

## Hosting Speakers on School Premises

Through hosting external speakers, schools provide a safe space for students to engage with a variety of issues and hear and debate different perspectives. Schools have a responsibility to ensure that the people they invite to speak are suitable and that all safeguarding procedures are followed. When inviting speakers, schools are reminded of the following:

- [Keeping children safe in education](#) is statutory guidance that all schools must have regard to when carrying out their duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. When inviting speakers, schools should be conscious of the safeguarding requirements in the guidance.
- The statutory guidance on the [Prevent duty](#) makes clear that as part of their safeguarding policies, schools should 'set out clear protocols for ensuring that any visiting speakers- whether invited by staff or pupils themselves are **suitable** and appropriately supervised'.
- The Department for Education has issued [advice to independent schools](#) (including academies and free schools) on improving the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils which states that: 'schools should **consider 'vetting' visiting speakers** if they may hold views which are inconsistent with the requirements of any part of the SMSC standard, and if still used ensure that the content of their presentation is agreed beforehand'.
- The Ofsted guidance for inspectors on [safeguarding](#) states that: 'inspectors should also check the setting's policy and procedures for ensuring that visitors to the school are **suitable and checked and monitored** as appropriate, for example, external speakers at school assemblies'.
- All schools are subject to requirements to **forbid political indoctrination** and secure a balanced treatment of political issues. This extends to extra-curricular activities which are provided or organised for registered pupils at the school by or on behalf of the school.<sup>1</sup>
- Schools which are charities should have regard to guidance from the [Charity Commission](#), which includes some examples of steps that trustees can take to help them manage the risk around hosting speakers. Other schools may find it helpful to refer to these general principles.
- [Teaching misconduct guidance](#) states that staff are 'likely to face prohibition if they deliberately allow exposure of pupils to such actions that undermine fundamental British values including promoting political or religious extremism by inviting individuals to speak in schools'.

Schools play an important role within the community and will often let their premises to external organisations. This can also be a means of generating additional income for the benefit of the school. The following principles apply in relation both to speakers visiting during normal school hours and to organisations and individuals using the premises outside school hours.

- Schools are encouraged to consider having a policy on hosting speakers which includes hosting during school hours and outside of school hours. Having a policy allows schools to set their own standard on hosting speakers beyond the minimum requirements set out in

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<sup>1</sup>Section 406 and 407 of the Education Act 1996 and standard 5c of the Independent School Standards

the advice and guidance referred to above and might make clear, for example, that the school will only let its premises to organisations and individuals whose conduct is in accordance with the ethos of the school. It might ask speakers to sign up to a particular code of conduct before permission is given to use the venue. Having a formal policy in place can also make it easier for a school to justify refusing to host a particular organisation or individual about which there are concerns. Similar considerations may apply to hosting speakers outside of school hours as during school hours if students are likely to attend these events.

- Schools that are under a duty to promote community cohesion must be satisfied that any speakers they invite will not undermine that duty.
- Schools should be mindful of the way in which their land is held, and who holds it, as this may in some cases limit or prohibit land being used for certain purposes.
- Schools must ensure, in making any decisions about whether to host an external speaker, that they comply with the public sector equality duty and that they are not discriminating by reference to protected characteristics

Schools which outsource their letting arrangements to a third party are advised to ensure that the third party carries out vetting in line with the school's policy and any guidance from government.

### **Practical Guidance:**

When hosting a speaker (either during or outside of school hours), schools may wish to consider carrying out the following research before agreeing to host:

- The topic of the event (including the purpose of the speaker's visit and the appropriateness for the audience).
- The speaker's reputation and who may be prompted to attend, particularly whether the speaker or members from the organisation they represent have a reputation for causing disruption at venues.
- Any risks to the school's reputation and ethos.
- The status of the speaker, including their previous comments, by carrying out checks on internet search engines and across social media sites. When carrying out internet searches, it is good practice to look beyond the first page of results.
- Whether you consider there to be potential for speakers to use language intended to stir up hatred or incite violence.
- The views of the Community safety team/ local police/ LA Prevent co-ordinator if you have any concerns.

Schools should consider these steps for every event that they host.

### **For more information:**

The [equalities guidance for schools](#) contains advice on ensuring that the public sector equalities duty is fulfilled (see chapter 5).