Raising the attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils
Contents

Introduction .................................................................................. 3

Ethos and Practices of the School .................................................. 5

Effective Language and Learning Support for Pupils for whom English is an Additional Language .............................................................. 6

Strategies for supporting EAL pupils ............................................. 7

An Inclusive Curriculum .................................................................... 8

Understanding Social, Cultural and Religious Issues ......................... 9

Intervention in the Early Years .......................................................... 10

Focused Support for Refugees ......................................................... 11

Effective Liaison with Parents and Carers ........................................ 12

Good Links between the School and the Wider Community .............. 13

Recruitment of Minority Ethnic Teachers and Support Staff ............ 14

Sources .......................................................................................... 15
Introduction

This booklet aims to give an overview of the issues which affect the achievement of minority ethnic pupils. It is written in a format which is readily accessible and will provide a framework for further study. It is also written in the context of Government policy, which promotes education in which “all pupils, irrespective of ethnicity, language background, culture, gender, ability, social background, sexuality, or religion should receive the highest quality education.”\(^1\) This is emphasised below.

“Wherever we come from, whatever our roots, or our faith, we have a stake in being British and we can be proud of that. Celebrating diversity and building a fairer, more confident multicultural nation with a fresh, strong sense of national identity is an important and timely project. Having confidence in yourself and holding on to a dream that you can achieve is so important. Nothing should hold you back in reaching your full potential. I want a society that gives you these chances, a society where each of you, regardless of colour, race or religion has an equal opportunity to succeed. It is your future and we need to hear from you.”


The 1999 Ofsted Report, “Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils – School and LEA Responses” indicates that the attainment of minority ethnic groups as a whole is improving and within ethnic groups there will are differences in attainment. Some groups, however, continue to underachieve significantly, relative to the performance of their White counterparts, particularly African Caribbean boys, Traveller, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils.

Further research and data consistently show that Black pupils are much more likely to be excluded from school than White pupils committing the same offence.\(^2\)

This highlights that for some groups in society, majority and individual attitudes towards ethnicity continue to be major causes of inequality.

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\(^1\) “Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils”, Teacher Training Agency, P. no: 114/5-00
\(^2\) e.g. DFEE data on exclusion rates in LEAs (1998), “Exclusions from Secondary Schools 1995/6 Ofsted (1996) and more recent data
This document considers the main factors which can influence the achievement of minority ethnic pupils as listed below:

- The Ethos and Practices of the School
- Effective Language and Learning Support for pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL)
- An Inclusive Curriculum
- Understanding of Social, Cultural and Religious Issues
- Intervention in the Early Years
- Focused Support for Refugees
- Effective Liaison with Parents and Carers
- Good Links between the School and the Wider Community
- Recruitment of Minority Ethnic Teachers and Support Staff

It should be noted that recent research from Ofsted has shown that strong leadership and high teacher expectations have a significant impact upon the achievement of minority pupils.³

Ethos and Practices of the School

Recent reports have shown that the standards of attainment of minority ethnic groups are raised when school’s senior management teams make sure that there are effective and well implemented equal opportunities policies, with the headteacher giving a strong lead.  

- Inequality can operate at institutional, structural, cultural and individual levels. Successful schools and teachers counter this.

- Racial equality is an issue for all schools, including those with an all, or mainly, White population.

- Prejudice and discrimination can affect the emotional, social and intellectual development of all pupils.

- All policies and documents should make the school’s stand on equal opportunities very clear. It should be included in the school’s Values and Aims statements.

- Ethnic Monitoring should inform policy making and action planning.

- Minority ethnic teachers and other staff are important in reflecting the ethos of a school.

- Racist bullying and harassment have an impact upon pupils’ attainment and the life of the school. Policies for dealing with racist incidents should have clear procedures, which are upheld by all staff and are endorsed by the school population, including parents.

- Help should be given to the victims of racism. Their self-esteem should be built up and they should be shown that the problem is with the racist abuser.

- Consideration should be given to unwitting stereotyping and low teacher expectations. “Where schools have high expectations of all pupils and classwork is well matched to the different levels of attainment, good progress can be made regardless of the school’s intake”.


- Schools should help pupils to choose their own identity, e.g. London British, Indian British, Black Muslim, but it must be remembered that culture is not the only aspect of identity.

- Ethnic Monitoring of behaviour and exclusions should inform policy and other strategies.

