

Anti-racism
resource series

Supporting staff from racially minoritised groups

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Introduction

In order to begin thinking about supporting staff from diverse backgrounds, we must recognise that, in the UK, teaching is a majority white profession.

In England, 92.7% of headteachers, 89.7% of deputy or assistant headteachers and 85.7% of classroom teachers are from a White British background.[1] 46% of schools have no staff from Black, Asian or minoritised ethnic backgrounds, and only 16% of schools employ over 20% of their teachers from BAME groups.[2]

This means that it may often be the case that a teacher from a racially minoritised group is the only staff member from that group in their school.

This can have a negative impact on the mental health of staff from racially minoritised backgrounds in many ways:

- they may feel isolated
- they may feel unable to raise issues of racism if they occur
- they may feel unable to raise other issues (like workload or stress) for fear of being perceived as difficult
- they may be looked to as a representative of their minoritised racial group, and feel pressure to speak on behalf of that group.

[1] Department for Education. School workforce in England: November 2019, 2019. https://www.ethnicity- facts-figures.service.gov.uk/workforce-and-business/workforce-diversity/school-teacher-workforce/ latest#by-ethnicity

[2] UCL Institute of Education, UCL. Making progress? Employment and retention of BAME teachers in England, 2020. https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10117331/1/IOE_Report_BAME_Teachers.pdf

The ‘hidden workload’

Teachers from racially minoritised backgrounds may encounter what has been termed the ‘hidden workload’. This term refers to additional labour that a staff member may take on that is not recognised as part of their day- to-day job.

This can include:

- feeling the need to work harder than white peers in order to prove themselves just as capable
- dealing with racism, overt or subtle, from peers
- being automatically relied upon for diversity initiatives in the school – for example, a Black teacher being expected to plan activities for Black History Month simply because of their race
- being the go-to person in the school when issues of racism or racial bullying arise amongst students.

This hidden workload can have a detrimental effect on staff mental health and job satisfaction.

It’s important for schools to address this before concerns directly arise. We cannot assume that just because issues have not been reported that they do not exist.

Colourblindness

When asked to think about issues around race and racism in our schools, a common first reaction may be to think that ‘this isn’t an issue here’. You may have heard phrases like ‘we treat everyone equally here’, or even ‘we don’t see race’.

This type of approach is called ‘colourblindness’[3], and regardless of intention, it ignores the deep-seated issues of systemic and structural racism. It is important to move away from this way of thinking as we work to become anti-racist schools, being fully aware that racism is pervasive and entrenched and that we need to confront it directly to make a difference.

[3] You can read more about colourblindness and the issues with this approach on Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Color_blindness_(racial_classification)#Criticism

What schools can do

Some schools already have excellent initiatives in place to support their staff's mental health and wellbeing, making it a whole-school priority.

Schools are becoming aware that in order to properly support the wellbeing of students, the wellbeing of staff must be treated with equal importance.

There is more work to do in this area, specifically thinking about supporting the mental health and wellbeing of staff from racially minoritised groups.

- Conduct an anonymous staff wellbeing survey to find out the needs of racially minoritised teachers and support staff in the school.

Find out more about how to conduct a confidential staff survey from our 5 Steps framework.



- Review your staff wellbeing policy; does it take into consideration the additional mental health burden racially minoritised staff may be facing?
- Develop a specific policy for anti-racism, which clearly lays out the whole-school approach to anti-racism, ensuring that tackling racism is the responsibility of all staff.

Use our anti-racism policy template to develop your policy.



- Where possible, allocate funding towards bringing racially minoritised consultancy professionals into the school to work with you.
- Ensure that calendar events like Black History Month or celebrating different religious or cultural days are the responsibility of a group of staff, not just one person.
- Ensure that school display is inclusive and not just White/ Eurocentric.
- Senior leadership should look closely at staff demographics and discuss ways to improve diverse hiring practices.
- Events that are traumatic for certain communities (deaths of Black people at the hands of police, news stories about increases in hate crimes towards certain demographics, etc) should be given due care and consideration.

Case study

Rahi Popat, Pastoral Support Officer at Keyham Lodge School in Leicester

In our school, our staff diversity is around 60% of teachers from White backgrounds and 40% of teachers from racially minoritised groups.

This is despite the fact that the majority of the children we see here are from White British backgrounds. Many of them do not encounter people from different backgrounds in their lives outside of school, so it's important to us that they can develop stable relationships with teachers from lots of different backgrounds, to help reduce that sense of difference.

There is a policy of zero tolerance to racism that is clearly implemented in the school, and our attitude towards anti-racism is the same as towards safeguarding and mental health – it is everyone's responsibility. It is a whole-school approach.

Every single staff member who starts at the school learns about this in their induction; how to tackle racism, what to do if they witness a racist incident. Knowing racist behaviours are dealt with consistently is hugely important to a staff member who themselves may deal with racism. It shows staff that the whole school community understands and wants to tackle these issues, even when they are uncomfortable.

Having an anti-racism champion won't work - you can't have just one staff member who is championing that issue. Of course, you do have to have people leading on certain things, but if you have just one person being responsible for something it won't work. If you hear a racist incident, you can't just pass it on to the designated racism person for them to respond to. It has to be a united approach, which is what Keyham Lodge does well.

If you are the staff member that everyone is coming to about racism, the workload and pressure increases on you – you are solely responsible for a school-wide issue and that is very bad for your wellbeing, particularly if you are from a racially minoritised background and also experiencing racism and the mental health impact of that.

Here it is emphasised to staff consistently that it is everyone's responsibility, but also that we shouldn't be afraid to ask for help. Some staff members might know more than others in certain areas, and we can learn from each other.

Open channels of communication are vital to supporting staff members mental health and wellbeing. At Keyham Lodge, the leadership have shown great commitment to wellbeing and mental health is always open for discussion. A wellbeing committee has been established to support staff mental health and wellbeing with activities such as meditation and we are now looking to develop a staff wellbeing project across our Trust. Staff feel able to discuss any concerns they have and know they will be supported.



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