

Anti racism resource series

Reviewing existing school policies

Co-authored by Hon. Stuart Lawrence

> If it's not blatant racism, many people don't consider it racist. It will be played off as a misunderstanding when clearly that's not what it was.
>
> **Student**[1]

[1] This quote is from the Anna Freud Centre's survey on racism and mental health. A total of 796 respondents aged 13 to 20 completed the survey between 23rd September and 11th October 2021.



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Introduction

Often, we don't recognise or understand institutional or systemic racism because we don't recognise that incidents are part of a pattern. This pattern can include behaviour that results from many of the policies that we use in school to support our day-to-day decision making.

Reviewing your existing policies can help you to identify these patterns and improve your policies by making them fair and equitable to all members of the school community.

Research has found that 70% of young people who had experienced racism at school said it had negatively impacted their mental health.[1] By ensuring that our policies are fair and do not discriminate against certain racially minoritised groups, we can build a school environment that properly supports students and their mental health.

When writing or reviewing policies, it is helpful to understand the following terms and their definitions:

Direct racism:
treating someone less favourably than others on racial grounds.

Indirect racism:
where a condition or requirement is applied equally to everyone, but that people of a particular racial group are less likely to be able to meet than other people, putting them at a disadvantage.

Harassment:
treating someone in a way that violates their dignity, or creates a hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Victimisation:
treating someone less favourably for having made or supported a complaint of racial discrimination.

Institutional racism:
the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. This includes processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage racially minoritised people.

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[2] Mind. Not making the grade: why our approach to mental health at secondary school is failing young people. 2021. https://www.mind.org.uk/media/8852/not-making-the-grade.pdf

Which policies do I need to review?

Eventually, you and your leadership team will want to look at all policies that apply to students and staff at your school. However, a good place to begin is by looking at the policies that you use to guide your decision making with regard to student conduct and relationships. These might include:

- behaviour and relationships policy
- anti-bullying policy
- behaviour for learning policy
- exclusions policy
- attendance policy
- school uniform policy or rules
- recruitment policy.

You may want include policy documents, flow charts and rules documents in your review.

Examples of policies or practices that could be causing racial discrimination and inequity:

- a school uniform policy that prohibits certain types of hairstyles and headwear
- an anti-bullying policy that doesn't include specific guidance about racist incidents
- a curriculum policy that excludes writers, thinkers and achievements from racially minoritised groups
- an attendance policy that doesn't make provision for religious observance other than Christian observance
- a behaviour for learning policy that requires that students show their attention and respect in a narrow range of culturally specific ways
- a communications policy that does not include provision for languages other than English.

Who should be involved in reviewing school policies?

You will be most effective in recognising patterns of racism if you include representatives from the many different groups who make up your school community: pupils, parents and carers, teachers, support staff, school leaders and governors.

Coming together to review existing policies can be a powerful first step for schools wanting to develop their anti-racist practice.

How could we review our policies?

We suggest that you work together to look at each policy in turn and discuss the following questions:

- Do the rules or provisions described in the policy apply exclusively or mainly to pupils, families or staff from racially minoritised groups?
- Does the policy suggest actions or consequences that treat racially minoritised pupils, families or staff less favourably than others?
- Does the policy apply a condition or requirement equally to everyone but the proportion of racially minoritised children, families or staff that can comply is considerably smaller than the proportion of others who can comply? Is this detrimental to people from racially minoritised groups?
- Does the policy suggest actions that could violate the dignity of pupils, families or staff from racially minoritised groups, or that could create a hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment?
- Does the policy suggest actions or consequences that result in racially minoritised pupils and families receiving a less appropriate or professional service?
- Do the policies embody unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage racially minoritised people?

Getting help and advice



You may want to consider engaging the support of an anti-racism or equalities expert to help you to review your policies. Committing part of your school improvement budget to anti-racism work can be a powerful way of making sure that you get off to the best start possible.

The organisations listed below are just some that we are aware of – there may be other organisations in your local area that you want to engage instead.

Paid for support services (including training, consultancy and therapy)

- **BLAM UK** - www,blamuk.org
- **Muna Abdi** - www.ma-consultancy.co.uk
- **BAATN** (The Black, African and Asian Therapy Network) - www.baatn.org.uk
- **The Black Curriculum** -www.theblackcurriculum.com
- **Diverse Educators** - www.www.diverseeducators.co.uk
- **Black Minds Matter UK** - www.www.blackmindsmatteruk.com
- **Show Racism the Red Card** - www.theredcard.org

Further information, resources and networks

- **NAHT Leaders for Race Equality -** www.naht.org.uk/leadersforraceequality
- **Runnymede Trust** - www.runnymedetrust.org
- **BAMEed Network** - www.bameednetwork.com
- **Black Educators Alliance** - www.blackeducatorsalliance.org
- **Muslim Teachers Association** - www.mta-uk.org
- **Taraki** - www.taraki.co.uk
- **Jami** - www.jamiuk.org

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