House of Commons debate on British values and teaching, 25/06/2014

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British Values: Teaching

[Mr Peter Bone *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): The sitting is resumed and we start with a very interesting debate on the teaching of British values.

Mr John Denham (Southampton, Itchen) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone, particularly as you have rightly said that this is a very interesting debate. I hope that everyone will still feel that it is an interesting debate when I have finished speaking.

I am grateful for the chance to have this debate on teaching British values. I have been engaged in this issue for a long time and certainly at least since I became a Home Office Minister in 2001, but obviously I asked for today's debate following the Government's recent announcement that all schools will be required to promote British values. In the wake of that announcement and the issues in Birmingham that seem to have provoked it, media coverage has tended to be polarised between supporters of the Government's proposition and those who treat the whole idea of promoting British values with some derision or concern. I wanted this debate because I do not fit easily into either of those camps. I believe that nation building —the conscious attempt to create a strong cohesive society with a strong national story and shared values— is now a national imperative. It follows, for me, that schools should be in the business of nation building. I do not agree with those who have argued quite recently that talking about Britishness is really rather un-British. That includes, in fact, the Secretary of State for Education.

However, I have real concerns that the Government's approach is ill judged and may be counter-productive. It is of concern that within days the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister were taking diametrically opposed positions on this issue in the media. That rather suggests that both were more concerned about forthcoming elections than about the promotion of British values, but this issue is too important for the Government to handle it in such an unco-ordinated and disorganised way. I will end my remarks by making a few proposals for an approach that is more rounded and more constructive, but still designed to promote British values.

This is a critical moment. Three years ago in Munich, the Prime Minister ended support for what he called "state multiculturalism". He did not just say that multiculturalism was dead; he put nothing in its place, even though Britain at that time was continuing to experience rapid social and economic change with large-scale if unplanned immigration.

From the 1960s, Governments had done their best to make an increasingly diverse society work, tackling racism and discrimination, unfairness in public services and disadvantage in education. From 2011, for the first time in more than 50 years, we have had no clear state policy and no clear Government philosophy about how we are all to live together successfully. Of course today's problems do not start or end with this Government, but this was an unfortunate time to leave the field of play—to

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abandon attempts to set out how a strong and cohesive society could be built. There was a desultory little document on integration from the Department for Communities and Local Government—it was little more than a list of local examples of good practice— and that was it.

For all the strong bonds between people of different backgrounds that exist, not for decades has this country felt so ill at ease with itself and so uncertain about where it is going, so a new initiative to promote British values is significant. It may, in my view, be poorly designed, but rather than dismissing it, we should welcome any sign of renewed interest in how our country works in the future.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on putting in for and securing the debate. I represent the most diverse city in Europe. The ethnic minority population of Leicester has now passed 50%. Does he agree that British values may mean something different in Leicester from what they mean in Southampton, London or, for example, the Forest of Dean, and that we should take on board all those differences before we get to a position where we define what British values are?

Mr Denham: That is a very important suggestion. I think we have to find a way to find, actively and consciously, the common ground and the common story, and that includes Southampton, Leicester, the Forest of Dean and many other places. It is not enough to say that we should all just go on in our own ways in our different places; nor is it possible to say that British values will mean just one thing and that everyone has to agree exactly the same thing. I want to talk this

afternoon about how we go through a process of finding what that common ground and common story is, so that rather than some people feeling that they are part of it and others feeling that they are not, everyone feels that they share in it.

I am clear about a few things. I believe that a diverse but sometimes divided Britain needs more than a hope and a prayer that we will all rub along together. Young people need a shared sense of our history and how we came to be sharing this land, and they need that in Southampton, the Forest of Dean and Leicester. They need to understand how our past has shaped our values and, crucially, they need the chance to debate and shape the values that they will share in the years to come.

Those who dismiss the whole idea of promoting strong national values are wrong. In the future, we need a conscious focus on nation building, and schools must play an important role. Multiculturalism has not, in my view, been the failure that some say. Promoting respect for difference and acceptance and tolerance for new communities has worked well and, in general, more successfully than in many other European countries that took a different path. However, in promoting respect for difference, multiculturalism failed to emphasise or develop what we hold and value in common. It was clearer about what new communities could expect from established communities than about what was expected from the new communities. The limits of what we could call value-neutral multiculturalism are clear. We need

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more emphasis on what we share, while continuing to value our differences, so I argue that nation building, emphasising what we share as well as valuing difference, must now fill the gap where multiculturalism has been found wanting.

Some have argued in the past that we do not need to share that much. The Parekh report, about 15 years ago, reflected the idea that, provided that we all saw ourselves as citizens under the law or even as communities under the same law, not much else mattered. The Goldsmith report, "Citizenship: Our Common Bond", was based on a similar, legal view of citizenship. Of course respect for the law is vital and our society would be stronger if everyone understood and respected the laws that currently exist to promote equality, freedom of speech and the right to vote, or to oppose discrimination, incitement and female genital mutilation, but saying that we are simply citizens under the law is not enough. That is just not how anyone feels about a real country. It is nation building that helps us to forge the common national story—the sense of shared identity alongside the many other national, faith, ethnic, cultural or local identities that we hold—and we need those things for a cohesive and successful society.

In 2001, I was a Home Office Minister. That summer, serious riots took place in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham. The conflict was between white working-class young people and young people, overwhelmingly British born, of Pakistani Kashmiri origin. I was asked to lead the response and I appointed a commission headed by Ted Cantle to look into what needed to be done. The Cantle report painted a depressing picture of communities that led "parallel lives", never mixing or speaking and educated in separate schools. People enjoyed less interaction between communities than their parents had done, because the big factories where everyone worked together had been closed.

I want to refer to what that report said about citizenship and common values. Talking about parallel lives, the report concluded:

"In such a climate, there has been little attempt to develop clear values which focus on what it means to be a citizen of a…multi-racial Britain".

The report went on to say:

"In order to develop some shared principles of citizenship and ensure ownership across the community, we propose that a well resourced national debate, heavily influenced by younger people, be conducted on an open and honest basis…The resulting principles of a new citizenship should be used to develop a more coherent approach to education, housing, regeneration, employment and other programmes."

I cannot stress enough the importance of that emphasis on young people's role, not just in being taught something, but in being able to shape their future and the values they wanted to share together.

Mr David Ward (Bradford East) (LD): This is like a journey back in time. I understand the link between the Cantle report, British values and bringing people together, but is it not the case that this debate has been prompted by what is taking place in schools? The bigger issue that we need to decide is what constitutes a secular education in this country and what limits that places on the activities of parents and governors in that school who probably want to run the school in a different way.

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Mr Denham: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying. The issues that have arisen in Birmingham are important, and I will come to them in a moment. If the debate was simply about a few schools—the issues that we have seen in Birmingham are not common across the country—that would be an issue to deal with in those few schools. The Government's response has opened up a bigger debate about how we promote a national story and shared British values, which I think is important and has been neglected for too long. There has been an attempt not to deal with some very difficult issues.

I turn to the Cantle report; I am deliberately going back in time. The report did not meet with universal acclaim. Established racial equality organisations said that its

diagnosis was the wrong one and that the problem was poverty and racism. Some Muslim organisations rejected any criticism of how communities had evolved. Liberal—that is, with a small l—voices, as now, rejected any idea of shared British values. Some felt, wrongly, that the problems arose only in a few places. Subsequently, public policy was diverted after the terrorism of 9/11 and 7/7. The riots took place before 9/11 and the report was published just afterwards, so although Cantle had some real influence, the big national debates about shared values that he talked about never took place.

One real legacy was the responsibility placed on all schools in 2005 to promote community cohesion, with Ofsted required to report on how well that was being carried out. That was probably much less ambitious than Cantle had wanted, but it was at least a start. Crucially, however, such work is difficult. Even though the Cantle report said:

"Schools should not be afraid to discuss difficult areas and the young people we met wanted to have this opportunity and should be given a safe environment in which to do so",

the evidence was that most schools found that difficult. The Select Committee on Home Affairs has said that few teachers felt comfortable with dealing with issues related to terrorism or the wars that were fought in Iraq or Afghanistan. A review of diversity and citizenship in the curriculum found that few pupils had had experiences of talking about things that people in Britain share.

Today, some of those old issues still exist and new ones have arisen. Many schools have seen rapid social and demographic change, so classrooms contain students who have been part of that change and students who come from families who have been disconcerted by it. If our schools, particularly our secondary schools, cannot provide a safe space in which to discuss such issues, that does not mean that students will not talk about them; it just means that they will talk about them in isolation in their own separate groups and communities, and in dangerous places off and online.

Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is talking about creating a value system that we can all live by. As he knows, a few days ago the Government published a consultative report on independent school standards. They have talked about the fact that we should be promoting the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect, and tolerance for those with different faiths and beliefs. Is that not exactly the sort of common value system that we can all unite around?

Mr Denham: I will come precisely to that point in due course. I hope that hon. Members in the Chamber will bear with me. I have been through the history, because it is important to understand that we have debated some of these things before. If we do not understand what went wrong in the past, we will not get it right in future. The key point I am trying to make is that unless we support schools and teachers to do such work, none of the regulations or the speeches we make will make any difference to anybody. As Sir Keith Ajegbo's review of diversity and citizenship reported, such work is not possible without support for teachers and the teaching methods that they need. He made this crucial point:

"In order for young people to explore how we live together in the UK today and to debate the values we share, it is important they consider issues that have shaped the development of UK society – and to understand them through the lens of history."

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing this important, timely and interesting debate. Following the earlier intervention, I put it to him—I do not say this tritely—that there is a problem in all this, because the right not to share some British values or some part of those values can, in itself, be argued to be a British value. The very act of trying to define this too narrowly can accentuate, rather than lessen, a sense of difference.

Mr Denham: How we handle difference is undoubtedly one of the British characteristics that students need to understand. I will talk about doing it in the right way and doing it in the wrong way in a moment.

Having said that teachers need support, the second point that I need to draw from history is that values mean little without an understanding of the history that has shaped them. Students need to be able to debate and explore values rather than simply being taught them. The Prime Minister spoke recently about Magna Carta. To get from Magna Carta to where we are today, we have to go through quite a period of burning bishops, cutting the heads off kings, fighting civil wars, invading other countries, being invaded and calling it a Glorious Revolution, trade union campaigns, women's suffrage and all the rest of it. We can make no sense of our British values without understanding the history of how we came to be where we are.

Let me set out my concerns about what the Government are proposing. Hon. Members will have gathered that I agree with and support the idea of promoting British values; my concerns are these. First, the Government have spent much of the past four years undoing the good work that was going on in schools. Secondly, they are expending far more energy on constructing a legal basis for intervening in schools than they are on helping teachers to promote British values. There are simpler ways of dealing with the sorts of problems we have seen in Birmingham. Thirdly, the legal definition of British values leaves too many contentious questions unresolved and carries too many risks. Fourthly, all attention has been focused deliberately on one community—the Muslim community—and not enough

on addressing all those who will share in shaping Britain's future. Fifthly, the Government have neglected the fact that we have multiple identities. I am English every bit as much as I am British. British values, as the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester

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East (Keith Vaz), has said, are seen through the prism of many other identities. Finally, there is too little practical support for schools, as I have said.

For four years, the Government have actively undermined good work in schools. Citizenship education has been weakened and Ofsted's legal duty to inspect school promotion of community cohesion was ended in 2011. The Government promoted schools with greater autonomy to set their own curriculum and determine their own intake. The Government have funded free schools such as the Al-Madinah school in Derby, and they should not be surprised if their rhetoric encouraged the idea that schools could be narrowly tied to one part of the community or one set of parents. Faced with the consequences, the Government are now scrambling for new powers to intervene.

In current law and in the Government's proposals, British values are set down as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect, and tolerance of those of different faiths and beliefs. No one will argue much with those. However, twice recently the Prime Minister has given different lists. He has spoken, for example, of accepting personal and social responsibility and of respect for British institutions, but in neither case did he say what he meant. Those are not in the Government's proposals, and such sloppiness does not bode well for the future. British values cannot mean whatever the Prime Minister of the day, or a Secretary of State, means them to be. British values are crucial, but they are not unchanging. The Britain I was born into was commonly racist and deeply homophobic. Much has changed today.

None of the values listed explicitly challenges racism, sexism or homophobia. We have to dig into the draft regulations to read that British values are to be interpreted as meaning the Equality Act 2010. I wonder how many commentators, or indeed Government Members, realise that the Act is now the legal baseline for British values. I welcome the Act, but even I would hardly describe it as a timeless British value. What that tells us is the importance of students understanding where such statements of values come from and what they mean today. Students have to know the history, the arguments, the campaigns and the political disputes that have led to changing attitudes. It is better to see the Act as a snapshot of where our national debate had reached in 2010. Not everyone will support the Act's values, which is the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith).

This Parliament has sanctioned gay marriage, despite the opposition of England's established Church. Upholding the law means respecting gay marriage, but where does that leave the millions of people, of many faiths, who believe that gay marriage is wrong? To me, a key part of Britishness is the principled and practical compromises we reach to handle such differences. Those compromises are complex, subtle, ever-changing and democratic. Those of us who have met concerned constituents will agree that, in the best sense of the word, Britishness does not lend itself to law, but I will make this point: once the Government's regulations are challenged, as they will be when they are used as the basis to intervene in schools, it will be the courts that define what British values mean. Instead of being dynamic and constantly evolving, judges will say what British values are. Given

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how many Government Members are exercised by what judges have done with the European convention on human rights, I am surprised that the Government want to give judges the power to decide what it is to be British.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I have massive sympathy with the right hon. Gentleman's central point that promoting positive values in schools will be difficult because they are always changing and evolving, but does he, in return, have some sympathy with what I think prompted the Government to approach the matter in the first place? Does he recognise that there are certain extreme and intolerant views that must actively be kept from being promoted in schools?

