

Out-of-school education settings: registration and inspection

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents more than 18,000 heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of maintained and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL has members in more than 90 per cent of secondary schools and colleges of all types, responsible for the education of more than four million young people. This places the association in a unique position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of secondary schools and of colleges.
- 2 ASCL welcomes the attention being paid to these bodies. Some undoubtedly add a valuable dimension to the education of children who attend them, but school and college leaders have had concerns about some of them for many years.
- 3 There is a very wide range of different organisations encompassed by this definition: many, but by no means all, are intended to provide religious instruction in a particular religion or sect; many, but by no means all, are associated with a particular ethnic group.
- 4 Many can and do help young people understand better the cultural, ethnic or religious group to which they (or one or more of their parents) belong. This can be very valuable. But there is clearly a possibility that intentionally or accidentally they will exacerbate tensions between such a group and other groups in society, or between their group and British society as a whole. In extreme cases there is a danger that such settings can be used to radicalise young people and set them on a path of conflict with democratic society.
- 5 Such settings are often essentially unaccountable, except perhaps to the parents of the children who attend them, who may or may not be in a position to understand or challenge poor teaching or actually harmful instruction.
- 6 Indeed, it hard for any outsider to assess the quality of such a body.
- 7 It has been suggested that mainstream schools and colleges should develop closer links with bodies such as this to enable them better to serve the communities around them. ASCL has some sympathy with this, and indeed many schools and colleges already do have such links with some.
- 8 But as set out above it is hard for school and college leaders and governing bodies to be sure that they are dealing with suitable partners. They are rightly very concerned about safeguarding the young people in their care. If a mainstream school or college links with one of these institutions, which are often run on very informal lines, there are questions about where are the limits of their responsibility if something goes wrong, what checks and supervision are necessary and how is the quality of their practice assured.

- 9 School and college leaders are not resourced to, do not necessarily have the training to, and certainly do not have the time to make such assessments of number of potential partners of this kind with any degree of certainty.
- 10 ASCL therefore welcomes the proposal for registration and inspection of such bodies. As well as exposing weak or actually harmful practice in some cases this will enable schools and colleges to have the confidence to make links with those that are quality-assured as providing a good service and doing their young people no harm.
- 11 Such bodies need to comply with the same principles as any school or college, including adherence to British values, to be sure that the same poor practice that exists in some independent faith schools, as recently exposed by Ofsted, is not reproduced in this sector.
- 12 I hope that this is of value to your consultation, ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

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