

Report

RSA

Action and Research Centre

**Schools with
Soul: A new
approach
to Spiritual,
Moral, Social
and Cultural
Education**

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March 2014

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1. Introduction

“The league-table culture and compliance culture that Ofsted has brought in to the system has taken the soul out of schools.”

John McIntosh, London Oratory School

“Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same.”

Kathy, Wuthering Heights

“What’s a soul anyway? How do you spell soul?”

Nathan Detroit, Guys and Dolls

This report marks the conclusion of the first *RSA Investigate-Ed*, a series of investigations on key education issues. These aim to propose new ideas for policy and practice in response to emerging evidence and changing contexts, as well as support the early development of practical partnerships and projects. Speedier than a commission approach, but more in-depth than a traditional seminar, these investigations will give policymakers, practitioners and other stakeholders structured spaces to diagnose problems and generate solutions.

This investigation focused on the curious acronym that is ‘SMSC’: the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.¹ Enshrined in education law in the UK since 1944, inspected in England since the birth of Ofsted in 1992, and embedded in various forms through curricula and other levers across Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, the duty of schools to promote SMSC has in some ways remained a constant in the face of ever-changing policies and reforms.

Many existing schools place a premium on building spiritual and moral ethos, whilst new academies and Free Schools often strongly emphasise school ethos and character development in their initial establishment. The promoting of community cohesion remains a legally established priority. Meanwhile, new learning approaches that focus on developing the qualities to live confidently in a global context are coming to the fore. This context explains both why the promotion of SMSC remains a key education issue and why there is controversy about what it means and how schools should approach it. While such developments are turning the spotlight increasingly on SMSC, at the same time other pressures on schools may be leading to a decline in focus and provision.

1. For this report, we are using the term ‘SMSC’ as a shorthand for the process of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. We have taken care to avoid over-stretching the term and paying attention to its specificities, but where necessary to describe general trends, we also use SMSC to refer to these forms of development where they might appear under different labels in different systems, such as character education, personal development, or social and emotional skills.

In exploring these issues, we looked across the UK. This gave us an opportunity to learn from different contexts and approaches. Although led by evidence, our starting question was normative:

How can we ensure that schools across the UK prioritise the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of their students, alongside their academic development?

Our final recommendations are primarily concerned with the English context, although many have the potential to inform policy and practice across the UK. Indeed, there may be cross-UK solutions that, despite the increasing divergence of political settlements for education between the UK's nations, could offer real opportunities to change the debate and improve practice around SMSC in England as well as in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The RSA acknowledges the active support of our three funding partners: the Culham St Gabriel's Trust, the Gordon Cook Foundation, and the Pears Foundation. We also thank all members of our expert group who participated so enthusiastically before, during and after our two summits, in particular those who contributed to our case studies. We hope that this group continues to collaborate. However, although their thoughts informed ours, this report was not created by consensus; responsibility rests with the authors alone.

Our investigation into the promotion of SMSC tells a broader story about change in education. Despite an apparent increase in school autonomy over the last few decades, the goals that used to define the purpose of schooling appear have moved to the periphery. They have been overwhelmed by attainment-related accountability pressures and reduced to a by-line in National Curricula and in the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted's thinking. It has been increasingly difficult for schools to think about anything other than short-term gains to short-term outcomes. The deeper thinking about the purpose and the development of those values and skills that are anything but soft, has been rendered far more difficult by the constantly changing terrain of policy initiatives and the attendant focus on narrow priorities. SMSC's continued existence provides an opportunity for schools to carry out this deeper thinking about the way they educate and what kind of development they want to promote, and, in the process, to begin to wrest control and reclaim territory from the centralising tendencies of too many governments and their agencies.

The word soul has baggage. It might sound too tied to religious traditions, new age, flaky, or connected to the infamous progressive 'blob'. However, we believe that it is highly relevant in meeting the challenges of schooling in the 21st century.

The mantra for the last twenty years of education in England, said too often but not done often enough, has been 'standards not structures'. It may be time to reintroduce a third 's', the soul of schools, into this mix. Then we may begin to see more clearly the young people behind the standards and think more clearly about whether their long-term needs are being met. We believe that now is the time to put back the soul and spirit into our schools and begin to create a clear vision about the purpose and goals of education and schooling in the 21st century. SMSC provides an ideal catalyst for such reclamation by UK schools.

2. The state of SMSC: a brief history of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education

“The commanding objective must be the achievement of a larger life for the ordinary man and woman.”

Roberto Unger

“We are not human beings on a spiritual journey. We are spiritual beings on a human journey.”

Stephen R. Covey

I can't measure SMSC but I can see it and parents can talk about it This comes back down to leadership and confidence.

Reena Keeble, Headteacher,
Cannon Lane Primary School

1. The tradition of promoting SMSC in the UK education system

When the 1944 Education Act included under the ‘purposes of statutory system of education’, ‘the spiritual, moral, mental, and physical development of the community’² it solidified in written form the ideals of several centuries of schooling. The personal and social – as opposed to the purely religious or academic – development of pupils has been a function of education in the UK since the time of the first ‘public’ schools in the Middle Ages were created to prepare young men for careers as public servants, as opposed to church or university men.

Despite the huge changes to society and education during the 20th century, this long-standing notion that schooling is about pupils’ personal and social development, alongside the academic, has been maintained. It remains enshrined in recent official legislation in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales (see Box 1). In England, for example, The term ‘SMSC’ first appeared as a recognisable term following the addition of ‘cultural development’ in the 1988 Education Act, when the creation of Ofsted in 1992 gave the Chief Inspector of Schools the attendant duty, as part of school inspections, to report on the ‘spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils’. The removal of mental and physical, whilst never publicly discussed or justified, was probably because these elements of development were felt to be fully integrated in the new national curriculum.

2. Thanks to Ted Huddleston for his insights on the 1944 and 1988 Acts

Box 1: Current SMSC-related policy across the UK

	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales
National Curriculum	<p>'SMSC' is included in the preamble to the 2014 National Curriculum in relation to schools offering a curriculum which is 'balanced and broadly based'.</p> <p>Elements of SMSC, particularly the social and cultural, are mentioned in the Purpose of Study statements for some NC subjects eg English, languages, PE, Art and Design and Technology.</p>	<p>Thematic Units such as 'Learning for Life and Work' promote spiritual, cultural and moral development.</p>	<p>Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies is a core curriculum area for students aged 5–14, with options for higher qualifications. Associated experiences and outcomes cover spiritual, moral and cultural development.</p>	<p>The curriculum framework refers to moral, spiritual and cultural development under the headings of 'Personal and Social Education' and 'Religious Education'.</p>
Inspection Framework	<p>Schools are judged according to their impact on pupils' development of SMSC aspects.</p>	<p>Requires inspection of pupils' personal development.</p>	<p>A key Quality Indicator requires that schools have appropriate 'values and aims'. Schools carry out self-assessments to monitor their progress in providing the Curriculum for Excellence.</p>	<p>Schools are inspected on their provision for pupil wellbeing, including 'SMSC'.</p>

Further detail can be found in Appendix 1: 'SMSC looking back and forward'

Despite its long existence, there remain issues as to what the promotion of SMSC means in terms of each component, as well as whether there is a recognisable overarching definition for the combined promotion of all components. Interestingly, in England, Ofsted defines SMSC through each individual dimension, but does not attempt to give an overarching definition (see Box 2). The best attempt we have found of an overall definition of SMSC came from a House of Lords education debate:

...the training of good human beings, purposeful and wise, themselves with a vision of what it is to be human and the kind of society that makes that possible.