- High rates of attendance should be promoted. Efforts at home-school liaison and visits are having positive effects. Distance learning packs can be used for extended absences.

- School procedures should be set up for the familiarisation of newly arrived pupils, with special consideration for refugees. Schools will find it helpful to refer to guidance on meeting the needs of mobile pupils.
Effective Language and Learning Support for Pupils for whom English is an Additional Language

Many pupils in English schools speak a language other than English. Throughout England about 200 different languages are used.

“Pupils progress in learning English, and their academic and social achievement will depend to a great extent upon their teachers’ knowledge, skills and understanding of how to support their learning of English, whilst ensuring that they have access to the breadth of the school curriculum”. (Source: “Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils “, Teacher Training Agency.)

- Pupils who are learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Some pupils are able to read and write fluently in their first language, whereas others may have emergent language skills in both Language 1 and 2. Some pupils may only use their community language when communicating with certain family members.
- Opportunities should be made to value and highlight the linguistic heritage of pupils and encourage the use of first language alongside the use of English within the classroom.
- Maintenance of first language not only raises self-esteem, but it also can support learning of English, through developing linguistic skills.
- It should be noted that oral skills can often outstrip written competence. As pupils progress through the Key Stages they are required to be familiar with increasingly complex vocabulary in written work.
- Provision of good role models of English is necessary.
- Special strategies for supporting EAL pupils should be employed e.g. providing key words and visuals, the use of additional visual and auditory materials, providing additional input on key grammatical elements and the structure of writing, scaffolding learning to ensure that learning outcomes match curriculum content.
- Monitoring pupil’s understanding by questioning and by setting tasks which do not require the use of English is essential.
- Assessment should be made within the National Curriculum. EAL children do not follow a simple progression, but may jump levels as their English progresses. Language in Common/Northern Association of Support Services for Equality and Achievement (NASSEA) may be used to assess Stage of Language Acquisition.
- Care should be taken not to confuse EAL and Special Educational Needs.
Strategies for supporting EAL pupils

For the purpose of this document a simple list of headings is given.

- Value and use pupils’ home languages
- Maintain the development of pupils’ first language
- Give EAL pupils access to the curriculum as quickly as possible
- Provide opportunities for pupils to read and hear good models of English
- Take every opportunity to extend pupils’ English
- Provide additional support during lessons where possible
- Use visual or auditory materials
- Teach English language within the context of the curriculum learning
- Monitor pupils’ understanding
- Make regular assessments
An Inclusive Curriculum

"Schools have a responsibility to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils. The National Curriculum is a starting point for planning a school curriculum that meets the needs of individuals and groups of pupils. Teachers need to be aware that pupils bring to school different experiences, interests and strengths, which will influence the way they learn."


- In order to ensure that all pupils are included in Education they cannot all be treated the same way. They have different life experiences, interests and sometimes responses. Effective inclusive strategies will raise attainment of all pupils.

- Monitoring achievement by ethnicity can highlight if all pupils are being included.

- Inclusive schools review the curriculum to ensure that it recognises, respects and has knowledge of the cultural experiences of all groups, promotes understanding of diversity and counters stereotypes. They include children's histories, languages, religions and culture.

“If we do not acknowledge the contribution of black people, their cultures, lifestyles and languages, we will continue to present our children with a false view of the world around them. We will be encouraging White children and students to think of themselves, their culture, lifestyle and language as superior, as the “norm” and therefore acceptable and of value. We will be encouraging black children and students to believe that they are outside the “norm” and therefore less acceptable and of less value.”

Source: “All our Children”, Babette Brown, EYTARN, 1995

- Initiatives aiming at inclusion should feature in the school development plan.

- Cultural concerns may mean that parents or carers may have reservations about some aspects of the curriculum. Flexibility is necessary here.

- Celebrating festivals and looking at race issues in PHSE have immense value, but it is important to ensure that all children's backgrounds are recognised throughout the curriculum, otherwise there is a danger of tokenism.
Understanding Social, Cultural and Religious Issues

“Everywhere, cultural identities are emerging which are not fixed, but poised, in transition, between different positions; which draw on different cultural traditions at the same time; and which are the product of those complicated cross-overs and cultural mixes which are increasingly common in a globalised world.”


