

Inclusive Schools

Promoting and Protecting Freedom of Religion or Belief for All

Introduction

Culham St Gabriel's Trust has a strong track record of engaging with Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and education. It has sought to explore how FoRB and FoRB principles might be taught in formal education settings.

The Freedom of Religion or Belief was first articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Article 18 reads:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Since then, other treaties and legal documents have given greater shape to the rights covered. Those treaties and documents include: the 1953 European Convention on Human Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the 1989 UNCRC Article 14 which guarantees children the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and in the UK the Equalities Act of 2010.

Culham St Gabriel's, notably through the projects which it has supported, has been responsible for the emergence of a nascent evidence base for what constitutes FoRB Education. See for instance, Culham St Gabriel's Primary Education project, or the FoRB Ambassadors project run by AREIAC. More information about Culham St Gabriel's work on FoRB can be found [here](#).

Equipping school leaders

This document seeks to extend that work by considering how school leaders (such as chief executives, headteachers, directors of education, governors, trustees) can build cultures where, alongside other values, FoRB is promoted and protected. . The distinction between promotion and protection is important: in the UK discrimination or hate-crime is the most experienced violation of FoRB[1].

[1] <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-year-ending-march-2025/hate-crime-england-and-wales-year-ending-march-2025>



So, while a school that takes seriously FoRB in relation to inclusive practices will actively promote FoRB, it will also take seriously and challenge violations of FoRB which could occur.

Before considering the contribution of FoRB to ensuring inclusion and building belonging in schools, it is worth setting out three principles of FoRB Education itself.

Three Educational Principles

FoRB Education enables pupils to:

- talk about their own religion or belief, experience ways in which other people explore and express meaning, and to learn about where and how their religion or belief may be different to others;
- talk about freedom, what it means to be free, what it means for others to be free, and what it might mean or feel like to have those freedoms restricted specifically in relation to FoRB;
- learn about Human Rights, that they are for everyone everywhere and that FoRB is a human right.

The resources developed by Culham St Gabriel's based on these three principles include FoRB learning outcomes for different age groups, such as learning about and understanding the responsibilities we all have to promote and protect FoRB for ourselves and others.

Supporting Inclusion through promoting and protecting FoRB

To be a school where FoRB flourishes suggests something more than just teaching about FoRB. Rather it speaks to decisions taken and values embedded at many different levels within a school, weaving an understanding of and commitment to FoRB into the vision, mission and ethos of the school. Freedom of religion or belief helps create school cultures where every pupil feels respected and able to express their identity, supporting a deep sense of inclusion and belonging. It also protects pupils from discrimination and fosters understanding across diverse worldviews, thereby strengthening positive relationships in the school community

In schools there are a range of 'domains' across which choices and approaches may be made.

These domains are:

- Professional Knowledge: what individual teachers know and understand about promoting and protecting FoRB
- Curriculum: how the curriculum promotes and protects FoRB
- Leadership Practice: how school leaders implement their vision, mission and ethos to promote and protect FoRB throughout the school community

The framework which follows consists of two documents:

- A toolkit which seeks to pose questions for each domain corresponding to the three key principles of FoRB Education. In this way, leaders can use the framework to consider how they might go about embedding a culture in their schools which promotes and protects FoRB. It also makes a distinction between 'promoting' and 'protecting' FoRB.
- A sample FoRB School Policy. The content provided is indicative and may be adapted by schools to suit their contexts and to align with existing policies which they might have in place.
- Finally, it is important to stress that this document is intended as a guide for teachers and school leaders who are interested in thinking about how their schools can promote and protect FoRB. The toolkit is thorough and wide-ranging and requires time and commitment to meet in its entirety; this might not be appropriate for every school, but the toolkit retains its value as a mechanism to stimulate conversations about values important to the whole school community.