Hansard, 2006

Box 2: Current Ofsted definitions of SMSC

Pupils' spiritual development is shown by their:

- beliefs, religious or otherwise, which inform their perspective on life and their interest in and respect for different people's feelings and values
- sense of enjoyment and fascination in learning about themselves, others and the world around them, including the intangible
- use of imagination and creativity in their learning
- willingness to reflect on their experiences

Pupils' moral development is shown by their:

- ability to recognise the difference between right and wrong and their readiness to apply this understanding in their own lives
- understanding of the consequences of their actions
- interest in investigating, and offering reasoned views about, moral and ethical issues

Pupils' social development is shown by their:

- use of a range of social skills in different contexts, including working and socialising with pupils from different religious, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds
- willingness to participate in a variety of social settings, including by volunteering, cooperating well with others and being able to resolve conflicts effectively
- interest in, and understanding of, the way communities and societies function at a variety of levels

Pupils' cultural development is shown by their:

- understanding and appreciation of the wide range of cultural influences that have shaped their own heritage
- willingness to participate in, and respond to, for example, artistic, musical, sporting, mathematical, technological, scientific and cultural opportunities
- interest in exploring, understanding of, and respect for cultural diversity and the extent to which they understand, accept, respect and celebrate diversity, as shown by their attitudes towards different religious, ethnic and socio-economic groups in the local, national and global communities

(Ofsted, 2013)

Our biggest challenge is making SMSC purposeful and not just a tick the box exercise for Ofsted.

Headteacher

2. The promotion of SMSC aspects in and beyond the UK

Concern about schooling being more than a religious and academic education but also about pupils' personal and social development is a long-standing tradition not just in the UK but in countries across the world, and the tradition continues to impact on current policy and practice. A close look at the countries that are seen as economic and educational competitors to the UK highlights how SMSC-linked purposes feature prominently in the aims and goals set for the education system as it is reshaped and reformed to meet the needs of fast-paced 21st century society (INCA, 2012). The development of new national and state-level curricula highlight a current concern for pupils to develop personal and social qualities akin to SMSC in order to prepare them for living and working in the modern world. For instance:

- in India, CBSE, the oldest and largest exam board, is working to make Values Education and comprehensive development a top priority for its 9,000-plus schools
- in Singapore, a new curriculum for Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) has just been published after 3 years of work, following a ministerial announcement of Character and Values as “the most critical part” of education
- in Australia, the new national curriculum, introduced in 2008, features ethical understanding, intercultural understanding and personal and social capabilities among the overarching ‘General Capabilities’, alongside literacy and numeracy

Such developments are recognised not only at national but also at cross-national level. When in 1996 UNESCO produced a vision for 21st century education, it urged that the aims of universal schooling must include ‘Learning to Live Together’ and ‘Learning to Be’ (UNESCO, 1996). These goals now find more solid form in efforts to establish global metrics for universal education: the Learning Metrics task force will seek to track, along with aims such as literacy and numeracy, the extent to which students in different countries are developing to be ‘Citizens of the World’ and recognises social and emotional learning, and culture and the arts, as key learning domains (UNESCO/Brooking, 2013).

The enduring value of SMSC aspects is also evident in a trend in new school models designed to meet the personal and social development of pupils both in the UK and beyond. The last decade has seen an explosion in the number of ‘new’ schools, often as part of charter or Free School policies. Schools that have the opportunity to design their approach from scratch are typically very explicit about their core values, often placing moral, personal or social development at the heart of their mission.

In England, various changes to school structures have been accompanied by deep thinking and changes around ethos that relate, explicitly or implicitly, to SMSC development. This was especially visible in the original ‘sponsored academies’, guided by the vision of their sponsors. More recently, many Free Schools have developed designs that more concerted integrate the personal and social and academic development of children. At School 21,³ the curriculum is designed around the core values of integrity and humanity, and six core student attributes that intertwine academic and SMSC development: craftsmanship, eloquence, expertise, grit, professionalism, and spark. An alternative example is Maharashi Free School, where pupils’ education is underpinned by spiritual development through ‘consciousness-based education’ involving meditation and integrative themes that allow for exploration of SMSC and academic topics, such as ‘every action has a reaction’, and ‘the world is as we are’.

Globally, this trend is particularly noticeable among schools serving disadvantaged students, where academic progress and personal and social development are seen as mutually dependent and equally vital processes. Famously, KIPP Charter schools, one of the largest chains in the USA, introduced a ‘character report card’ in an attempt to give

For me it has always been important to be led not by the curriculum, but by ethos. Some people think SMSC is a wishy washy, soft option...that's not what I mean: holding people to account, strong values, high expectations, high social and moral code, with high academic results flowing from that. That is what I mean.

Ian Lowe, Executive Headteacher, Topcliffe School

3. School 21 <http://school21.org/>

I think teachers set an example in the classroom...but I do think the wider world will make you think about [SMSC development], more than school.

Year 10 student

SMSC development equal place with academic in the eyes of parents and administrators.⁴ Meanwhile, the Citizens Foundation, in Pakistan, runs a network of free schools for poor students in urban and rural areas that seek to remove barriers of class and privilege. This is achieved through an education that enables moral, spiritual, and intellectual enlightenment and creates opportunities to improve quality of life.⁵

Into this mix have come a growing number of intermediary institutions who are attempting to apply pressure and support, both upwards on government and downwards on schools, to enable a renewed focus on particular aspects of SMSC. The Jubilee Centre for Character and Values, founded in 2012 as part of the University of Birmingham, has initiated a number of large-scale research projects to develop new practice, and has recently created a framework for Character Education in the UK (Jubilee Centre, 2013). Additionally, for the past 20 years, the non-denominational Human Values Foundation⁶ has been working to create educational programmes for UK schools, supporting teachers with materials to help students explore moral questions and leaders with tools to create a morally based environment. Our case studies of UK schools (Appendix 4) illustrate several who have worked with intermediary partners in their promotion of SMSC.

The above context, both in the UK and beyond, throws up a number of interesting questions which are at the heart of this investigation. We turn first to the why question; namely, given the many other competing pressures on schools – and particularly those schools serving children where meeting standards in literacy and numeracy is a significant challenge – why does the issue of pupils’ personal and social development as enshrined in education legislation through SMSC retain a resilience so that, on paper at least, it remains a high priority for governments, support agencies, educators and learning institutions throughout the world?

3. The purpose and value of promoting SMSC

One of the key drivers keeping SMSC aspects on the education agenda in the UK and across the world is the challenge of how best to educate young people so that they acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and capabilities – often summed up in the term ‘competences’ – to live as active, productive, responsible and participative citizens in modern democratic societies. Young people in the UK and across the globe today face an uncertain future: economic instability, stubbornly poor social mobility, the challenges of increasing population diversity and growth, climate change, and the whole raft of pressures that come from rapid globalisation. According to neuroscientist Jay Giedd, the way in which teenagers learn, communicate and entertain has evolved more in the last 15 years than in the previous 570 years.⁷ Today, children and teenagers have access to more information, opinions, and media from across the world than any generation before them. It is these political, economic and social trends that have led to the growing importance of developing personal and social skills, resilience and determination, cultural capital

4. Character at KIPP www.kipp.org/our-approach/character

5. The Citizens Foundation Values www.tcf.org.pk/Values.aspx

6. Human Values Foundation www.humanvaluesfoundation.com/

7. Interview at www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nEBVtPmeCQ

SMSC is the heartbeat of our school. We give regular thought as to how virtues and values can be used to support the development of the child as a reflective and spiritual learner and promote teaching and learning that is of the highest quality. We build together a values-based language for pupils to use to understand their own and each other's motivations, feelings and responses. It promotes an intellectually enquiring and a spiritually reflective response in children and adults alike and we hope it is borne out in every single exchange and action that takes place in our school.

Bridget Knight, Headteacher,
Eardisley CE Primary School

and character that help young people to cope, adapt and thrive in an age of increasing uncertainty.

So where do schools fit into the mix? It is a given that effective SMSC development for young people cannot be delivered solely within the school gates. Parents, siblings, extended family and friends, neighbourhoods and communities, cultural and public institutions and the media all play a huge part in personal and social development. Yet schools have a crucial role to play. Various research studies have found that schools become the most important communities in the lives of pupils, particularly during adolescence (Cleaver et al., 2005). Schools are where young people spend most of their time, make friends, engage with their peers and feel safe to raise issues. This sense of belonging provides a crucial space for young people to appreciate and explore their place in the world and to access the guidance and support of a committed teaching and pastoral staff.

The question of how schools can meet their crucial role of preparing young people to meet the challenges of living in our fast-paced, uncertain modern societies has been a growing focus for researchers and educationists across the world in the last decade. That focus has reopened debates about the purpose and nature of schooling and encouraged new thinking about the nature of the relationship between academic outcomes and other dimensions of development.

