

THE RUNNYMEDE TRUST CONSULTATION RESPONSE TO:

Back on Track – A strategy for modernising alternative provision for young people

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The Runnymede Trust welcomes this opportunity to respond to the proposals set out in the white paper *Back on Track – A strategy for modernising alternative provision for young people*. We welcome the intention of the paper to transform the quality of alternative provision, both to support more effective early intervention by schools to tackle problems before they become acute, and to provide high quality support for those young people who are permanently excluded or who are otherwise without a school place. We support the overall aim to ensure that the provision made for these young people is of high quality and gets them back on track. However, we have some concerns that race equality issues have not figured prominently enough in the proposals despite widespread evidence of the disproportionate impact of exclusions on particular minority ethnic groups.

The Runnymede Trust is an independent policy research organisation focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic society.

Our mandate is to promote a successful multi-ethnic Britain – a Britain where citizens and communities feel valued, enjoy equal opportunities to develop their talents, lead fulfilling lives and accept a collective responsibility, all in the spirit of civic friendship, shared identity and a common sense of belonging. Runnymede has been active in the field of education for many years. Within our current education programme we devise and promote practical strategies for use in the classroom and, at community level, we aim to address and support the specific needs of minority ethnic young people. Further we focus on identifying, sustaining and augmenting improvements in race equality and social cohesion in the changing terrain of education policy and practice

We recognise that these proposals are in support of the Children's Plan aim to improve the lives of all children and young people, including our most vulnerable, this white paper clearly makes the point 'we know that young people who have been excluded from school and likely to have spent time in alternative provision are more likely to be involved in crime and risky behaviours, become NEET and have poor job prospects' and 'the challenge for the alternative provision sector is to enable every young person to achieve their best' and also 'to minimise the number of pupils who are permanently excluded from mainstream education'.

Given this clear rationale the specific nature of the consultation questions do not allow for consideration of the key concerns we would have in terms of race equality. Therefore, we have decided to highlight those aspects of this guidance that have been overlooked and

which raise real concerns regarding the inclusion and attainment of Black and minority ethnic young people.

1. Exclusion rates among Black and minority ethnic young people

There is disproportionate impact of exclusions from school on young people from specific Black and minority ethnic groups, including those from Traveller groups¹. African Caribbean young people are four times more likely to be excluded from school, usually for what is defined by schools as 'challenging behaviour'. African Caribbean girls are more likely to be excluded from school than their white counterparts². Research also shows that young people of Pakistani heritage are vulnerable to low attainment and exclusion from school³. These figures and the negative impact of this disproportionate rate of exclusions on the attainment and life chances for specific minority groups has been stressed in the government guidance *Aiming high: Raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils (2003)*.

More recently the DCSF guidance '*Getting it Right*' on Exclusions raised this issue in order to challenge practice in this area. The equal opportunities checklist in this guidance stated 'the statistics on exclusions published annually by the DCSF show that a disproportionate number of pupils from ethnic minorities, particularly Afro-Caribbean and African boys, are permanently excluded from school. Independent research has also shown that these groups tend to be excluded for offences that would not attract exclusion for white pupils'.

On page 1 of these proposals the ministerial foreword states two thirds of permanently excluded pupils and 75% of pupils in Pupil Referral Units have special educational needs. This rightly highlights the need to understand and make provision for the specific needs of the young people excluded from schools and in alternative provision but misses the opportunity to make the same point in terms of ethnic origin. It is important to know and understand as much about the make-up of the young people excluded and in alternative provision in order to ensure we can best meet their needs and support successful outcomes and their transfer back into mainstream provision. Elsewhere in the document it recognises the need to take into account disability and gender issues but again there is no mention of ethnic background this would appear to reflect inconsistent policy development on ensuring race equality and 'Narrowing the Gap' (Children's Plan).

¹ Daniels et al, 2002

² Osler, A (2003) *Girls and Exclusion from school: Rethinking the agenda*, Brighton: Falmer Press

³ Warren, S and Gillborn, D (2003) *Race Equality and Education in Birmingham*, Birmingham: Birmingham City Council and B:rap

2. Relevant information gathering, data collection and analysis on attendance and attainment of young people in alternative provision.

Chapter 4 of this paper focuses on increasing accountability for pupil referral units and alternative provision, given the above picture it is important that improvements in data collection at pupil-level and the school-level indicators take into account ethnic origin, it will also be useful to include religion or belief and faith background to ensure we are monitoring for inequalities in outcomes for specific groups.

A further question arises in terms of what use will be made of school level census data for these young people as this could save duplication of information collection and contribute to the 'standardised information passport' recommended in this paper. However, there is a concern around the passport notion in that it does not become a badge or label by which young people experiencing difficulties in education and learning feel 'negatively identified' as this may have differential impact on young people from minority ethnic backgrounds. Perhaps it would be more helpful and facilitate re-integration into mainstream and across schools/institutions if provision was made for a 'standardised information passport' for **all** pupils. Moreover this may help improve equality data monitoring across the board. On the same point of avoiding duplication and supporting tie-in to mainstream processes we could better utilise the information and support identified through the CAF (Common Assessment Framework) process to inform the 'personalised education plans'.

3. The make-up and expertise of the workforce to understand and meet the diverse needs of these young people.

We embrace the proposals set out in this paper to develop and support the workforce in this field (this includes the specialist children services professionals- educational psychologists, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, and targeted youth support) which recognises that the 'staff in alternative provision need to be able to engage, motivate and inspire the most challenging pupils'. However again given the over-representation of young people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds in exclusions and in alternative provision, the proposals need to reflect that this will impact on the training and professional development of those working in this area. The specific questions that will need to be addressed are how to ensure:

- the diversity of the workforce so it reflects the diversity of the population as a whole and also of those represented in this provision and
- the training and support the workforce have in order to understand diversity and promoting race equality.

We would also support this paper's promotion of the role of wider support services in ensuring engagement in learning and positive activities for these young people. However this too has relevance for the issues raised above as it will have an impact on the

procurement and commissioning process, especially from third sector providers. Again it is about understanding the cohort of young people we are working with and ensuring we best meet their needs.

We ask that the Department in-line with implementing their single equality scheme carry-out and publish an Equality Impact Assessment on this new strategy. Furthermore that it heeds its own research and guidance on this issue and provide clearer, and far more consistent and comprehensive guidance that moves towards reducing the disproportionate number of Black and minority ethnic young people excluded from schools and makes every effort to recognise and respond to their needs when in alternative provision to enable these young people to get back on track.

The proposals in this paper do not sufficiently address the need for re-integration into mainstream schooling. Indeed, the suggested establishment of alternative minimum standards to those set out in the National Curriculum will militate against re-integration. Alternative provision should enable young people to re-enter mainstream education either at school or in further and higher education.

We hope that these comments provide a useful contribution to developing a *strategy for modernising alternative provision for young people* and look forward to reading the result of the overall consultation once published.

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