



Advisory note on the teaching of yoga in schools

From time to time we receive queries from schools about the possible implications of teaching yoga in church schools. The ultimate decisions about this issue should be made by an individual school but it is hoped that the information below will be useful to school leaders and governors in making choices for the children in their care.

Introduction

Yoga is a vast collection of spiritual techniques and practices aimed at integrating mind, body and spirit. What is normally thought of as yoga in the West is Hatha Yoga, one of the many paths of yoga. The different paths of yoga emphasise different approaches and techniques.

Yoga is not a religion but a practice of personal inquiry and exploration to discover enlightenment. There are a broad variety of yoga practices in Hinduism, Buddhism and the ancient Indian religion of Jainism. However, some practitioners claim that the cultural and religious diversity of yoga teachers indicates that yogic philosophy speaks to universal truths that can be incorporated within any belief system, including Christianity.

In recent times, yoga has become popular as a way of keeping fit across the Western world and is increasingly offered in schools, either as part of the curriculum, as a calming exercise within the busy school day, or as an optional after school club. Yoga does not prescribe the worship of any specific deity or deities however it is based historically in Hindu scripture. This has led some governors, staff and parents nationally to conclude that the teaching of yoga in a church school does not sit comfortably with the Christian ethos, some have argued that yoga is a form of worship within another faith.

The Church of England is a broad Church and encompasses a range of views on the practice of yoga. Some churches allow yoga classes to take place inside their buildings, others are very much against the practice. In pointing out the diversity of views this note does not intend to resolve the issues or to proffer a solution. However it is important to acknowledge and accept that there are Christians who consider yoga to be religion. Schools are advised to respect the range of views expressed and to note the potential ramifications and subsequent media interest if the matter raises contentious responses.

General principles

1. Honesty and transparency

If a school wants to offer yoga then leaders are advised to discuss the proposal with governors prior to it beginning and to liaise with their school development adviser. School leaders are advised to keep governors, parents and staff regularly informed of the curriculum and nature of any extra-curricular clubs being offered to pupils. It is good practice for headteachers to ensure that any objections to the options offered to children are listened to and acknowledged, further advice should be sought if necessary. The school's curriculum and enrichment offer should be subject to ongoing monitoring and evaluation by the governing body. Parents should be aware of the nature of the lessons taught. Schools may wish to consider inviting parents to watch a session if they wish to do so for reassurance.



2. Learning intention

Research has shown that yoga can enhance children's flexibility, strength, coordination, and body awareness. In addition some practitioners claim that children's concentration and sense of calmness and relaxation improves when they practise yoga over time. School leaders are advised to consider the learning intentions for the children taking part. Is yoga being taught as a form of physical workout, a meditative exercise, or a combination of both? Could the same outcomes be achieved by other means such as bend and stretch, body conditioning or Christian Mindfulness techniques?

3. Context

Leaders are advised to consider the context of their school including the community which it serves. Leaders are advised that there is potential for inconsistencies to arise if the school offers yoga and also studies Hindu practices, including yoga, as part of the teaching of other faiths.

If yoga is taught as part of the PE curriculum and there is a parental objection to the practice, then leaders need to be alert to the fact that children cannot be withdrawn from PE as a statutory subject in the curriculum.

4. Outside providers

School leaders are advised to thoroughly research outside providers offering yoga sessions. Leaders should satisfy themselves that the nature of the actions and words of sessions are not contrary to the Christian ethos of the school and that parents are made fully aware of the session contents. This may involve the regular monitoring of sessions to ensure consistency with the school's vision and aims. It is particularly important that outside providers are sensitive to the use of meditative words that can be seen as contentious for some Christians.

5. Inform your school development adviser

Schools that already offer or are considering offering Yoga are requested to inform their school development adviser.

For further help and advice please contact your school development adviser.





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