This focus has led to much attention on the development of 'grit' and the fact it has been found to be a higher predictor of academic and career success than IQ (Duckworth et al., 2007). Yet it is just one of a range of non-cognitive or so-called 'soft' skills which have an important impact on academic outcomes (Gutman and Schoon, 2013). Other studies, many from Nobel Prize Winner Professor James Heckman, show that psychological and behavioural traits like conscientiousness, emotional self-regulation, and persistence are on a par with so-called 'cognitive' traits in influencing academic and labour market outcomes (Pearce et al., 2006). This is something teachers know intuitively – that pupils' SMSC development and academic progress tend to go hand in hand.

Moreover, infusing teaching and learning with SMSC aspects is not only a route to higher attainment in terms of qualifications. Educationalists around the world are beginning to talk differently about the need for teaching which meets young people's needs and concerns – and which is more engaging, and results in deeper learning. International experts like Michael Fullan and Michael Barber – formerly more traditional in their approaches to pedagogy and outcomes – now advocate the need to find ways for young people to learn in more challenging environments, which develop character, resilience and leadership as well as lead to academic results (Fullan and Langworthy, 2014; Barber, Donnelly and Rizvi, 2012). Barber and colleagues' new 'formula' for curriculum development has E (for ethics) as an encompassing requirement for young people:

Well-educated = E(K+T+L)

Where E stands for Ethics, K for Knowledge, T for Thinking and L for Leadership

The appeal of this approach is already manifest in curricula like the longstanding International Baccalaureate (IB) or the newer International

Middle Years Curriculum.⁸ This curriculum is intended to meet a set of personal goals as well as subject goals and content is structured around ‘Big Ideas’ such as ‘Development’, ‘Justice’ or ‘Resolution’ – allowing students to explore and connect what they are learning to real individual and societal concerns.

Although the promotion of SMSC on its own is not the same as a more expansive education, it gets to the heart of what many feel is lacking currently in schools. In considering the relationship between SMSC development and attainment, it is important also to keep in mind the wider outcomes of education, to which academic progression and qualifications are only a contributor. These outcomes are not fully specified in the curricula of the UK (other than Scotland, where they form the basis of the Curriculum for Excellence) yet they could generally be agreed to include material security and wellbeing and the means to sustain those – through work and as a member of a society, communities and family. Experiencing and practising spiritual, moral, social and cultural ways of being in school, as part of a school community and its various networks, lays the groundwork for managing the complex demands of modern life. In this respect, it is a pre-requisite for living successfully in the 21st century, as well as vital to the future of our society.

4. Promoting SMSC and the fear of ‘relegated priorities’

In many respects, therefore, the promotion of SMSC is part of the very lifeblood or DNA of schools and schooling: an enduring core purpose, whose values and value adapt to changing circumstances but whose purpose is more relevant than ever before to modern societies. However, our investigation stemmed from a sense that, in England at any rate, the promotion of SMSC today is at best a side concern of schools, education policy makers, and the public. In the past five years, in the UK ‘GCSE’ has been on average 40 times more popular a search term than ‘SMSC’,⁹ despite both being four letter acronyms for aspects of young peoples’ education.

Fears about the declining place of SMSC have partly been founded on the drop in study of Religious Studies. Since short-course GCSEs were restricted from league tables, the number taking the course in RE, formerly a very popular extra subject, declined by 30 percent (Religious Education Council, 2013). The fear is compounded by a decade of slow, then, in response to the EBacc, more rapid decline, in those taking arts GCSEs. Exam courses are poor proxies for aspects of SMSC, but nonetheless these data signal a willingness in schools, pupils and parents to de-prioritise these areas.

Two very visible parts of the system – Ofsted ratings and league table places – seem to have forced schools’ attention to narrow around the measurable parts of education: exam results, and the curriculum progression which gets children there. This is in spite of SMSC outcomes still being part of the Ofsted inspection system.

This is not an argument for taking these measures away, but a reason to question how and why schools and teachers have found it so difficult

Coming to school is about coming to learn, but it is also a bit like swapping... I swap my belief and feelings for someone else's belief and feelings and we can discuss and learn more, and then when it comes to lessons you know more because you've discussed and listened to other people.

Year Six student, St. Michael's CE VA Junior School

8. International Middle Years Curriculum www.greatlearning.com/imyc/

9. www.google.co.uk/trends/explore#q=smsc%2C%20GCSE&geo=GB-ENG&cmpt=q

to resist these pressures and hold a space for SMSC-related provision and outcomes. Clearly, worries about the marginalisation of SMSC aspects form part of a broader perception that schools are struggling increasingly to focus on anything other than exam results. Early in 2014, an independent advisory group formed of business leaders and economists published a set of recommendations entitled *Making Education Work*. One of the group's key recommendations is that 'Non-cognitive skills and attributes such as team working, emotional maturity, empathy, and other interpersonal skills are as important as proficiency in English and mathematics in ensuring young people's employment prospects' (Anderson, 2013, p.7).

This list is notable in its expansiveness because, within the discussion of school priorities, the promotion of SMSC outcomes could be seen as particularly vulnerable to being squeezed out. They appear even more ethereal than the collaboration and communication skills that employers typically focus on when discussing the deficiencies of schools and school leavers. In populations that are increasingly diverse and decreasingly deferential, they carry challenges and controversies which schools may be partial to avoiding. Finally, although there are growing attempts to measure other non-cognitive outcomes in young people, the assessment of SMSC outcomes (with the possible exception of the social) remain largely untouched, leaving them prone to further relegation in schools' minds. This vulnerability was neatly summed up by one participant in our project's expert group:

We are working in a system that mainly reflects and transmits the overt values of capitalism and individuality, with a nod to the niceties of being 'good citizens'. While we are playing this game, I believe it is incredibly difficult to be truly effective in improving SMSC. Or at least we will have to be satisfied with sowing a few seeds and hoping they might reap fruit at some point, once the real business of getting exams passed, getting further or higher education and then work, is done with.

Angie Kotler, Schools Linking Network

This leads us to our second question, and the main body of our investigation, namely: how can schools and other partners be supported to influence and impact on pupils' SMSC development?

SMSC development is a needs-led thing... what does our community need... how are we actually going to get there... where do we want to be...how are we going to make those things match up?

Helen Newell, Headteacher, St. Michael's CE VA Junior School

3. Our investigation

The RSA's investigation into the future of SMSC began with the creation of a diverse 'expert group' of practitioners, policymakers and academics. This group met twice, advising us on useful lines of enquiry, interrogating our analysis, and suggesting design principles and recommendations. A list of group members is included at the end of this report.

Our approach to the investigation attempted to mine existing knowledge and where possible fill gaps, encouraging the generation of creative solutions. The use of the word 'evidence' in education is important but sometimes overplayed. Although our analysis did attempt to bring some evidence and data to bear on this issue, we also accepted the impossibility of ascertaining a single truth on the current state of SMSC in schools across the UK, and the causes of this situation.

To provide a context for the investigation, we carried out a historical analysis of the nature of SMSC or equivalents in the jurisdictions of the UK (Appendix 1). We also sought to establish a picture of the current situation regarding SMSC promotion – is there a basic problem of comprehension, or something more complex than that? This highlighted that many of the goals of SMSC are fulfilled by commitment to overlapping conceptions such as personal and social development, wellbeing, social and emotional skills and character education. The particular terms of SMSC are nevertheless helpful in drawing out from these conceptions the different sets of issues and considerations (spiritual, moral, social and cultural) young people may have in today's society, where each of these dimensions is more diverse than ever before.

To understand how SMSC promotion was perceived and understood by Ofsted inspectors, Ofsted provided us with a sample of the 4,102 Section 5 Inspection Reports carried out between September 2012 and April 2013. Our analysis of this sample (Appendix 2) showed that SMSC is provided mainly through whole curriculum integration and teaching style, followed by outdoor and extracurricular activities, and then music, dance, and the arts. We found that experiential learning, human connection, and relevance to students' interests and needs are key themes associated with good provision of SMSC.