- It is extremely important to highlight the fact that culture is both deeply rooted and at the same time is changing. This is being speeded up by rapid communication and increased mobility.
- Everyone’s life is conditioned by many different cultural practices. When formulating an inclusive curriculum it is important for White children to explore their cultural heritage, so that culture of all types is celebrated. Multiculturalism should include all pupils in a holistic manner.
- By schools teaching an inclusive curriculum pupils are able to draw from a wide variety of cultural factors.
- Young people growing up in Britain share many cultural experiences in common, such as; inter-ethnic friendships, shared tastes in music, fashion, food and aspirations in life.
- Each person’s identity is unique. Religion may be the defining factor for some people rather than ethnicity. Schools need to help pupils as they search for their identity. For example: a Black woman living in London may see herself as; Black British, Jamaican, London British, Christian, a woman and a mother.
- With each pupil being seen as an individual, teachers have to see the relationship between cultural differences which may influence the way pupils behave, and it is wrong to assume that all members of a particular group share the same practices.

This said, there are situations when, for example, the systems of education previously experienced by newly arrived children to the UK are different. For example, children coming from East Africa may have been taught through rote learning. Active learning methods could be confusing for such children and they have to adapt significantly. It should be stressed that this should not place a higher comparative value on one system. These students may have equal success through different routes.

In another example, in English one would expect to say “please” before a request for action, whereas in Punjabi one would make this statement by an inflection of voice and facial expression. We should remember that body language can be culturally loaded and what is deemed to be offensive in one culture is acceptable in another. They are equal, but different.
Intervention in the Early Years

- Young children are extremely vulnerable to the pressures which society places upon them. In their formative years they are developing attitudes to themselves and others which are based upon how they see their similarities and differences.

- Children as young as two years old can identify physical and other differences, and by the age of three to five years they learn to attach value to skin colour.

- Prejudiced attitudes are learned from the whole environment. Children need to be given opportunities to unlearn them. This is affected by what children see, or do not see represented in the media, what they hear said about others and what they are permitted or encouraged to do.

- It should not be assumed that because there are no obvious racial incidents that young children are not learning to be prejudiced. Children quickly learn how different behaviour patterns are “acceptable” in different environments. What the teacher may see in a controlled setting may be at variance with a less monitored play session.

- Racist incidents involving young children need to be handled very sensitively. “Most young children find it difficult to see another person’s view as equally important. Consideration for others has to be learnt.”

- There are many ways of bringing up children, which have equally effective outcomes. “…the parents of a child are the best source of information about the behaviours and practices found in specific cultures….These differences may lead to different expectations between educators and parents….we should never fall into the trap of making crude assumptions based on children’s backgrounds.”

- The experiences of all pupils should be included so that the separation between home and the nursery or school environment is reduced. The children’s home languages should be incorporated in the setting.

- Assessments and the recording of milestones should be checked to ensure that they are not based upon stereotypical assumptions and that they are free from discrimination.

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Focused Support for Refugees

(For the purpose of this document asylum seekers and refugees are given the term “refugee”. However, it should be noted that asylum seekers have the additional difficulty of the uncertainty of their right to remain in the UK.)

- The needs of refugees can differ from those of other minority ethnic groups. Additional factors may need addressing before their educational needs can be met.

- Many refugees have come from difficult situations and the children may need to be given opportunities to come to terms with this. Teachers are not usually trained in counselling and the school may need to seek outside help. Liaison should be made with refugee and community associations.

- It is known that many refugees suffer from racism and harassment.

- A refugee child’s current housing may be temporary, creating uncertainty for all the family and the child may have to move school more than once.

- Previous education has often been disrupted and in some circumstances there may have been no formal schooling before.

- For those children who have been formally educated, the English education system may be very different in structure and methods.

- Many newly arrived refugees may have little or no English. Schools need to employ the same strategies for English language acquisition as they would use for other newly arrived pupils.

- “It is vital that young refugees, especially those that are unaccompanied, are kept in touch with their home communities. If they are ever to go back to their homeland or be re-united with their families it is essential that they have knowledge of their native language, culture and religion. Schools will not always be able to provide this. Therefore, it is important to put unaccompanied or individual children in touch with other people who have come from their own country.”

- Successful schools offer an inclusive curriculum, which includes positive images of migration and builds upon the strengths which refugees bring and have brought in the past. These schools teach why people have become refugees in the past and about the long history of global asylum seeking.

