

# School-level actions to promote community cohesion: a scoping map

## What do we want to know?

The review seeks to answer the question:

*What is the nature and extent of research literature on the role of schools in promoting community cohesion?*

It focuses on those aspects of community cohesion that are concerned with social relations and values rather than with life opportunities and (in educational terms) ‘closing the gap’ in achievements.

## Who wants to know and why?

The Department for Children, Schools and Families set the topic for this review to inform the nature and extent of research literature on school actions to promote community cohesion. As a new policy area, DCSF wanted a relatively quick overview of the literature, in order to help get a feel for current coverage of the issues and plan future research needs.

## What did we find?

A total of 84 studies were identified and included in the map, providing evidence that there is a research literature on the role of schools in promoting community cohesion in England and, more generally, in the UK.

The literature provides information about different contexts for action, the issues schools seek to address and the ways in which schools seek to address them.

Although there is a literature on school action to promote community cohesion it is relatively small and patchy in coverage. Whilst, therefore, it offers a useful bank of ideas for action and ways of understanding cohesion issues, its usefulness is limited. In particular:

- The geographical distribution of studies is uneven and is not sufficiently extensive to reflect fully the diversity of school type and population in England.
- The literature is weighted towards studies concerned with cohesion in relation to ethnicity.
- Some forms of action are more widely reported than others, for example, the literature tells us more about one-off or recurrent programmes of action than more ‘embedded’ approaches and more about schools acting individually or in pairs than area-based approaches. Studies are also variable in the extent to which they describe school action in any detail.
- Much of the literature is descriptive, and much of the evaluative literature is small scale and may be of poor quality.
- Although cohesion is a phenomenon that is manifested in ‘communities’, the focus of most studies is on schools and changes in their student populations. Very few studies look at the wider community impact of school actions.

## What are the implications?

Further research would seem sensible in order to increase current knowledge and understanding in this area. In particular, funders might consider ways of encouraging systematic and high quality research. These could include:

- funding or co-funding a programme of research aimed at filling specific gaps in knowledge;
- funding demonstration projects based on existing actions where the evaluative evidence is most encouraging with integral high-quality evaluation;
- funding 'development and research' projects aimed at the on-going development of new or less-proven forms of action;
- funding high-quality case studies, focusing on: schools where specific actions are embedded in

cultures and practices; area-based approaches; and the community impacts of schools' actions (these are, of course, not mutually exclusive alternatives).

## How did we get these results?

To produce this scoping map the review group took a systematic and transparent approach to searching for literature and selecting relevant material on community cohesion. We did this through keyword searches of bibliographic databases, and searches of websites and by approaching key informants who have carried out research in fields which are relevant to community cohesion. We then applied inclusion and exclusion criteria to build up a map of relevant studies which produced the 84 studies that were used to address the research question above.

## Where to find further information

The results of this systematic review are available in two formats:

### SUMMARY

Explains the purpose of the review and the main messages from the research evidence

### TECHNICAL REPORT

Includes the background, main findings, and full technical details of the review

These can be downloaded or accessed at  
<http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=2416&language=en-US>

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### TECHNICAL REPORT

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