

All God's Children.

There is much with is excellent in the document. Children are being bullied. Church Schools need to lead the way in welcoming all. The notes following are though about concerns. They need to be read in the context that much of the document is helpful and timely.

Language and intentionality (eg definition of bullying – Stonewall's is objective and very well crafted including referencing '**persistent**'; while the CofE guidance rests on the **emotional response of the individual to a single situation**.) This opens every Church School to a potentially serious environment.

Doctrine There are differences (in the introduction) to later statements that children *are loved* by God (page 5). In Christian theology, God indeed loves everything he has made; *knowing* God is a response to this love. (eg, the primacy of one particular doctrine of Election through the bold statement that all *are known* by God, and the title of 'All God's Children' are references that could be misunderstood as incarnational theology veering towards universalism; there is an ontological difference between being *known by* God and *knowing God*.)

Theology and gender fluidity. Is this document is now reflecting official CofE policy and doctrine? If so, then where is the careful theological debate and Reception process regarding what the guidance calls 'the wonderful variety of ways to be human'. This is not defined in the document and if it were to be, it would need to be within the context of Anglican theology and Scripture. This is loose and allows porous interpretation in what will become official Guidance and is to be the basis for SIAMS inspection grading. Stonewall's documentation is much better.

Inspection If this document is to be the basis of the new SIAMS inspection framework on then the document will set the direction and agenda yet it has not been road tested in any meaningful manner. In our Diocese, we are responding belatedly to the document only after it has been approved, printed and distributed to every Church School in the Diocese. How was this distribution funded? Why was funding allocated in this manner?

If 'urban myth' stories of OFSTED inspections taking a particular view of inclusion and questioning Church Schools on aspects of faith-culture-inclusivity are correct, then what the document needs to be is a fair analysis of the level of the problem (what is the evidence?), recommendations for changes (because we can all learn in this area) and finally, a robust evidence base that schools can use for their reply to OFSTED.

Assumptions. There are empty generalisations lacking an evidence base. (eg, Christian children of Christian homes can have a harder time navigating identity issues?!) This could be misused by people to make strongly negative statements about faith within families. Where is the evidence that this is the case vs subjectivism? Experience suggests that clarity of faith leads families to demonstrate accepting love in areas such as differentiation. What does this statement say about the presence and comfort of Christian faith in the home?

Emphasis on inclusion without adequate theological underpinning. On p28 Desmond Tutu is quoted regarding “everyone’s an insider”. This creates a radical inclusion whereby nothing is to be excluded from teaching or ethos either now or the future. It appears to follow a Natural Evolution Theology: as society ‘evolves’, Church Schools are assumed to evolve to welcome and embrace all sexual expressions as ‘insider’. The document errs towards Natural Theology rather than Trinitarian Theology, with the emphasis on sexual orientation evolution as an aspect of the belief in ‘human civilisation evolution’ⁱ. Para 49 states that CofE Schools must now undertake an “unconditional acceptance of differences”. This creates a situation where our schools lack theological lines: Polygamy? Serial monogamy? What does ‘unconditional acceptance’ look like in a theological framework? The impression given is that the document is an agenda seeking a theology.

Outmoded/fixed in time psychiatric assumptions. The guidance has fixed sexual orientation in the same criteria as ethnicity, creating a fixed-view of orientation. Both Stonewall and the Royal College of Psychiatrists have reviewed their previous fixed-orientation hypothesis and moved to a hypothesis of orientation fluidity.

Is it a ‘safe’ document? The document defines its purpose as creating ‘safe and welcoming’ without adequately defining what this means other than citing *personal* offense. ‘Safe and welcoming’ in the context of the subject matter is widely viewed elsewhere as about positive affirmation. Positive affirmation and ‘safe’ are not necessarily the same thing. Personal offense in law is a difficult area to adjudicate on. The definition of bullying as being about a single, personal slight (albeit that this is surely not acceptable and does need eradicating) could create a nightmare of legal challenges for Church Schools in the future. Stonewall recognises that bullying tends to be about persistence and event and their definition is far better and a stronger statement on which to base cases and investigations.

Eradication of gender (rather than role gender neutral): the document appears to go well beyond sexual orientation and gender bullying; it appears to use gender stereotyping (‘boys can wear tiara’ headlines regarding the document – which was unfortunate and typical hyperbole) as a means to introduce a deep philosophy of gender neutrality; this is not Scriptural. This is not about male and female role stereotyping but about the Creator’s distinctive fulfilment in all Creation. Again, it appears to be an agenda creating a theology.

Questionable resources for a Church school. The further resources section has a list of commended – but not recommended? – books. This appears naïve or if it is not naïve then it may be something else? Some of these books could be seen as against the Teaching of the Church in some of their content, ethos and language; eg, King and King, Tango Makes Three, The Family Book... The resource list for sex education includes material which, being polite about it, has no reference to faith, marriage or the context of love, for eg, Channel 4’s DVD series. Those commending the guidance might like to view it themselves first before commending it to younger children?? What is needed in the document is a list of approved and commended materials which conform to Scripture, Teaching and Anglican Theology (hopefully aligning with all 3?) but to do this, the material would have to be assessed by those with theological understanding. The document does not appear to have a great deal of theological understanding but instead majors on social pedagogy and cultural evolution.

Perhaps this should be expected from an education document; conversely, this is a document from the Church of England about an aspect of education. The question needs to be asked: are the right people leading this?

What is missing? 8 key things....

1. Critical analysis of the resource list regarding the value in terms of education and Christian acceptability; as such, the entire list could be deemed by schools to be official direction.
2. Christian based resource materials which have been adequately assessed. If they do not exist, the CofE might like to produce them. Schools need to know what is appropriate and what is not appropriate
3. Reinforcement of the Christian Distinctiveness of inclusion of all and the theological reasons for this.
4. Reinforcing the stated position of the CofE that sex education is within the framework of Christian teaching, marriage, practices: that fall short of this are not the ideal expression of sexual love.
5. Christian theology and teaching to underpin the principles of the document. There are over 90 references to homophobia, 9 or 10 references to Stonewall and links to Stonewall's website but the Bible and Christ are each referred to just once.
6. Evidence, such as para 2, p3 where the document states without evidence that there is work to be done regarding removing HTB language from schools. The implication is that this is institutional and prevalent in Church schools.
7. Acknowledgement in the publication as to the funding source for the hard-bound copies distributed to all Church schools.
8. Explanation as to how this will influence SIAMS expectations and OFSTED inspections