

Requiring teachers to present a view in classes that ou...

Published: January 15, 2026, 4:48 pm

The government [issued this statement](#) yesterday:

New guidance to support teachers in tackling sensitive issues in the classroom in a politically impartial way is being published today (17 February 2022).

Teaching about political issues and the differing views on these is an essential part of the curriculum, helping pupils to form their own opinions and prepare them for later life.

The [new political impartiality in schools guidance](#) will help teachers and schools navigate issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the legacy of the British Empire or societal responses to racism in accordance with the law, which states that teachers must not promote partisan political views and should offer a balanced overview of opposing views when political issues are taught.

Practical examples include:

- *
when teaching about the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the UK, teachers should not present discriminatory opposing beliefs held at the time in an uncritical manner or as acceptable in our society today;
- *
teachers should not present opposing views to the fundamental underpinnings to our society, like freedom of speech and protection from violence and criminal activity;
- *
when teaching about racism, teachers should be clear that it has no place in our society – but should avoid advocating for specific organisations that have widely contested aims or views;

*

when teaching younger students about historical figures with contested legacies, it may be advisable to focus on what these figures are most renowned for and factual information about them, if teachers think pupils may not be able to understand the contested aspects of their lives, beliefs and actions;

*

if inviting local political figures, including MPs, councillors, or former pupils involved in politics, to talk to pupils, this can be balanced by inviting a range of people with differing views or by teaching directly about other candidates and political parties; and

*

suggested action if it became clear, following a complaint, that during a lesson a teacher suggested to pupils that it is an objective fact that the political system of a certain country is the 'fairest' and 'best' in the world. A proportionate response may be to ask the teacher to clarify during their next lesson that this was their own personal political view.

I don't usually quote at such length, but sometimes it seems worth noting what the government is saying.

In response to this statement I note that [the Guardian](#) is reporting:

[Restrictions on political topics in schools](#) will harm young people by curbing discussions about the polarised arguments and issues they are exposed to on social media, according to the government's former mental health champion.

Natasha Devon said young people from minority backgrounds stood to be the biggest losers if the new guidelines meant teachers in [England](#) were afraid to provide students with a safe environment to debate issues.

They added:

Devon compared the guidance to the section 28 regulations concerning classroom discussion of homosexuality in force during the late 1980s and 1990s.

"With section 28 it didn't say you can't talk about homosexuality, it said you were not allowed to 'promote' homosexuality," she said. "But what ended up happening is that no one talked about it and I think the same thing is going to happen now, which will harm minority students by taking away their space to explore issues like race and social justice that are affecting them all the time."

Others noted how hard this guidance will make any discussion of Black Lives Matter, for example, and yet that movement has a real impact on young people's lives and this

guidance makes it nigh on impossible for a teacher to permit discussion of their views.

Other issues are noted by the Guardian. I have my own. It is with this example:

Scenario

Teaching about climate change and the scientific facts and evidence behind this, would not constitute teaching about a political issue. Schools do not need to present misinformation, such as unsubstantiated claims that anthropogenic climate change is not occurring, to provide balance here.

However, where teaching covers the potential solutions for tackling climate change, this may constitute a political issue. Different groups, including political parties and campaign groups, may have partisan political views on the best way to address climate change.

This part of the topic should be taught in a balanced manner, with teachers not promoting any of the partisan political views covered to pupils.

First of all, I challenge the idea that discussing the idea that we should tackle climate change is a political issue. It makes no sense at all to say a teacher might teach about the issue and state it to be a fact that this is a human created crisis but then has to make clear it is a political judgement that we might wish to address it.

As a matter of fact young people know about climate change because they are well aware that for many this might be the biggest crisis that they will ever have to face in their lives.

Does a teacher really have to say that there is a credible choice to take no action and suggest that this is a balanced view when that means that the planet may cease to be sustainable during the lifetimes of their pupils because Steve Baker says some (by which he means those of his generation and perspective) think it too expensive to take action?

How is a teacher meant to introduce that claim neutrally, and remain neutral by suggesting it is credible and to be respected during discussion? Does this guidance really means that teachers are required to say to their pupils that some amongst their parents' and grandparents' generation think they would rather not change any aspect of their lifestyle and would instead prefer that the planet become unsustainable for generations to come? On what basis could a teacher remain credible with their pupils on that basis?

The same problem is apparent in many areas. For example, the government implicitly argues that a teacher can be acknowledge that racism is an issue but then requires that the the teacher argue that doing nothing about it is acceptable.

It could also apply to social policy. For example, the teacher could suggest that poverty is real but is then required to present the view that nothing be done about it.

This is not about neutrality. It is not even about ethics or impartiality. It is about teachers being required to present the view that although the existing structure of society is profoundly prejudicial and harmful to the well-being of many that is the consequence of the natural order of being and that although there are things that might be done to address these issues it would be wrong for anyone to do them. That requires the teacher to in that case present the argument that the society we have is the best that we might get. And that is profoundly biased in favour of the opinion of the current government, whose position this sustains by suggesting that they have achieved optimal outcomes for us all, whatever we might think.

Requiring teachers to present a view in classes that our government is the benign deliverer of optimal outcomes for society is anything but neutral, but that is what the government is demanding that teachers do.