Mr Denham: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, in a few moments I will directly address what I think the Government should be doing to enable themselves to address situations such as those in Birmingham.

Alok Sharma *rose—*

Mr Denham: I will take one more intervention.

Alok Sharma: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for being so generous in taking interventions. I agree that the world has changed and society has, in many ways, become much more tolerant. I remember sitting on public transport in Reading when I was a youngster and being subjected to casual racist abuse. That would not happen in a town such as Reading now, or at least people would not get away with it. On the subject of changing values, does he not agree that values such as individual liberty, tolerance and democracy are timeless?

Mr Denham: They are timeless, but our understanding varies. Forgive me for using a trivial example, but when I first came into this House, non-smokers were expected to respect the right of smokers to smoke in Committee Rooms, tea rooms, dining rooms and bars. Today, smokers are expected to respect the liberty of non-smokers not to breathe in their smoke. Liberty has not

changed, and this is a silly example, but our understanding of what those values mean changes over time. That is crucial. The idea that our understanding of those values is fixed in time is wrong.

One of the reasons for pursuing that point is that the Government are about to legislate on some of those values more strongly than ever before. We need to anticipate the potential problems. The Government want schools to promote active participation in democracy, and I have no doubt that the Government wish to be able to address schools in which, for example, aggressive advocates of an Islamic caliphate are undermining democracy, but where in law will that leave communities, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, the Brethren and others, that do not vote, do not advocate the vote and do not bring up their children to vote? We, in a rather British and tolerant way, have never felt the need to bother ourselves with those communities before. The Minister should be careful that we understand what we are getting into when we use the law, rather than the promotion of good practice in schools, to promote British values.

Some of the activities in Birmingham schools that have been described, including the harassment of able teachers, the imposition of narrow dress codes, restricted curricula and the use of racist stereotyping and gender

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segregation, are unacceptable, but we do not need complex regulations on the promotion of British values to address those activities. The hon. Member for Bradford East (Mr Ward) raised this question earlier, and let us say that all publicly funded schools, of any intake or designation, should be required to maintain an environment that is genuinely welcoming to all students of all backgrounds. If we made that our test and our principle and said that failure to maintain such an environment should be the basis of intervention, it would be much clearer, it would be easier to inspect and it would be a proper foundation that respects the fact that there are faith and non-faith schools, and schools with different intakes, while stating that no school can be run in a way such that other children would not wish to go there.

Mr Ward: I accept that point, but the difficulty is in the definition of a secular school, which means that the meaning of "welcoming" is disputed. It is easier to say what "welcoming" means within a faith school, but in a secular school there will be parents who say, "This school, unless it is doing these things in this way, is not welcoming to our children." That is where the debate becomes very difficult.

Mr Denham: The hon. Gentleman and I probably do not disagree. My father was the head teacher of a Church of England school and my son goes to a Church of England primary school, but I am not a person of faith. I can see a school that is welcoming to children who do not come from a faith background but that has a distinct faith ethos. It is possible to get the right balance between the two.

There are limits to the extent to which anyone can insist that a school follows a narrow practice such that other parents and other children do not feel welcome. We can do much better than the incredibly complex regulations on the promotion of British values that the Government are pursuing. My wording might not be right, but this is the approach I want to take. I do not think there should be any publicly funded school to which any reasonable person would say, "That school would not welcome my child." Those are the constraints on how far people can demand particular practices, approaches to the curriculum and the promotion of faith, and so on.

I will now make some progress. I have taken longer than I wanted, although I have taken several interventions. I will quickly address the question of British values. Are Education Ministers in Wales, Scotland and, indeed, Northern Ireland advocating a similar message? I hope the Minister will answer that question. If not, why is it that British values will be promoted only to the English? Have we recognised that people in England are more likely to put their English identity first? Have we recognised that in some areas white students are more likely to describe themselves as English, according to the polls, and black and minority ethnic students are more likely to describe themselves as British? Those are not trivial issues for a teacher having discussions in the classroom about the nature of being British. I see no sign in any of the Government's guidance or discussions that those issues have been considered at all.

The nation building I want must recognise that we all have multiple identities—faith-based, nation-based, ethnicity-based and locality-based—and should not assume

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a single homogeneous whole, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East said. The nation building we need must include many people who currently have widely differing views about the state of Britain. If we think about the challenge that faces us, we all have constituents who feel insecure because they feel that their British or English identities are under threat. They need to accept that the clock cannot be turned back, but they must be reassured and feel that they have a voice.

We all have some constituents who will be among those who recently admitted to rising levels of prejudice. Fail to address that and our society will be strained. We all have newer communities yet to find their full place in our society—here but not yet fully here. We all have those who are happy with the way things are and who welcome change. They can actually be part of the problem if they are likely to dismiss the concerns of their neighbours in their local communities. Nation building means finding common ground and common

values that can bring those people together. It does not help if just one community is singled out as the problem, but that is what I fear the Government have done.

Alok Sharma: The right hon. Gentleman is making some interesting points, and I want to go back to this one: he suggested that the Government want us to be homogeneous. I am sure the Minister will respond, but that certainly is not the impression that I have. He talked about what someone is. Well, I am British, but I have an Indian heritage. At the end of the day, the matter is about people integrating into mainstream society and being tolerant—all those common values that we have mentioned before, which I continue to believe are timeless.

Mr Denham: I believe that the hon. Gentleman is right, but I am worried that some of the legalistic ways in which the Government are going about doing it could end up producing a narrow set of legal definitions that push schools, in their interpretation of Britishness, to precisely the narrow, homogeneous view of the way things are that we do not want to see.

I am also worried that the way in which the Government have handled and responded to Birmingham has tended not to identify the issue as one of bringing together the whole country and people from many different backgrounds, including that of the hon. Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma), but to single out one particular community. *The Mail on Sunday* screams out on its front page: "Cameron tells UK Muslims: Be more British"—I rather fear that some spin doctor somewhere was rather pleased with that story. I do not think that is healthy or helpful. There are real and current concerns about extremism and radicalisation, but the promotion of British values should not be about one community or one faith.

Of course, given the conflicts involving Muslims around the world; the links of faith and family to some of those conflicts; and the pernicious activities of radicalisers and recruiters, there are dangers and challenges for some young Muslims that young people from other communities do not face, but it is all the more important to get such issues right. I fear that Ministers have equated conservative theology with anti-British values and the promotion of extremism. Yet the Government's own extremism task force concluded:

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"As the greatest risk to our security comes from al-Qaeda and like-minded groups, and terrorist ideologies draw on and make use of extremist ideas, we believe it is also necessary to define the ideology of Islamist extremism. This is a distinct ideology which should not be confused with traditional religious practice."