- A successful school recognises the factors given above and creates a flexible policy and programme to meet the needs of refugee pupils.

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8 “Children of the Storm: Support for Young Refugees in Britain”, information leaflet.
Effective Liaison with Parents and Carers

- All families need to feel welcome in school and have their values and cultures respected. It is possible to set up parent support groups to acknowledge the particular needs of communities or to create a parents’ meeting room in school.

- Some minority ethnic parents may have had different, or indeed difficult experiences of school themselves and this will put them at a disadvantage in relating to their child’s schooling.

- Teachers and schools have a responsibility to communicate effectively, using jargon free language. If necessary, translation services should be enlisted. Examples of strategies would include: “translating all formal communications, including newsletters, into majority community languages; displaying material and directional signs around the school in community languages; and providing interpreting facilities.” Some schools also hold meetings for specific purposes, for example to explain National Curriculum tests to parents. It is a priority to ensure that all parents are included.

- If parents fail to attend school meetings consideration should be given to whether the time, place and invitation were accessible to minority ethnic parents. Many parents welcome home visits, feeling more able to share in the security of their own home. It helps to have a bilingual assistant where possible.

- It is important to create a dialogue with schools, so that parents feel that their views are acted upon.

  “In two schools, staff have visited African Caribbean parents at home to listen to their views on the school and education more generally. This arose out of concern for the underachievement of the Black Caribbean boys in the school and their disaffection. This has led to increased confidence between parents and teachers and a greater willingness on the part of parents to come into school.”

- Schools should monitor the effectiveness of their liaison with parents as part of their ethnic monitoring. For example, in one school data showed that only 11% of Bangladeshi parents attended Parents meetings in 1994/5. After a policy of encouragement, including telephone calls, special letters and offers of transport the attendance rose to 74% in two years. (Sources:)

Good Links between the School and the Wider Community

- Learning takes place inside and outside school. Community organisations may be encouraged to develop special initiatives for specific groups who are underachieving within the community. For example, there is an African Caribbean Saturday School in Milton Keynes.

- It is important that young people are given positive role models, both inside and outside schools. Schools may liaise closely with the Youth Service. Black youth workers may be encouraged to make links with schools. Young professionals from the minority ethnic communities may be invited into schools, or to act as mentors. Research has shown that this is most successful when there is time for a relational aspect to be included.

- Joint initiatives between the school and community groups can raise attainment. In Milton Keynes the Close to Home Project aims to bring schools, the youth service, community organisations and carers together to support children at risk from exclusion. This project takes the specific needs of minority ethnic groups seriously.

- School/community-based projects are the most successful when there are: clear targets, with parents being involved in the target setting process; on-going tracking of individual pupils and overall monitoring; a high level of senior management commitment; communication about progress and input requested from tutors of the children involved; and an expectation that achievement is a priority. (Source:10)

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10 “Improving Practice: A Whole School Approach to Raising the Achievement of African Caribbean Youth”, the Runnymede Trust in association with the Nottingham Trent University, 1998.
Recruitment of Minority Ethnic Teachers and Support Staff

- It is important that the teaching profession is more representative of the population at large if we are to achieve an inclusive education system.

- The report of the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry indicated that the need for a more balanced group of school staff should equally apply to all or predominantly White areas as it does to more racially mixed areas.

- Care should be taken to ensure that minority ethnic staff members are represented in all areas of school staffing. The diversity of communities should be reflected among mid-day assistants, support assistants, Governors, teachers and senior management.

- There should be flexible ways of recruiting and encouraging training. For example, by: creating part-time training courses; recognising overseas gained qualifications and enabling teachers to gain Overseas Trained Teacher Status; ensuring that there is no cultural bias in the interview process and by showing that the school has a clear Equal Opportunities Policy and is effective in dealing with racist incidents.
Sources


❖ “Children of the Storm: Support for Young Refugees in Britain”, information leaflet.

❖ DFEE, “Removing the Barriers: Raising Achievement Levels for Minority Ethnic Pupils - key points for schools”, 2000


❖ Runnymeade Trust in association with the Nottingham Trent University, “Improving Practice: A Whole School Approach to Raising the Achievement of African Caribbean Youth”, 1998.


❖ Teacher Training Agency, “Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils”, Publication Number 114/5-00.

❖ Milton Keynes Council “Changing Faces in our Schools” 2002
Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils