of best practice which guide teaching and learning should be available to schools in order that anti-racist work is supported in combating anti-Semitism in the context of a whole school approach.

In order that the different views and beliefs among young people contribute to discussion and learning in a constructive way, teachers should have the means to:

- organise classroom discussion in ways which enable every pupil to have an input into that discussion;
- ensure that the views of everyone in the class are properly heard;
- moderate negative opinions and strong emotions;
- focus on evidence and valid information;
- represent the different points of view as accurately and fairly as possible;
- where possible, use a variety of outside and community sources; and
- demonstrate respect for different opinions.

A strong professional framework, a framework which has the support of the wider school community, is vital to ensure a robust education system which offers every opportunity to pupils and which does not tolerate intolerance.



www.teachers.org.uk