We have yet to read Peter Clarke's report, but I fear that that is the very confusion that Ministers and the Prime Minister have introduced into the debate.

Margot James (Stourbridge) (Con): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way in his most insightful speech. However, his reference to the conflation with conservative religious views concerns me. Some of the media coverage of the Birmingham issue has said that there is a difference between extremist ideology that might breed terrorism and conservative religious values taking hold, as if the latter were acceptable. The latter may be acceptable in theory, but in practice, in those Birmingham schools, it led to girls being excluded from their right to participate fully in the life of the school. To that degree, I would contest that conservative religious values, practically applied in that way, are fundamentally at odds with British values of equality and freedom.

Mr Denham: I would agree. I made it clear that I am not here to defend the practices that were uncovered in Birmingham schools. I was actually going on to make the point explicitly in my speech; if I lose concentration, I will probably end up reading it out anyway.

Here we go—on the next page. As I have said, knowing the difference between religious conservatism and extremism does not mean that we do not tackle unacceptable problems in schools. The hon. Member for Stourbridge (Margot James) got there before I did. She is absolutely right. As I made clear when I was talking about the need to intervene if things go wrong and schools become exclusive, I accept that point.

However, by conflating conservative theology with political radicalism and extremism, the Government have not helped to take the debate forward. It has undoubtedly fuelled fears and concerns in the wider non-Muslim community and alienated the majority of Muslims, who do not support what was going on in the Birmingham schools. It has made that necessary discussion about how we educate young Muslims in our British society probably more difficult. I do not think that the Government have got the issues right, because it comes across as though the challenge is to get one particularly disloyal community into line, when the real challenge is bringing together people from many different communities into a cohesive society with a strong national identity. That is a big enough challenge.

I want to end with five, I hope, constructive and practical proposals. First, I would like to see the Government fill the gap left by their opposition to multiculturalism by endorsing the idea of nation building. It should be public policy to create a strong, cohesive society with a strong national story and shared values.

Secondly, I would like to see the Government shift the emphasis of their approach from constructing legal powers to intervene, based on legal notions of British values, to providing teachers and schools with the powers and resources they need to do that job well.

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Thirdly, the Government should set out a simple test for all publicly funded schools—faith, community, academy or free—that they should be required to maintain an environment that is genuinely open and welcoming to all students of all backgrounds. That, rather than the tortuous test of promoting British values, should be the basis for inspection and intervention.

Fourthly, citizenship and the promotion of strong national values should be restored to their proper place in the curriculum and made part, once again, of Ofsted's normal inspection regime. As part of that, the Government should take a fresh look at how we ensure that students in mono-cultural or mono-faith schools enjoy wider opportunities to meet, work, study and socialise with those from other schools and other backgrounds.

Finally, the Government should recognise the importance, not just of teaching national values, but of involving young people in debating, exploring and shaping them. Just as British values commonly understood are different today from when I was born, so they will be different in 60 years. It is today's young people who will, together, decide whether our country works or not.

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): It might be helpful for hon. Members present to know that I intend to have the shadow Minister on his feet no later than 3.40 pm.

3.7 pm

Sir Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): Mr Bone, I am not sure how long each of us has—about five or six minutes?

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): Yes.

Sir Tony Baldry: Well then, the full version of my speech will be found on my website, www.tonybaldry.co.uk. This is the abridged version.

We are grateful to the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr Denham) for introducing this debate. I do not think we agree with his analysis.

The inscription on the second world war memorial in my school reads: "Whatever hope is yours, Was my life also". Later this year, we commemorate the centenary of the start of the great war. A good starting point for defining British values would seem to be exactly what our fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers considered to be the values they were fighting for in those wars.

I think the first value, which I am sure we have learned over the centuries, is that of tolerance—the need to tolerate others and the need, in particular, for religious tolerance. That is perhaps not surprising, because there was a terrible legacy of religious intolerance in this country during the Reformation and the counter-Reformation, which led to our recognising that we needed to get along with and tolerate each other. Unlike some other countries in Europe, in Britain we have generally never had hang-ups about religious emblems, such as crucifixes, being displayed in schools or public buildings.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Tony Baldry: Come on. The hon. Gentleman has 10 minutes; I have only five, for heaven's sake.

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Of course, tolerance is not absolute. One of the great challenges for liberal democracies that has to be learned is what the acceptable boundaries of tolerance are. In the first week of sixth form at my school, my contemporaries and I were set an essay by our head master, John Ounsted, entitled, "To what extent should the tolerant tolerate the intolerant?" It is good for schools to consider the appropriate way not only to promote tolerance, but to deal effectively with intolerance.

Closely related to the need to understand and learn tolerance is the understanding of mutual respect, or what Quakers have traditionally described as "finding that of God in every man". I have visited primary and secondary schools in my constituency for more than a third of a century, and my impression is that schools are extremely good at seeking to promote mutual respect among pupils.

Tolerance of others, a belief in freedom and the importance of democracy are, therefore, all fundamental British values. And they are British values —these are not lists. Some of those who have described British values have simply described lists. When John Betjeman was asked to describe Britishness, he wrote of

"Books from Boots' and country lanes",

but such things are not values; they are games of word association about things people at any time might associate with Britain, and the word associations are constantly changing. What we need is a focus on values.

In the short time I have, I would like to make a point that it is easy for me, as Second Church Estates Commissioner, to make. Nothing in what the Government propose should be seen as being in any way intended or likely to be anti-Muslim because it seeks to promote British values. At the start of her diamond jubilee year, the Queen made a visit to Lambeth Palace to meet faith leaders. I was fortunate enough to be present in my capacity as Second Church Estates Commissioner. Her Majesty the Queen made a short, but moving speech, which I have no doubt she wrote herself. This was a personal comment. She said:

"This gathering is a reminder of how much we owe the nine major religious traditions represented here…Our religions provide critical guidance for the way we live our lives, and for the way in which we treat each

other…Here at Lambeth Palace we should remind ourselves of the significant position of the Church of England in our nation's life. The concept of our established Church is occasionally misunderstood and, I believe, commonly under-appreciated. Its role is not to defend Anglicanism to the exclusion of other religions. Instead, the Church has a duty to protect the free practice of all faiths in this country.

It certainly provides an identity and spiritual dimension for its own many adherents. But also, gently and assuredly, the Church of England has created an environment for other faith communities and indeed people of no faith to live freely. Woven into the fabric of this country, the Church has helped to build a better society—more and more in active co-operation for the common good with those of other faiths."

In other words, part of British values is about having the tolerance and mutual respect to respect and, beyond that, protect the free practice of Islam in this country. However—to go back to my earlier comment about the tolerant not tolerating the intolerant—that does not mean protecting the teaching of Islam if that teaching perversely seeks to suggest that Islam is opposed or hostile to other faiths or values.

Her Majesty went on to say:

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"Faith plays a key role in the identity of many millions of people, providing not only a system of belief but also a sense of belonging. It can act as a spur for social action. Indeed, religious groups have a proud track record of helping those in the greatest need, including the sick, the elderly, the lonely and the disadvantaged. They remind us of the responsibilities we have beyond ourselves."

That is perhaps another important British value: loving one's neighbour as oneself, accepting personal responsibility and accepting responsibilities to oneself, one's family and the community in which we find ourselves.

That advice from Her Majesty the Queen was very sensible, and I see no reason why it is not possible to ensure that all schools promote fundamentally decent British values. Those values bring us all together.

3.14 pm

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Bone. I congratulate my fellow Hampshire MP, the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr Denham), on securing the debate and on his interesting and challenging speech, in which he made a number of important points. It is also a pleasure, of course, to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Sir Tony Baldry).

I welcome the debate on this issue, both here today and more generally, and I welcome the consultation that the Government have launched. The debate would be useful and important even without what we have learned through the Trojan horse revelations. Clearly, there are some shared British values, but in a time when young people can be exposed to all sorts of influences, particularly as a result of technological change, it is important to restate—or, in some cases, just state—what those values are.

We have a more diverse society than we have ever had, and I think all of us here welcome the richness that that has brought. However, we also need to think about the word "multicultural", which means different things to different people. We need to think about its positive connotations, but also about its drawbacks.

On the great seal of the United States is inscribed "E pluribus unum", a compelling phrase. However, the United States has had a lot more time to think about what it means and to put it into practice. We, in our country, need to address what can be—indeed, what we love being—"pluribus" and what we need to be "unum", and how wide that list should be.

We tend to be quite reticent about discussing Britishness. We are patriotic, but we tend to be reserved about expressing that. In America, people occasionally have debates about the pledge of allegiance to the flag, but our schools often do not have the flag to pledge allegiance to. Today's debate turns on three important questions. First, what is in the core set of British values? Secondly, how should we express them? Thirdly, should we teach them, and, if so, how should we teach people about not just their existence, but their primacy in British life?

There are at least four—possibly more—different expressions of Britishness, which should not be conflated, although they sometimes are. The first relates to true core values: things such as tolerance, freedom of thought, freedom of religion, respect for the law, and a belief in the democratic ideal and the equality of citizens. Just because those are British values, that does not, of course, mean they must be uniquely British values; we

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share them with a number of other countries. It is also true that how they are manifested is not immutable. The values stay constant, but, as the right hon. Gentleman said, how they are expressed and what they imply changes over time.

Secondly, there are the principles that underpin our society and its operation. I will come back to this, but it includes things such as representative liberal democracy and an organic constitution, and the role of independent institutions, a free media and the rule of law. Those are fundamental, but they are not necessarily that widely understood; indeed, aspects of them are not even always entirely welcome—for example, the way in which

liberal democracy, as opposed to pure majority democracy, can work.

Thirdly, there are things that are clear majority views, which are sometimes talked about as British values, such as a belief in our national health service and in public service broadcasting through the BBC. However, those are beliefs, not core values, and people's views on them can change. I would suggest that just thinking that the Belgian health care system is worth looking at does not make someone un-British.

Fourthly, there are all manner of traits and characteristics, such as a sense of humour; a distrust of power; respect, but not undue respect, for others; and a love of a rich and permeable cultural base in music, film and food. We cannot promote those things in school, and nor should we try to, but they are still an important part of being us and of our shared destination.

What, then, should we do in schools? The first and most important thing to say is that it is a journey, rather than a destination. We can all easily agree about the negative side: we can agree about keeping extremists out of schools and about girls not being disadvantaged in their learning in class. We can also agree that public funds clearly should not be used on school trips available only to members of one faith.

What we do on the positive side, however, to promote British values is a lot harder. I have found no better description than that in the academy model funding agreement, which talks about

"respect for the basis on which law is made…support for participation in the democratic processes...equality of opportunity…liberties for all within the law…and tolerance of different faiths and…beliefs."

I welcome what the Government propose to do to strengthen what is called the "spiritual, moral, social and cultural" standard and actively to promote such values. However, there remains the big question of how. At the sharp end, I certainly welcome what the Government are doing on no-notice inspections, removing school leaders who fail to protect their pupils and strengthening the rules on barring teachers who have knowingly brought extremism into school.

More generally, turning to the idea of positive promotion, there is a need for a big national conversation. That will not happen overnight. There is a debate to be had about the extent to which such things can be taught rather than caught. Personally, I am a bit of a sceptic about the idea that someone can stand at the front of a class and say, "Today we are doing British values." Those are things that permeate in other ways.

Mr Andrew Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

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Damian Hinds: I am very short of time—very quickly.

Mr Smith: In implementation, is it not crucial for children and young people to be helped to develop their critical ability to question what they are taught, wherever it comes from?

Damian Hinds: The right hon. Gentleman is right, and one should not underestimate the importance of space in class for discussion, as well as more formal debates in schools, and other things of that kind.

There is much more that I want to say, but I will just talk about history in the curriculum. What I say will echo, a little, what the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen said. We should tell the great British story and face up to the parts of it that we are not so proud of, but I would like more appreciation of the development of the institutions in and of our democratic system. Those are not British values per se, but they reflect and reinforce them. I am less bothered about young people learning about the mechanics of voting or which competencies are reserved for the devolved Administrations versus the UK Parliament, but I am bothered about a greater, broader understanding of the nature of representative liberal democracy and its superiority not only to autocracy—which is pretty obvious to everyone—but to the tyranny of the majority. With it go the freedom of the media and independent institutions, the protection of minorities and the rule of law. Those things need not be dealt with as an add-on; they can be understood through history taught in a rigorous academic way.

I have two concerns: the first is that we should not conflate the issue with a general debate about secularism. The "Trojan horse" schools were not faith schools. Faith schools in general get above-average results and are popular with teachers. Having attended one, I can confirm that its ethos and what we did there did not inhibit my inquiring mind or stop me appreciating and valuing the differences in others; if anything, it enhanced those things. Faith schools can also be incredibly diverse. There is a Catholic primary school a mile from here and 95% of its pupils are of one faith, but they speak, between them, 32 different mother tongues. More than nine tenths of them have English as an additional language. It is fine to have a debate about faith schools, but it is a different debate from today's.

There is a second concern on which I would like reassurance from the Minister, and that is the inherent danger in having someone—anyone—in charge of defining British values, not just now but 10 years from now. I call this the Semmelweis question. If anyone present does not know who Semmelweis was, it is because we are all over 40. Our children all know, because he is taught in every school in the country. I will not go into it now, but he was an Austrian who found out that hand washing would stop infections from spreading in hospitals. Someone decided that that would be taught in every school in the country; but it is not on the national curriculum. Whoever that person is, they have an awful lot of power. We need adequate ways to make sure that it is not the courts or politicians

who are left to deal with such matters.

I welcome the debate and the swift action of the Secretary of State, but we must also allow an approach to evolve, and be alive to the dangers.

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3.22 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Like the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr Denham), whom I congratulate on giving the Government a chance to think in advance about some of the more complex aspects of what they propose, I am not a particularly religious person, but I come from a Jewish immigrant family background.

I have two stories to tell, about by late father, Sam. One happened more than 50 years ago when I came home from my junior school and mentioned, without any sense of trauma or discrimination, that we had been asked in class how many of us were English. Several hands went up. Then we were asked how many of us were Welsh, and most hands went up—the school was in Swansea—including mine. At that point, the teacher said, in all innocence, "Oh, but Julian, I thought you were Jewish." When I mentioned that to my father he was outraged. He said, "What on earth was she talking about? What on earth was she thinking of? Of course you are Welsh. Being Jewish has got nothing to do with it. Our religion has got nothing to do with it." I know that that story is true. I can vouch for it, because I remember it.

The second story—*[Laughter.]* That must have been funnier even than I intended. The second story is one that I can remember my father telling me, but I have never yet managed to research it so I do not know for certain whether it is true and will not name the country from which the community concerned came.

My father told me that a large number of people were displaced from central and eastern European countries as a result of the war, and they were allowed to settle in various communities around Britain. One of those communities started something that had been known before the war in their country—a degree of anti-Semitic propaganda—in the United Kingdom. My father said, although I have never been able to check or verify it, that when that started the Attlee Government made a firm public pronouncement warning the community that its members were welcome to come to this country and make it their home, but they were not going to bring anti-Semitism with them because the Labour Government of the day would not tolerate it.

I hope that the House can see why I told those stories and where they are leading. As I said earlier, in an intervention on the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen, I have a lot of sympathy with his proposition that it will be very difficult to promote positive values in schools because positive values evolve. However, I think it would be possible to promote what one might call negative values in schools —in other words, to make sure that some things are ruled out as unacceptable. I have a firm belief that in most communities, including the Muslim community, the majority of people are moderates and a small minority are extremists. I believe it is essential that extremism should be kept out of schools. The sort of extremism that provoked the present initiative is on a par with the fascist or Nazi, and Marxist or communist, extremism or totalitarianism of the past. It is an Islamist totalitarianism of the present. That must not be allowed to proceed.

We should therefore be careful about what we are trying to do. I hope that the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen will agree with the distinction

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that I am about to draw: between preventing extremists from taking over schools, and using schools that have not been taken over to prevent, through the promotion of a positive narrative, the radicalising of children. The truth is that nothing that can be done in a state school will insulate young, impressionable children if they are being radicalised outside the school.

Finally, I want to supply the attribution for the paradox of tolerance that my right hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Sir Tony Baldry) alluded to earlier. It will come as no surprise to the massive total of 98 people who, according to the wonderful website theyworkforyou.com, are assiduous followers of my parliamentary speeches, because I have mentioned many times that the words are those of the late, great conservative-oriented philosopher Sir Karl Popper, who in volume 2 of "The Open Society and Its Enemies" laid down the wonderful maxim called the paradox of tolerance: we should tolerate all but the intolerant, because if we tolerate the intolerant the conditions for toleration disappear and the tolerant go with them.

3.29 pm

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr Denham) on securing this timely debate. It is as always a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis).

When it comes to teaching British values, the clue is in the title. We are all British; we are all one nation and it should be so basic that we do not need to say it. Yet everywhere we look there is no shortage of people seeking to divide us from each other. North of the border, in Scotland, there are those who seek to divide that nation from Britain. In Wales, devolution tends to deepen, with advocates for more devolution, which could be a through-train in the direction that Scotland has gone. In Cornwall there are those who seek to separate that area too, and in Northern Ireland. In Dover

we are simple souls. We do not want any particular devolution; we just want Calais back, and we would like Boulogne back as well in due course. *[Laughter.]*

We need to sound a warning against all those who seek to divide regions from the nation, because wherever there is division or separation or where people are divided from other people and separated, we rapidly get a lack of trust and the those sorts of problems we have seen. If we tell someone that they have to go and live in a castle and we tell someone else that they have to live in a different castle, sooner or later they will start to raise the drawbridge and go to war with each other. There will be separation, division and a lack of understanding. The best way to counteract that is to say we are all one people—we are all in it together, we are all integrated, we are all one community and one nation, and we should all stand together.

That is why the whole idea of multiculturalism was such a massive error, because it feeds on division. It creates division and a sense of separation—a sense that we are not all the same, not all in it together, not all joined together and not integrated; a sense, rather, that we are disintegrated. Poor pity that they did not think multiculturalism through or see that it would lead to the distrust that we see in some areas and some nations of

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our country. What we need is a greater sense of unity, a greater sense of shared identity and a shared mission as a country.

I think we have deeper values, beyond the value that we are one nation, and they are the values of what that means and what our history teaches us. In saying that, I am very aware that I am the Member of Parliament for Dover and Deal, the representative of the white cliffs. So much of what our nation is about is tied up in that land, which is hallowed, like Gettysburg, not by any special holiness, but by the acts of the people—our forefathers—and the values they fought for. We should not shirk from underlining that, first and foremost, they fought for freedom—for what the Americans think of as first amendment rights: freedom of religion, freedom of association, freedom of the press and freedom of speech. Those freedoms, so dearly won, are so easily lost and so often under siege. We should be valiant and strong in standing up for them and ensuring that we can talk and communicate with respect. I do not accept the word "tolerance"; I think that "live and let live" is a better way to explain our understanding of different thoughts in our communities.

There is also the rule of law and the flexibility of our constitution, which bends like a reed in the wind. As times change, we change; our laws, customs and mores change. Finally, there is our fighting for the underdog—our sense of justice and our sense of going to war, as we did back then to defeat the gnarled hand of tyranny that crept across Europe, casting a deep shadow. We were responsible for turning it back and for leading the charge against it. That is an important part of what it is to be British. We should be proud of what we have achieved as a nation and we should be strong and very clear in saying that we are one people. Make the case for integration, do not go for multiculturalism and talk about how we draw people together, because that way lies hope, whereas in division lies fear and mistrust.

3.33 pm

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): A democratic state surely has a duty and a vested interest in ensuring that its citizens are aware of their rights and responsibilities, and in that respect schools are the obvious place to start. They should be a place of learning and understanding, where naivety is met with guidance and questions presented with answers.

The subject of this debate, which I congratulate the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr Denham) on securing, has long been an issue—it has been an issue for generations. My hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma) spoke eloquently, and it will be no surprise that, with names like Sharma and Opperman, neither of our families were at the battle of Hastings repelling the French. We arrived not a thousand years ago to repel the French but, in his case, approximately 50 years ago and, in my case, approximately 100 years ago. You can imagine, Mr Bone, the difficulties that my ancestors had through two world wars with a name like Opperman, fighting their German cousins—and fighting with distinction—for the British Army.

Integration is something that we are all seeking. This is an issue that has not suddenly popped up in the last year, five years or 10 years; it has been an issue down the

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generations for different cultural identities. When we ask ourselves this question, I believe that it is right that the Government are promoting the consultation on British values in schools. I am certain that the Minister will outline the details of the consultation, but the strategy that sets it out seeks

"democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance for those with different faiths and beliefs".

One would hope that those are universal values, but we know that the reality worldwide is that they are not universal values, but are particular values of this country. In that respect, these purportedly universal values are, in fact, very British and their promotion must be a very good thing. One must not forget that promotion is not the same as teaching something or having respect for it. One can respectfully disagree with an idea that is promoted—one may take a differing view—but one is definitely much better informed for it, and that is surely the point we are trying to make, so I

welcome the consultation.

Like many hon. Members, I will make my full speech available on my website, guyopperman.blogspot.co.uk. While my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) may have 98 followers on theyworkforyou.com, my 17,000 followers will, I am sure, greatly enjoy this particular speech.

Dr Lewis: You need them more than I do. *[Laughter.]*

Guy Opperman: It is rare that one gets barracked by one's own side, but one has to get used to it.

What are British values? Sarcasm may be one value that we would particularly wish to identify. We are—are we not?—good at queuing, and we are bad at football. As everyone knows, we are the inventors of football, a game we play for 90 minutes before the Germans win on penalties—unless we are not even making the further rounds. We are the creators of proper breakfasts, the world's finest sauces—everything from ketchup to HP—and all the best boy bands that could possibly exist.

Many of our constituents—returning to a serious point—are British Muslim, British Indian, British Chinese, Scottish and British, and Welsh and British. Some would argue that the likes of Monty Panesar are way more British than Kevin Pietersen, and I think that they would be right.

Do we take advice from the French? It is a rare thing and I know it is something you would never do, Mr Bone, but you will recall that Jacques Chirac said: "One cannot trust people"—that, by the way, is the British—

"whose cuisine is so bad".

However, we would surely reply that our national dish is not roast beef any more; it is, of course, curry.

On that point, I would like to make my contribution to the debate, which is to ask whether we need to consider introducing, as the Canadians have, a Minister for integration. In Canada, he is the famous Jason Kenney, who has been so successful at formulating and promoting integration of people of many different faiths. His portfolio includes citizenship, multiculturalism, immigration and integration. It is the unification of those strands of Government Departments and the difficulties faced that we genuinely need to address.

I take the view that this process is about creating a stronger society, not splitting it. Surely the purpose of promoting British values is to ensure that by doing so

we are not being counter-productive, because any person in this country can uphold their religious, national and cultural identity as well as their British identity. In that respect, surely we should be supporting this debate, this dialogue and this discussion.

3.39 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I welcome this debate and congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr Denham) on securing it and on his, as ever, thoughtful speech.

We have had quite a lot of discussion about British values, but not perhaps as much about the teaching side of things—perhaps we will get more of that in future debates. Nevertheless, it has been a fascinating debate and I congratulate all the hon. Members who contributed to it. I will mention the right hon. Member for Banbury (Sir Tony Baldry) in a moment. The hon. Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) used the phrase "e pluribus unum", but of course it was much later that that was interpreted as bringing together different peoples from different parts of the world. In its original sense, it was more about the states coming together and forming a union. However, there was much to agree with in his remarks.

As ever, the hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) made a thoughtful, intelligent speech. He said he was brought up in Wales. I was brought up in Wales, with a Welsh mother and an Irish father. My father always insisted that I was Irish, but I never accepted it and still do not, although I am proud of that heritage. I have always thought of myself as Welsh and British. The hon. Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke) said he hoped that Scotland would not break away from the United Kingdom. I endorse that sentiment. The hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) mentioned his German ancestry and bragged about the size of his following, much to the derision of Government Members. He made a thoughtful contribution to our debate.

I am glad to see the Minister here. I thought that the Schools Minister might have come along to respond to the debate, as teaching featured in its title. Perhaps that is because, as we understand from press reports, the Deputy Prime Minister is a bit uneasy about the new Government policy on a consultation on British values. If so, that is a shame, because I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen: it is important that we debate what this means and what its implications are, and I welcome that.

A couple of weeks ago, I attended a moving event in my constituency where Councillor Ali Ahmed of Cardiff was honoured by the Bangladeshi community on becoming the deputy lord mayor of Cardiff. His opening remarks at that event were: "I'm proud to be a Muslim, I'm proud to be a Welshman, I'm proud to be a British Bangladeshi and I'm proud to be the deputy lord mayor of Cardiff." In saying that, he showed what we all want from British values and what we all want in our communities: the opportunity for everyone, from whatever background, including the humble, poor background in Bangladesh of Ali Ahmed and his family, to succeed and fulfil their potential. I found that event

moving.

I wanted to intervene briefly on the right hon. Member for Banbury, because he mentioned the values that our fathers and grandfathers fought for. It is always important

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to remember that on the Menin gate in Ypres are the names of Muhammad Aslam, Abdullah Khan, Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Usman—soldiers who fought alongside our grandfathers and fathers in previous wars. We sometimes forget that the grandfathers and fathers of many of those in the immigrant community in Britain today fought alongside British soldiers in those wars and that they are here because their grandfathers and fathers were part of the British empire's Army at the time. We should always remember that strongly in our discussion of British values.

I echo the comments that my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen made about Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland—the other parts of the UK. When the UK Government kick off such a debate —but in an England-only jurisdiction—it is important that we should also talk to colleagues to the devolved Administrations and involve them in it, otherwise there is a danger of it becoming isolated and more about Englishness than Britishness. Those perspectives are important, as are the perspectives of the various minority ethnic communities that were discussed in this debate.

The context for this debate is undoubtedly the Trojan horse incidents in Birmingham. Ultimately, things have come to a head because warnings given about what might be developing there were not heeded quickly enough, and one reason for that is that systematic problems in our education system have developed, allowing such developments to become likely. The current system is inadequate and fragmented, and there is a dangerous vacuum. Only last night—the hon. Member for Bradford East (Mr Ward) will know this—the principal of Kings science academy was re-arrested on suspicion of fraud in relation to that free school. There is a vacuum that we need to address. I will say more about that in a moment.

We also need to look at the reset button a little bit on faith in our schools and revisit what that is all about. Of course, the schools involved in the Trojan horse affair were not faith schools, but we should restate and be clear that no publicly funded school should be a place for indoctrination or proselytisation. Faith-based education can be positive—some of the finest schools in this country are faith-based schools—but they must still respect and understand other views. Indeed, all publicly funded schools should be clear that it is unacceptable for such indoctrination or proselytisation to take place and that it forms no part of any publicly funded school, whether faith-based or not. I think all the faith-based education services would accept that principle—indeed, I think I am using the exact words of the Catholic Education Service in that regard.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen that undermining citizenship teaching has not helped the situation. De-emphasising pupil and student voices in the system has not helped either. Yesterday I spoke to a group of articulate year 10s from a community school in London who were visiting the House of Commons, and their insights on this and other issues were important. With the fragmentation, there is also a danger that we are marginalising the parental voice in the system. With the growth of large academy chains that are accountable to no one, so-called autonomous local schools are often being dictated to by those large academy chains, more than local authorities ever did and with no accountability whatever.

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We need a debate about British values, but that conversation must include the young people involved who are in the schools, as my right hon. Friend said. It must be a debate about British values, not about an imagined Britain glimpsed through the rose-tinted spectacles of the Secretary of State for Education. As usual, with this story he hit the headlines but rather missed the point. British values cannot be the product of a Secretary of State for Education's solipsistic ruminations; they have to be shared and must arise from a common feeling among the diverse communities and generations in this country. Our schools should be in the business of teaching those values through the ethos of the school as much as in formal lessons, and it should be as much about the debating of the values as about inculcating them.

Schools should, first and foremost, be safe havens of learning that promote respect, tolerance and hard work, and encourage debate and discussion—I say that as a former teacher. They should also promote community cohesion, as they are required to by law, although they are no longer inspected on for that. We have seen how quickly things can go wrong where that is not made clear and where it is not monitored.

There is a danger that the Government are sending out mixed messages. If citizenship is talked down and undermined as a subject, but then they decide that it will be kept in the national curriculum, is it any wonder that people are confused? In a system where most secondary schools do not have to teach citizenship, because they are not required to teach the national curriculum, it is no wonder that heads, teachers and governors, as well as parents, can become confused about what is expected of them in relation to teaching citizenship and British values. That is why, if we really are to promote these values in our schools, we need a mechanism to ensure that all schools do so.

We have proposed a new approach to local accountability, through directors of school standards.

We believe that, had our approach been in place in 2010, the Department for Education would not have ignored the warnings about Birmingham. In requiring collaboration between schools, different groups could be brought closer together.

This is an important debate for this country and our schools, and we need more than headline-grabbing soundbites from the Secretary of State to tackle the great challenge.

3.49 pm

The Minister for Skills and Enterprise (Matthew Hancock): Mr Bone, I hope that you, like me, have found this to be an enlightening, well thought through and extremely reasonable debate. It has been positive, and I congratulate the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr Denham) on securing it. I will try to address his five points and some of the points raised by other Members, but we need to set the debate in context. The question of the values that tie us together as a country is a crucial point that has been raised and relevant through the ages. This debate is not on a new subject, but one that has been raised throughout history.

It is best to start on the point about universal values and the question of what British values are. As has frequently been stated, the Government have set out that British values are

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"democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs".

The right hon. Gentleman said that we could all unite behind those values, and I certainly hope that we can, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) rightly pointed out, we are complacent if we say that that is easy or natural. British values are not universal around the world, and we should be proud that they are very widely, if not universally, accepted here at home. Those universal values flower in Britain because of the protection of our strong democratic state, defended through liberty—with blood, in times gone by—by our forefathers and the forefathers of those from many different backgrounds.

To seek to defend those values, and the British polity that protects them, is a valuable task. In that, I thought that many of the comments made by the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen were astute, but it was a sad irony that in arguing that we should come together in many of these things, he sought to find points of division where none exist. The argument for a conscious focus on nation building is one that we support. He argued not for a legal basis in that space, but for providing teachers with the powers and resources to enable them to deliver. While it is crucial to ensure that we defend British values by specifying what is not acceptable, that inevitably ends up with a legal basis for intervention. As my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) pointed out in describing the paradox of tolerance, if we are to ensure that we promote British values—including ensuring that we take action against extremist ideologies that are anathema to them—there need to be legal elements. There is, however, much, much more to the issue. For example, the broadening of the history curriculum is one part of a response to a need to strengthen the underpinning of British values that has been under way over the past few years.

On the promotion of citizenship and British values in the curriculum, the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen made an odd critique about citizenship and Ofsted. Of course Ofsted inspects on the teaching of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. That is a core part of its framework, and the argument that it did not inspect for that is, frankly, wrong. His point on involving young people in debate is important. Having listened to his speech very closely, I argue that there is much more that unites than divides us.

There is another crucial point, which everyone in the debate has touched on: British values are not simple and British identities are often multiple. I did not even know that my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East had a Jewish background. Being Jewish and British is a widely held identity, much like being Scottish and British, English and British or Welsh and British. Once we get to Ireland it is slightly more complicated, because Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, rather than Great Britain. As my hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma) set out, however, identities expand to being Indian and British and many other different backgrounds. Nevertheless, the reticence with which some express British values, and the argument that it is rather British to be reticent about expressing British values, which I recognise, should not prevent us from setting out expectations on shared values. British values are a core set of beliefs that support and ensure freedom, liberty and tolerance and underpin the way we want our society to function.

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The debate rightly touched on the issues in Birmingham schools. We are clear that we need to learn lessons from what happened there. I will deal with a couple of technical details before going on to the broader point. In 2008, when concerns were expressed, the schools were maintained schools. Much progress has been made in maintained schools. They must promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils so that they can participate in wider society, and they must promote community cohesion. The strategy for creating the conditions for integration recognises the critical role that local organisations, including schools, can play in bringing communities together. Existing advice on teacher misconduct confirms that misconduct includes:

"Actions or behaviours that undermine fundamental British values, democracy and law, promote… extremism, or demonstrate deliberate intolerance and/or lack of respect of the rights, faith and beliefs of others".

Maintained schools are also required under the citizenship curriculum to teach pupils about subjects including democracy and human rights.

Those requirements are only part of the wider answer to the question on British values, of which the teaching of history is also part. Here I come to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke), because he, in his eloquent articulation of British values, warned against those who would try to divide us and pointed to the special role of Dover and its white cliffs in the British story. We should pay heed to his words. Having said that, we will take further action, in addition to the action taken since 2010, to strengthen guidance to schools to set out more clearly our expectations. That follows the publication of the Government's Prevent strategy, which focuses not only on tackling directly violent extremism, but extremism more broadly. That is necessary to tackle the roots of violent extremism, and the Secretary of State has set out that we will consult on further action.

On Monday, we launched a consultation on strengthening the wording of the independent school standards, which apply to independent schools, academies and free schools, to require schools actively to promote principles that encourage fundamental British values. That builds on the change made last year to include a requirement to encourage pupils to respect fundamental British values. In addition, we will also require teaching

"on the strengths, advantages and disadvantages of democracy and how democracy works in Britain, in contrast to other forms of government in other countries".

The guidance also describes the outcomes that independent schools, including academies and free schools, will be expected to demonstrate. That shows that the accountability of academies and free schools is stronger than that of maintained schools, not least because of inspection by the Education Funding Agency as well as by Ofsted.

Finally, I want to pick up on one point made by the shadow Minister. He said that there was no accountability whatsoever in academies. I would say that—

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): Order. I am afraid that time has beaten us. I would like to thank all hon. and right hon. Members for co-operating to get everyone in, and for an interesting debate.