However, we also found a lack of consistency in how Ofsted inspectors evaluate SMSC promotion, with SMSC sometimes being assessed according to provision, and other times on whether students can articulate the meaning of their SMSC development. Very often, Ofsted inspectors refer only to one aspect of SMSC in their assessment, with the overall rating based on that assessment (although it is possible that other examples have simply been omitted in the report). In some cases SMSC is assessed in conjunction with overall academic attainment and the attainment gap, with low attainment or a large gap being cited as unfair to students; fairness being seen as an SMSC-related concept.

Education is about not just learning the subject, but actually learning about life. How you're going to go out in the working world and not be completely terrified.

Year 11 student

We carried out a brief survey of teachers as part of the NFER (National Foundation for Educational Research) Omnibus teachers' survey to assess how the 'average' school senior leader and teacher understood and was influenced by his or her school's approach to SMSC. A panel of 1,524 practising senior leaders and teachers from 1,164 schools in the maintained sector in England completed the survey. The schools were broadly representative of overall school demographics, in terms of regional variation, eligibility for Free School Meals, and attainment of pupils. Overall, 86 percent of primary teachers and 78 percent of secondary teachers agreed with the statement that 'I understand my school's approach to Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education (SMSC)'. 76 percent of primary teachers and 60 percent of secondary teachers agreed with the statement that 'My school's approach to Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education (SMSC) impacts on my teaching'. There was a small difference between primary and secondary teachers (with primary teachers more likely to agree with the statements), but a more marked disparity between members of senior leadership teams and classroom teachers. For instance, only 26 percent of classroom teachers strongly agreed that they understood their school's approach to SMSC, compared to 41 percent of senior leaders. This suggests that the ethos and approaches devised by governors and senior leadership teams are not necessarily translating into broader whole-school levels of understanding and commitment.

It's lots and lots of tiny things that add up to holistic learning... [SMSC] is integrated into the value of everything we do – through role modelling with staff, how we recruit staff.

Guy Shears, Principal, Arrow Vale RSA Academy

The investigation needed to be informed by the examples of excellent work going on in SMSC provision in UK schools today, so we sourced a range of schools in England who had been judged 'outstanding' for SMSC, as well as schools in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, based on recommendations of experts in those jurisdictions. For each school we interviewed the headteacher and key senior leaders responsible for SMSC. We carried out focus groups with students, and completed site visits where possible to take in the environment and wider ethos of the school itself. Some additional case studies were carried out by expert group members.

Many head teachers and others we talked to were resigned to a feeling that while SMSC development was important in the aims of the school, it was not an everyday concern; or that SMSC provision would never have a more substantial place in schools unless it could somehow be measured and set alongside data on curriculum levels and exam results. This was often despite school leaders doing their very best to hold a space open for promoting pupils' SMSC development. Yet schools who were strong in their approach to SMSC did not always share this feeling. Our case studies (Appendix 4) illustrate schools where senior and leadership staff felt confident about their approach to SMSC, fully integrated it into their curriculum, and had a thorough and rigorous approach to evaluation and improvement.

Most of these schools felt that their work on pupils' SMSC development contributed to strong exam results – however, one head offered a cautionary tale, suggesting that time committed to SMSC sometimes had to be at the cost of 'squeezing a few extra marks' for each child. One school in Wales, currently coming out of Special Measures, cited how whilst they were very proud of their focus on pastoral care and spiritual and religious wellbeing at school, they could see how in some ways it

School leaders must ensure that SMSC is never presented as 'just one more thing'. This will inevitably lead to conflict, frustration and demotivation.

Headteacher

had led to them taking their eye off the ball of pushing for excellence in learning and academic attainment.

As a final part of our investigation, Expert Group member Tony Breslin carried out a mapping exercise outlining how schools might break down and conceptualise SMSC provision. This gave an indication of the sorts of activities, experiences, structures and curricular or pastoral inputs that schools *already* use to support students' development and wellbeing in each of these areas. It suggests how individual schools or groups of schools should go through this kind of deliberate process – first in separating-out the aspects of SMSC, however they define it, and secondly, in identifying specific activities within each aspect. This would enable schools to get a firmer grip on duplication, gaps and complementarities and also begin to put together the broader jigsaw of how SMSC provision fits together in the school and in relation to student outcomes and achievements.

The key findings emerging from our investigation as a whole follow in the next section. Findings are arranged under three headings that link to our recommended next steps for schools and partners: clarification and engagement; planning and delivery; and evaluation and measurement.

4. Key findings

Clarification and engagement

SMSC promotion is in danger of moving to the margins of all but the most confident schools

The broader issues which used to define the purpose of schools and schooling have moved to the periphery, overwhelmed by attainment-related accountability pressures to a by-line in the national curriculum and in DfE and Ofsted's thinking. Whilst it is, as always, possible to find schools which can balance all priorities so as to have outstanding outcomes for attainment, SMSC, and anything else, these schools provide a poor basis for system-wide policy recommendations, beyond the obvious point that good leadership and commitment is all important. In SMSC provision, as with all other aspects of school life, we should not have a policy only fit for heroes.

The key reason for the marginalisation of pupils' SMSC development is time – not so much time for provision, as time for reflection about purpose

In past years, it has been increasingly difficult for schools to think about anything other than short term gains in relation to short term attainment outcomes. Deeper thinking about purpose, aims and ethos of schools, and the development of those values and skills which are anything but soft is not impossible. However, such thinking has been rendered far more difficult by the constantly changing terrain of policy priorities and the attendant focus on narrow priorities, policed by Ofsted through the inspection framework. It is hard in the current climate in schools to justify giving time to reflect on SMSC issues in the face of what feel like more pressing priorities.

Currently, too much school provision has a scattergun approach, lacking an underpinning rationale

The development of a shared language for SMSC at the school level necessitates the important step of creating a coherent vision and foundation for SMSC that can be shared by school leaders, teachers, students and parents alike. Currently, too much school provision has a scattergun approach, lacking underpinning rationale. This situation runs the risk of SMSC being 'everywhere and nowhere' – mentioned and supposedly connected to many daily activities in the school, but not adding up to any meaningful sense of understanding and identity for pupils and staff. Having mapped the aspects of SMSC in relation to school activities and modes of delivery, Tony Breslin argues that if all schools undertook such mapping they would be able to "replace the 'we do it everywhere' mantra

SMSC shouldn't have to be taught...it should be modelled. Morals should be instilled, you know, from parents. It should just be normal. The way people treat each other at school shows it.

Year 10 student, Kings Langley School

that is often associated with SMSC with a broader jigsaw of how the wider social, developmental and well-being curriculum fits together". This would allow schools to marry the promotion and measurement of SMSC along with that of academic success, attendance and progression to employment and further education routes.

Of all the four aspects of SMSC, it is the spiritual which is most at risk of neglect

The source of this risk to the spiritual appears to be its indeterminacy of meaning, as well as a level of teacher discomfort around the 'teaching' of spirituality. Yet there are ways to frame the concept of spirituality that can help it to speak to our deepest needs and present challenges in education. As Dr Jonathan Rowson argued at the launch of the RSA's spirituality project "The capacious term 'spirituality' lacks clarity because it is not so much a unitary concept as a signpost for a range of touchstones: our search for meaning, our sense of the sacred, the value of compassion, the experience of transcendence, the hunger for transformation" (Rowson, 2013). All of these elements (and perhaps more) are essential aspects of human experience and development, and young people need the space and support to connect with them and learn to value them – in order to build the inner resources that are increasingly neglected in today's society. Rowson's three principles for understanding spirituality could provide useful starting points for discussions about its educational context.¹⁰

The current UK context warrants a serious conversation about the relationship between spirituality and wellbeing. At a time when the number of adolescents in the UK diagnosed with depression has almost doubled in recent decades (Hagell, 2013), and according to the last census, religions plays a decreasing role for young people (ONS, 2011), there is a strong case for protecting spaces for spiritual development because many aspects of spirituality, particularly practices like meditation, but also and most simply a richer experience of life's meaning, can serve to promote wellbeing.

Planning and delivery

The leadership and understanding of SMSC promotion is insufficiently distributed

There is a lack of training opportunities for teachers and middle leadership in particular, to fully explore and understand the aspects of SMSC. In particular, for those who have not been RE, Citizenship or Humanities teachers (and even for many among these groups), methods of thinking and talking about pupils' SMSC development may be unfamiliar. Although guidance recommends locating leadership of SMSC with an

Supporting practitioners in embracing the ambiguities and abstract nature of spirituality is the way forward ... to support them being comfortable with that instead of being anxious.

Kate Adams, Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln

^{10.} 1) Spirituality is not centrally about 'beliefs': whether or not someone believes in certain statements or realities may or may not impact on their spiritual experience and development, but it is not an essential part of it. 2) For most people, it is hard to disentangle religion and spirituality, but this does not mean one cannot exist without the other or entails the rejection of the other. 3) Spirituality is most fundamentally about our 'ground', rather than our 'place' – ie it's about the basic facts of our existence, being in a mortal body in evolving relationships with others in the same human predicament; this 'ground' is in contrast to our 'place' that we tend to live our lives through, ie our social standing, our constructed identities, which are much more contingent and insubstantial and lead us to forget our 'ground'.

expert, in schools we spoke to where leaders and teachers felt confident in their approach, an understanding and responsibility was shared between all the staff. Pupils, too, need to be equipped to lead the design and provision of SMSC, allowing them to foreground issues which might arise in their daily lives before they become concerns for adults.

Education is about learning about people and being socially aware; how to talk to people; how to cope with other people's opinions even if you don't agree with them.

Year 11 student, Arrow Vale RSA Academy

Governors, parents and the wider community are insufficiently connected to and supportive of SMSC provision

The language of SMSC may be an inhibitor when it comes to engaging parents and other community partners in this aspect of schooling. This problem can be managed through careful and concerted communication efforts and conversations, which schools (and perhaps particular individuals within schools) must be responsible for. One Scottish teacher we spoke to described initially having difficulty discussing her subject – religious, moral and philosophical studies – because the current generation of parents grew up only with RE. Once engaged in conversation, however, parents were deeply interested, and often commented that this was the one set of topics their child talked about at home.

SMSC development has been disrupted by the online world and internet-bearing devices, but this has yet to impact sufficiently and systematically on the requirements for SMSC provision

In England, although a number of initiatives provide advice on online safety,¹¹ national education frameworks pay scant account to the ramifications for all aspects of SMSC development in the online sphere. The Ofsted inspection framework requires Inspectors to question students regarding e-safety, but in relation to SMSC recent supplements to guidance have yet to use the words internet, digital, or online (Ofsted, 2012; DfE, 2013). The new Computer Science curriculum may provide an opportunity to integrate SMSC development with other essential skills.

Fear of controversy is leading to an unhelpful 'sanitisation' of schools' SMSC provision and opportunities and superficial relationships between teacher and student

In focus groups, students talked at length about how much SMSC content at school felt 'out of date' or 'irrelevant' to their wider world. They felt the most meaningful and valuable SMSC support they could get would be through honest and open communication with their teachers, including being able to talk about their teachers' views and opinions, as well as lifestyle and choices. Teachers we consulted felt that fear of parental recrimination was a major reason for caution around SMSC topics, and also that if discussions of controversial issues did take place that many teachers felt untrained and ill-equipped to handle such conversations. A survey of teacher education courses carried out by a member of our expert group found that of the respondents, universities offered only single-session introductions to SMSC (as opposed to handling each aspect separately), as part of wider professional responsibilities of the teacher.

11. Examples include Digizen, part of the NGO Childnet International: www.digizen.org/ and the UK Council for Child Internet Safety, a government initiative: www.gov.uk/government/policy-advisory-groups/uk-council-for-child-internet-safety-ukccis

This means that new teachers are not being systematically prepared to handle pupils' SMSC development.

SMSC engagement and opportunities decline markedly for post-14 pupils

Conversations with secondary pupils in focus groups underlined that they saw SMSC opportunities as focused mainly in the early years of secondary schooling. Many possible reasons were cited, including that personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) classes were more suited to younger adolescents in terms of the topics under discussion; pastoral, form and House Systems worked best for younger years but seemed less useful once you got older; the school and curriculum became more focused on examinations, leaving little space to focus on wider developments; the pressures to earn money meant that older students looked for part-time work beyond school which limited their opportunities to engage in extra-curricular opportunities, even when schools offered them. This narrowing of the focus of schools for post-14 pupils in England, and other parts of the UK, is at odds with the policy in other nations around the world. Other countries' approaches to 'graduation' typically ensure continued study of a broader range of curriculum subjects supported by school and community based experiences which contribute to SMSC development. These can include promotion of higher level critical and reflective thinking, or activities such as community volunteering and service learning, or an extended personal project. The raising of the participation age to 18 has so far been a missed opportunity to stimulate a broader range of outcomes for learners.

Evaluation and measurement

Schools are largely focused on provision over outcomes

Few schools we spoke to had systematic methods of evaluating the impact of their SMSC provision and practice. This may be connected to a lack of understanding about developmental underpinnings of SMSC, which leaves teachers unprepared to make judgments about what kinds of behaviour and reasoning they can expect of pupils as they develop. It also reflects the complex, and often non-linear, way that young people's spiritual, moral, social, and cultural competencies develop in reality. It is difficult to measure and assess SMSC in a systematic way, whereas accounting for provision is much clearer. There is also ambivalence on looking at whole school outcomes versus individual pupil outcomes, with schools often unsure how to decide the correct 'unit' for assessment. Many schools are employing forms of self-evaluation or operate informal systems of observation, feedback, discussion, and updating strategies, but often these processes are not captured so it makes it difficult to compare progress over the longer term.

The current short-term nature of evaluation and goal setting may also have resulted in schools losing the habit of setting long-term goals, both institutionally for the school as an evolving community, and instrumentally for the contribution of provision to areas such as SMSC development. We found that schools which have developed a clear vision for SMSC provision and practice seemed to be more familiar with the long-term

Our priority is not examination grades but the development of curiosity and wonder in learning which will inspire aspiration and success. What we're trying to do is give each child a clear, positive, and aspirational vision of what kind of person they would like to be in society.

Ian Lowe, Executive Headteacher,
Topcliffe School

developmental trajectories of students and were used to hearing the students talk about their own personal and social development – so they in turn could have higher expectations for SMSC progression.

Accountability levers to improve and quality assure SMSC provision in schools are weak and inconsistent

Ofsted currently represents one of the strongest influencers on how schools behave. Despite the fact that SMSC forms part of the inspection framework, we found this did not provide a consistent or supportive pressure on improvement of SMSC provision as inspectors do not share a sufficiently rigorous approach in terms of where and how they look for evidence of SMSC provision and outcomes. Schools know that the inspection of SMSC will not be carried out with significant scrutiny or detail – some carefully selected pockets of practice usually suffice.

Whilst Ofsted need to take some responsibility for inconsistencies in the inspection of provision and outcomes, other levers need consideration. School governing bodies are largely under-involved in the creation and quality assurance of a school's SMSC approach. Additionally, the potential of increased pressure on performance management systems for staff, with the possibility of performance related pay, makes it all the more important that SMSC should be considered in those conversations. Again, real care needs to be taken at the interface between high-stakes judgments and a complex area like SMSC, to ensure the latter is not simply left out of the picture or artificially distorted to fit short-term target setting.

Conclusion

The overriding finding of our investigation is that, just at a time when the promotion of pupils' SMSC development may have most to contribute to both academic and wider outcomes for young people in and beyond school, it is losing prominence and sliding to the margins in terms of policy, practice and focus at national and school level. All school heads we interviewed agreed that it was difficult to prioritise SMSC development in the context of current accountability frameworks, despite their strong feeling it should be a core purpose of schools.

Despite this, there is still plenty of terrific SMSC provision and practice evident in schools around the UK. This practice is carried out largely in spite of other pressures, rather than being supported and endorsed by the accountability requirements on schools. Moreover, there is a growing groundswell of enthusiasm from practitioners and others to rethink, revive and reclaim SMSC promotion in schools. The process of the investigation uncovered an extensive and deep commitment to engaging with the dimensions of schooling associated with SMSC, and many we spoke to were eager to find ways to break through perceived barriers and turn this interest and commitment into greater action. This action would take the form of a more widely shared rethinking amongst schools and their partners of what pupils' SMSC development entails, in order to address gaps in understanding and adapt provision to the needs of educating young people to live with confidence in modern society.

In this respect, SMSC policy must be seen in the context of a larger questioning of the current system of qualifications: are our qualifications sufficiently fit for purpose that they can integrate and encompass both the

[What if Ofsted] could flip it round and say: 'well you're doing really well in your examinations and academic performance, but you can't get a 2 or a 1 unless we're secure with your SMSC education, and at the moment we don't feel students are developing as responsible adults'.

Gary Lewis, Principal, Kings Langley School

academic and the SMSC development young people need for life-long success, or do they offer young people a poor choice, forcing them to choose between short term recognition and deeper learning for life?

In addressing this question of balancing priorities, our investigation showed us about the potential power of a ‘re-set’ or ‘reclaim’ in the cases of UK jurisdictions which have had the opportunity to think through and prioritise their goals for SMSC as they develop their own national curricula. In Northern Ireland the development of a new curriculum with thematic units has created a new focal point for provision aligned with SMSC goals. This process has been even more extensive in Scotland, though we were warned that even here the lagging redesign of final year assessments is holding back the extent to which schools can put the personal development goals of the curriculum at the heart of their practice throughout year groups.

Our key findings are important in setting up what we call ‘design principles’ that should underpin a reformed or reshaped approach to SMSC, which would allow schools to reclaim the initiative in determining what is meant by effective policy and practice in this area. These design principles, in turn, suggest a number of practical recommendations for policy-makers, practitioners and others to ensure that this reforming and reclaiming of SMSC is given both the momentum and space to take place in the current UK education system. The design principles and practical recommendations are set out in the final section of this report that follows.

My biggest SMSC challenge is keeping it real for the children, so that they understand what it means for them.

Headteacher

5. SMSC going forward: design principles and recommendations

“There is no simple set of instructions on how to proceed... It is a way of going about things, and it demands the courage to breathe moral and spiritual motivation into everything, to seek the human dimension in all things. Science, technology, expertise, and so-called professionalism are not enough. Something more is necessary. For the sake of simplicity, it might be called spirit. Or feeling. Or conscience.”

Vaclav Havel (1992, pp. xvi-xvii)

The concerns which prompted this investigation appear to be well founded. Even if many schools have an ‘unconscious competence’ towards SMSC provision, doing more of it than they probably think, this cannot make up for the lack of overall strategy. Like the ‘hidden curriculum’, a ‘hidden ethos’ probably further disadvantages the already disadvantaged. In the face of frenetic policymaking and change, too many schools have been unable to step back, reflect and think much more deeply about their purpose, social, moral and otherwise. A clear, open and encompassing approach to pupils’ SMSC development can be a catalyst to enabling schools to make their purpose and ethos visible to and impactful for all. In short, SMSC provision and practice needs attention and support to move from the margins to the centre of schools’ lives.

This cannot be an over-prescriptive process. Nor can it be oversimplified. Schools need incentives, guidance and inspiration, and some framing and frameworks can help the less confident, more constrained schools. In this process, SMSC development is not an area of schooling where there can be a simple framework for ‘success’. To quote Vaclav Havel again, ‘there is no simple set of instructions on how to proceed’.

One possible response would be to rewrite the language of SMSC completely. Some members of our expert group proposed that the terms ‘personal and social development’ or ‘character education’ might offer greater clarity and lead to better provision and outcomes. Teachers we spoke to in Scotland observed that the language of the Curriculum for Excellence, in particular the ‘experiences and outcomes’ that can be shared between subjects, is helpful in creating common purpose and partnerships between different schools. However, having reviewed all

To provide high quality SMSC education schools need: a clear mission and ethos; an integrated curriculum allowing for SMSC to be embedded rather than seen as an ‘add on’; and enthusiastic and skilled staff who bring their own experiences to enrich the SMSC curriculum.

Primary school headteacher

the evidence and discussions, we concluded that the language of SMSC may not be perfect, but was not sufficiently broken to need replacing at this juncture. Indeed replacement may increase confusion. Moreover, the combination of the four aspects is a reminder that each has something distinct to offer. We do encourage sharpening a focus on SMSC as *pupils' SMSC development*: highlighting this human dimension can help to refine discussion concerning practice and outcomes. On balance, therefore, although 'SMSC' can feel clunky, keeping it retains the ambiguity which should naturally force schools to interpret and take ownership of the acronym.

Too often SMSC is seen as an addition to and sometimes even a luxury to the core curriculum within a school, often 'done' so as to satisfy Ofsted requirements. However if a school has a declared telos/vision, which is bigger, broader and deeper than the achievement of the desired examination results, it provides a direction and a purpose to not just SMSC but the whole of the curriculum.

Jill Rowe, Ethos & Formation
Director, Oasis UK

This necessary ambiguity renders the possible levers for change more difficult. In other parts of school life, simple changes to what Tim Oates calls 'control factors' can nudge schools to change behaviours and conform to national expectations. Instead, as Patrick Garton, Director of Oxfordshire Teaching Schools Alliance suggested:

'We need to create some levers for a conversation.'

We have attempted to create these levers through a set of design principles for pupils' SMSC development. Informed by our key findings, these principles aim to influence the thinking of anyone concerned with SMSC – school leaders, governors, policymakers and others. They are configured to apply across all UK jurisdictions and beyond.

Nine design principles for a transformed approach to SMSC

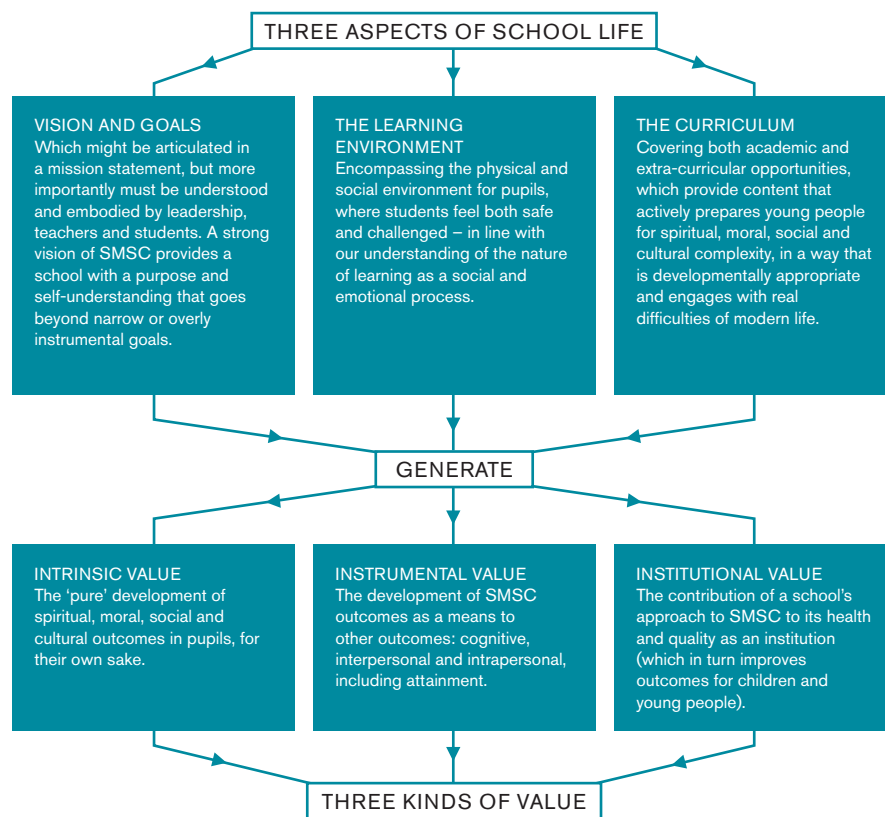
Clarify and engage

I. Make time for reflection to clarify meaning and create a coherent and robust vision and language for SMSC

Schools, individually, need to make time to come to an agreed definition about what they mean by pupils' SMSC development, what they include, what they do not and why. Some schools might place a stronger emphasis on a particular aspect, but all need to be mindful that attending to the spiritual, moral, social *and* cultural development and wellbeing of the children and young people in their care is a *statutory* responsibility.

Such an approach enables the school as a community to rationalise what it means by SMSC, communicate it to stakeholders, and most importantly, act on it. Without this kind of definitional work a school is unable to be clear about its SMSC objectives, or its progress towards achieving these. A school's governing body, working in partnership with the senior leadership team, should have a significant role in driving this process forward.

Figure 1 below may prove helpful to schools in creating this clear and robust vision for SMSC and operationalising it through policy and practices. Schools may find this a useful starting point for reflection and clarification of what SMSC means to them.



2. Make 'real' space for the spiritual

If the purpose of schools is above all to teach that which society and families value but struggle to teach alone, then spiritual development should be a central rather than avoidable aspect of SMSC provision. More than any other dimension of SMSC, spiritual development needs a 'stipulative' definition that spells out how pupils' spirituality will be developed at school. The RSA Social Brain Centre's current spirituality project has developed three categories which could usefully inform schools' approaches: experiences, practices, and perspectives.¹²

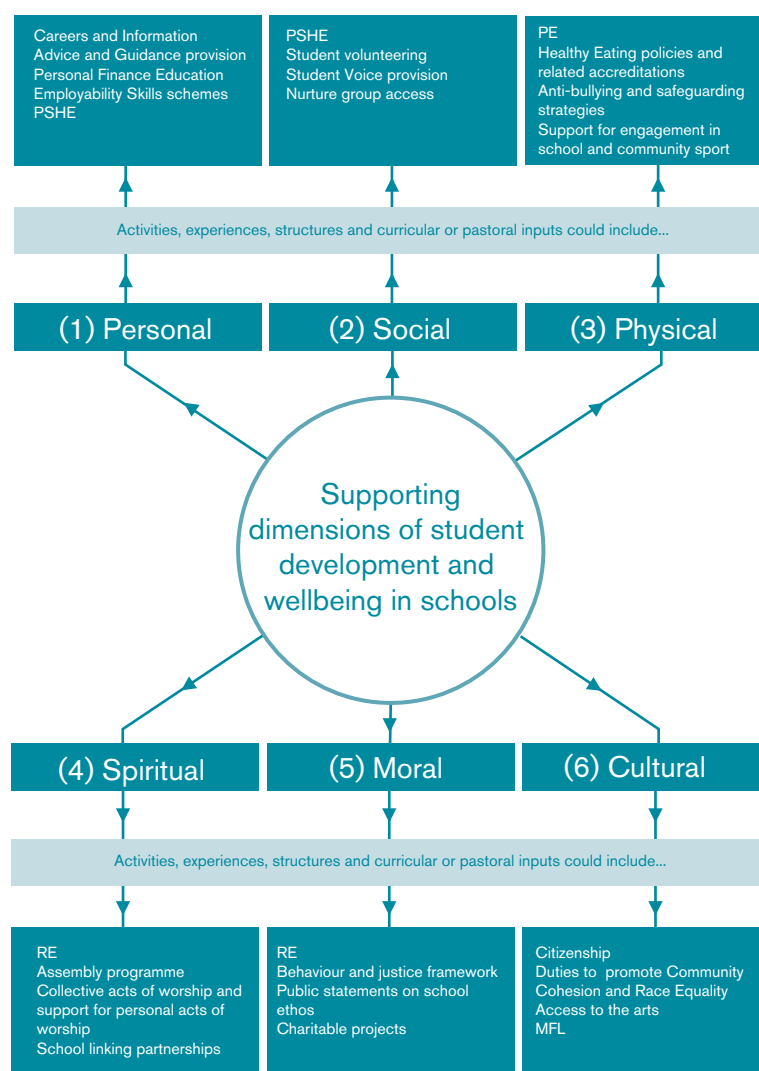
Schools taking spirituality seriously would need to initiate important conversations about what life is for, instilling a better felt sense for the myriad of human experiences, and some practical know-how on meaning-making for ourselves and others through rituals and practices. Such developments could be disruptive in a positive sense, helping to bring the school together as a living community that has soul and spirit, fostered by the individual and collective efforts of the human beings – students, senior leaders, teachers, support staff, governors, parents and community representatives – who have the school's best interests at heart.

12. Spiritual *experiences* are moments of aliveness, rapture and homecoming that make the world feel viscerally meaningful. Spiritual *practices* are the disciplined and creative activities that support human development – things we do to strengthen our inner lives. Spiritual *perspectives* are the value-rich visions of what it means to be here, to be human, our worldviews that contextualise our experiences and practices

Plan and deliver

3. Locate SMSC provision in multiple but specific areas of schooling, avoiding the ‘everywhere and nowhere’ dilemma and create ‘real opportunities’ for explicit student outcomes

Schools should focus on a *limited number of activities or approaches* for the implementation of SMSC. Done well, these are likely to be more effective and more open to a critical evaluation than many spread too thinly to make any real difference. Schools need to decide which of many possible activities and experiences are going to play a deliberate specified role in meeting SMSC goals. These are the areas that students, parents, teachers, advisers and inspectors are pointed to in answer to the question, “How and where do you deliver your responsibilities with regard to SMSC?”. Such an approach gives SMSC a degree of profile across the school – the kind of profile that, in a secondary school, a conventional ‘subject’ gets by virtue of being ‘on the timetable’. More importantly, it provides a clear basis on how a school might measure its success in achieving its SMSC objectives, and on how others might measure its success in this respect. It renders SMSC activity explicit and confirms that it has been strategically planned, something that classic ‘cross-curricular’ approaches struggle to achieve or demonstrate.



Although all staff need to bear some generic responsibility for SMSC, and teachers should be encouraged to reflect on their pedagogical repertoire to exploit SMSC-related ‘teachable moments’ when appropriate in standard lessons, they should not be expected to build in SMSC opportunities to every lesson or lesson plan.

As a National Teaching School we understand the significance of SMSC and the need to ensure that teachers and leaders feel empowered to address and develop SMSC within their own school setting. Helping schools to find the space to make sense of SMSC in an authentic way in their own settings is the crucial challenge – these are not things that can be bought ‘off the shelf’.

Patrick Garton, Assistant Headteacher, The Cherwell School

4. Nurture effective, creative leadership for SMSC at all levels

SMSC requires a robust, co-constructed and shared understanding of each of its components. Leaders in schools cannot develop, communicate and sustain a vision without a common understanding of what they are trying to do. Staff need to be able to engage, intellectually and emotionally, in an ongoing debate to shape and understand definitions. Governing bodies need the confidence and knowledge to challenge SMSC provision where necessary.

Although leadership for SMSC needs to be developed and distributed throughout any cohort of teachers, from the least to the most experienced, the development of Middle Leaders is a key moment for deepening understanding of SMSC. This can and should extend to student leadership whether through class and school councils, feedback mechanisms, or other forms of student voice and engagement. Pupil leadership development is also a vital opportunity to involve pupils in the design of SMSC provision. Approached in this way the design of SMSC provision promotes and fosters the capacity for leadership across the school and, in so doing, strengthens the soul and spirit of the school as a community, joined together in working for common aims and goals.

5. Sustain provision for SMSC throughout the teenage years

As pupils begin to study fewer areas of learning in greater detail, attempts to sustain a broader educational purpose become more difficult. However, our growing knowledge of how adolescents develop, neurologically and psychologically, points to the teenage years as a key time when young people need to understand their identity and build a far broader set of developmental characteristics, not only to thrive in the transition to adulthood, but to enjoy life in the present, as teenagers. Although many pupils continue to study RE to 16, this is a poor proxy for SMSC, however good the curriculum specification.

While other opportunities emerge, for instance through Youth social action programmes and the National Citizen Service (NCS), schools and colleges still need to find mechanisms to ensure that the SMSC development of all pupils continues to be prioritised through standard curriculum time and extracurricular activities.¹³ Such development helps to keep the school together as a community and encourages older students to take greater responsibility for their actions in and beyond school.

13. This can build on work carried out by the National Council of Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education, which is useful for any post-14 context. See www.fbfe.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Evaluation-of-SMSCG-Report-Final-for-web-site.pdf

6. Understand the impact of and exploit the potential of new technologies, and embrace controversy and complexity

New technologies are radically changing the way young people experience their social world, and pose interesting and diverse moral and cultural questions as people carry out interaction with others from all around the world in a virtual space, and children and teenagers have access to a much wider range of information and media. Schools need time to get to grips with these changes and think through how they will manage issues as they occur. These issues are too big to be kept on the sidelines, and schools which make space for them have found they are a helpful lever to opening channels of communication with parents and pupils about SMSC issues more generally.

It is vital for the relevance and vitality of SMSC provision that it embraces the complexity of life in modern societies and addresses the many controversies facing young people in their daily lives. These kinds of conversations are much easier if pupils and teachers already share a language and set of assumptions about spiritual, moral, social and cultural.

7. Engage with resources and opportunities beyond the school gates

Even the largest of secondary schools will not have the internal resources to ‘deliver’ SMSC independently. High quality SMSC provision requires opportunities for pupils to learn from other people, places and organisations, so that they engage with a range of experiences that challenge their thinking and encourage them to review their opinions. Such experiences can help to keep SMSC relevant to the needs and interests of young people and ensure that it responds to current debates and controversies in society.

Having a strong and coherent vision within a school can support this process: with a coherent centre, other opportunities for SMSC provided by external partners – such as cultural experiences, philosophy clubs, or community service – can more readily be built into a shared system of reflection and understanding, allowing teachers to enhance what pupils are learning through these experiences.

Evaluate and measure

It would be useful if there was greater consistency in the quality of the writing and there was more training for inspectors in this area. Some reports are comprehensive and evaluative, others less so.

Meg Henry, Schools Linking Network

8. Develop intelligent accountability and self-evaluation frameworks

Schools need some practical means of evaluating the effectiveness of their SMSC provision, partly to inform Ofsted, but more importantly to influence their next steps. A self-devised evaluation framework, possibly connected to Figure 1, would help schools to explore the connections between SMSC provision and broader outcomes, and articulate these with parents and others.

Self-evaluation data can be significantly strengthened through triangulating with additional sources of evidence, for example:

- use of existing attendance, behaviour and attainment data that might demonstrate correlations with SMSC provision and outcomes

- feedback from parents and others in the community about the school’s performance on SMSC development, as well as how clear the school’s vision or mission statement is on SMSC
- pupil feedback on opportunities for SMSC development
- quantitative data on provision of SMSC activities on offer and levels of take up

Systems of external inspection and regulation also need sharpening. Unlike judgements on other aspects of learning, SMSC judgements will be less informed by prior attainment data, so if anything needs more, not less attention from inspectors.

9. Retain a relentless focus on student learning and narrowing gaps in SMSC outcomes

Before any decisions are made about provision, each school needs to define its own SMSC-related outcomes, easily distinguishable from other educational focuses and aims within a school. They should contribute to academic attainment, but this should not be their primary purpose. They should be distinguished from preparation for *particular* roles in adult life, such as parenthood and employment. Instead, they should focus on the individual development of **pupils as people**. Once these outcomes are established, schools should seek equity in these outcomes, using pupil premium funding to ensure that those pupils at most risk of not developing these qualities through family circumstances are given opportunities to flourish.¹⁴ These outcomes need to be aligned, but not collapsed, into other intended outcomes. The task is then to define in simple terms what *development and progression* in each of the outcomes might mean.

Key recommendations

Building from these principles, we have developed nine key recommendations to help to stimulate discussion, debate and action. Although aimed primarily at the education system in England, we hope that they might resonate beyond its borders.

- I. **For everyone involved in education, 2015–16 (the academic year after the next general election) should be designated as a “year of reflection” when:**
 - no schools-related policies are announced by DfE or any other agency
 - no schools are forced to become academies
 - no Ofsted inspections take place apart from re-inspections of those schools which have been judged inadequate, and inspections of new Free Schools and academies, and
 - no organisations publish any new policy proposals for schools

¹⁴. This relates to the recommendations of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility, which has identified ‘character and resilience’ as a missing link in the government’s current social mobility strategy.

Schools would, of course, carry on teaching and responding to changes that already require implementation. During the year, school communities should be encouraged to exploit a period of relative stability to ask questions about their deeper goals. Thinking carefully and expansively about purpose and ethos is genuinely demanding work that requires proper time and space to accomplish. Governing bodies should have a central role in this process.

- 2. The DfE should set up a small expert working party to develop clearer guidelines for pupils' SMSC development in all state-funded schools in England, including academies and Free Schools.** The guidelines should be designed to be accessible to pupils, parents and other school stakeholders. They should explain with examples: how SMSC relates to the school curriculum as a whole; the constituent aspects in SMSC and what they might mean in different phases of education; and ways in which these different aspects may be supported in practice in schools.
- 3. Ofsted should develop a more consistent and rigorous approach to the inspection of schools' SMSC provision and outcomes.** Every school report should include a comprehensive analysis rather than a small number of illuminating anecdotes. However, more than any other area of inspection, Ofsted should above all evaluate the extent to which each school has developed, delivered and self-evaluated its own approach to SMSC. This has implications for the training of Ofsted inspection teams to ensure that they have a clear and consistent understanding of what SMSC development is and how it can be approached in schools. More radically, future revisions to Ofsted frameworks should consider whether the current 'behaviour and safety' category should be changed to 'pupils' personal development' (of which behaviour and safety is a subset). This will enable a greater focus on SMSC and other outcomes not currently assessed through standard public examinations and other methods.
- 4. The National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) should ensure that SMSC is more overtly built into any revisions made to the teachers' standards.¹⁵** For example, a new ninth standard could state that "a teacher must contribute to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils". This revision would ensure that SMSC was given more time in Initial Teacher Education (ITT), performance management processes, and professional learning opportunities. In advance of any future changes to Standards, ITT providers, including Schools Direct and Teach First, should consider how student teachers' understanding of SMSC development can be enhanced through both theory and classroom practice.

¹⁵ The next revision to the teachers' standards could be undertaken by a new Royal College of Teaching, but this issue is beyond the boundaries of this investigation.

5. **The NCTL and other providers of leadership programmes should develop methods for use with aspiring school leaders that develop their understanding of SMSC.** Likewise, Teaching Leaders should ensure that their programme for middle leaders includes opportunities to better understand the potential for SMSC in school transformation.

6. **School governing bodies should take full ownership of a school's SMSC policy as a driver to consider and, where necessary, reshape a school's overall purpose and ethos.** School governing bodies should appoint a lead governor with responsibility for SMSC who liaises with the school leadership, teachers and pupils and ensures that the school has strong partnerships with those beyond school who can help to strengthen SMSC provision.

7. **School leaders should use the design principles above to rethink their approach to SMSC.** Through this process, they should consider the following:
 - building SMSC development into reporting systems for parents and students
 - building SMSC into teachers' performance management systems (but not lesson plans)
 - using pupil premium funding to support the development of SMSC outcomes, linked to strategies for closing attainment gaps

8. **External providers of education opportunities, including businesses and cultural organisations should attempt to identify, as specifically as possible, how their offer might support a school's SMSC provision and outcomes, in addition to any subject-based curriculum links.**

9. **Foundations and other funders should also consider supporting tough-minded, well-researched practical projects which seek to understand the impact of specific SMSC interventions on SMSC outcomes and attainment.** This might include the development of a simple SMSC 'auditing tool', similar to Artsmark but without a kitemarking function, which can enable schools to evaluate their current SMSC provision and plan next steps. This needs to be flexible enough to adapt to each school's self-defined SMSC outcomes.

As stated above, our recommendations have been shaped very intentionally as 'levers for a conversation'. In this investigation we have repeatedly been struck by the extent to which SMSC development overlaps and intermingles with other issues facing schools. While on one hand, SMSC may appear as a floundering relic of education history which some feel has outlived its usefulness, it is also quite clearly a descriptor of not just a core purpose of schooling but of the core dimensions of our existence as social animals. In this respect, creating the time and space to reflect on, and design approaches to, meeting the statutory requirement to promote SMSC development may also be a path to re-envisioning our schools as first and foremost human places – places that are both stimulating and kind to their constituents, imbued with spirit and soul.

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