

Radicalisation in Cumbria – The PREVENT Strategy

Events over the last few years in Syria and the ongoing refugee and migrant crisis in Europe may seem a long way from West Cumbria, but it is an issue that affects all of us and is something we need to be aware of. There is also no denying that there is an ongoing threat from terrorism, currently rated as 'severe'; British citizens are being recruited by terrorist groups, and the Government thinks local services could do more to identify and safeguard those at risk of getting involved – so it's making the prevention of terrorism a legal duty for public bodies – and that includes schools. The new Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 says that schools have a duty to 'have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'.

So what are the expectations of schools, and what would the Prevent strategy look like?

First and foremost, we will continue to teach a broad and balanced curriculum in line with our own values of tolerance, equality, respect, compassion and inclusion. We will promote fundamental British values, and assess the risk of pupils being drawn into terrorism or supporting extremism. We are training key staff to give us the knowledge and confidence to identify children at risk; we protect our students from terrorist and extremist material when accessing the internet at school and, as we always have done, challenge expressions of support for terrorism or extremist views, using 'us and them' language, or if a student tries to justify the use of violence to solve real or perceived grievances, in the same way as we would challenge other discriminatory or prejudicial views. Students need to be taught the skills to think critically so as to understand and tolerate differences, especially those of other faiths.

What has this got to do with me, especially here in Cumbria?

For Cumbria, perhaps the most worrying trend is a growth in extreme, intolerant ideologies, often extreme right wing. Groups actively aim to recruit young people, both face to face and increasingly via social media.

All children and young people have a fundamental right to be protected from harm of all kinds, and the right to expect schools to provide a safe and secure environment which teaches them how to answer the moral, social, political and economic questions they will be asked in an increasingly challenging and changing world. It feels as if all this is happening a long way away. But we should remember the world is getting smaller – and it could happen here. We will do our best to make sure our students are safe and can deal with such issues in a mature, balanced way. This is a difficult topic; and should you have any questions or comments, please contact me at school.

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