

Controversial issues - Topic 1: Controversial issues at school

Controversial issues – What and where?

A controversy is more than an everyday disagreement or difference of opinion. It is one which arouses strong emotions and causes ill-feeling and divisions between people.

Controversies are a natural part of life in a democracy, and in any community that values freedom of expression, including schools.

Controversies vary with time and place. They also vary in scale, from local to global.



Sometimes a controversy can arise in the school itself. For example, people may disagree with:

- what is being taught in your school, e.g. evolution,
- your school rules, e.g., about what students wear,
- your dealings with the local community, e.g., treatment of migrant students

As a principal, you will quite rightly be concerned about the way controversial issues are handled in your school – whether it is in a discussion in class, a debate in the student parliament, or a meeting of parents. You need to be aware of the consequences if things get out of hand and of the damage it can cause to your school's reputation.

This is why it is important for you to:

- understand the risks of handling controversial issues
- monitor issues you think are likely to be controversial
- teach your staff how to manage controversial issues wisely