

The Runnymede

Trust

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Examining school exclusions and the race factor

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Introduction

This briefing paper examines the continuing disproportionate exclusion of ethnic minority students in the light of current government social inclusion policy. It follows on from The Children's Society and The Runnymede Trust's national joint conference *Inclusive Schools?* (June 1999) in which both organisations called upon the government to set specific national and local targets to reduce the disproportionate exclusion of ethnic minority students from school. This paper aims to revisit this issue and to place the race factor in school exclusions back at the forefront of the government's political agenda.

This paper should be seen in the context of national debate concerning 'institutional racism' and racial equality that arises, most notably, out of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and the publication of the Macpherson report, in particular those recommendations related to prevention and the role of education (R: 67-69). These state unequivocally that Local Education Authorities and School Governors should have 'the duty to create and implement strategies in their schools to prevent and address racism' (R: 68).

Early in 1999, the government made an explicit commitment to implementing the MacPherson report's recommendation as a 'catalyst to permanent and irrevocable change, not just across our public services but across the whole of society' (Commons, Hansard, 24/2/99). Nine months after the publication of the MacPherson report, this paper draws attention to potential disparities between its recommendations and current statutory provision to identify and challenge racial discrimination in school exclusions.

Background

Recent research not only highlights the disproportionate representation of ethnic minority students in school exclusion statistics, but the alarming decline in the attainment levels of this group from primary to secondary school (Gillborn & Gipps 1996; Osler & Hill 1999). These trends can be seen against other relevant findings that examine LEAs' and schools' effectiveness in reducing exclusion amongst certain ethnic minority groups. We point to the following in particular:

- **Unsystematic collation and analysis of available data by ethnicity.** Less than half of all LEAs monitor data on fixed-period exclusion by ethnicity and are able to identify patterns of fixed-period exclusions amongst ethnic minority students. This information could act as a trigger to target resources to prevent permanent exclusion (Audit Commission 1999).
- **Lack of comprehensive monitoring and analysis of pupil behaviour by ethnicity.** Only a few primary or secondary schools monitored or analysed pupils' behaviour in relation to ethnic background, as found in a recent OFSTED survey of 48 schools. The report concluded that this 'leaves schools open to the danger or stereotypical "impressions" and gives no sound basis for initiatives to address any real difficulties' (OFSTED, March 1999, para 121).
- **Wider representations of ethnic minority culture needed within society.** The influence of inherent racist stereotypes within the media's portrayal of ethnic minority culture, in particular on young African-Caribbean men's identity, outside

of the school gates impacts upon teachers' and pupils' perspectives of each other and on subsequent interaction (Sewell 1997; Richardson & Wood 1999).

How does the government propose to tackle school exclusions?

The government has set out its policy for addressing school exclusions in the Social Exclusion Unit's *Truancy and Social Exclusion* report and the legally binding document *Circular 10/99 - Social Inclusion: Pupil Support*, The Secretary of State's guidance on pupil attendance, behaviour, exclusion and re-integration for schools, governors and LEAs.

Both documents give a comprehensive account of how schools, governing bodies and LEAs should deal with truancy and exclusion. Both documents also identify ethnic minority pupils as a high-risk exclusion group, and some reference is made to meeting the social and educational needs of ethnic minority pupils. We particularly welcome government



proposals to monitor and publish exclusion data by ethnicity because schools and LEAs can then in part be held accountable.

Government proposals for reducing exclusions, as stated in Circular 10/99 and Truancy and Social Exclusion, can be divided into the following subheadings:

- Target setting
- Accountability
- Prevention
- Clear structures and procedures
- Re-integration

Overall, we note that the government needs to address in greater detail the issue of exclusions and ethnic minority pupils. Headteachers, LEAs, governors and teachers need support and strategies for addressing the high exclusion rate for ethnic minority pupils. We believe that the suggestions that we have outlined below will strengthen government policy in this area.

How should government policy on exclusions meet the needs of ethnic minority pupils?

Target setting

By 2002 the government wants a one-third reduction in both fixed-term and permanent exclusions. This national target will be translated into action via each LEA's Educational Development Plan and Behaviour Plan. Targets apply from September 1999 for permanent exclusions and from September 2000 for fixed-term exclusions.

We applaud the government move to set national targets because LEAs, schools and governors will have to put in place structures and procedures to reduce the practice of exclusions in schools. However, government goals must include targets to reduce the disproportionate number of ethnic minority students excluded so that their specific social and educational needs are met. In adopting a colour blind approach the government will experience reductions in exclusion for all groups, but the rate for ethnic minority pupils will remain high (Osler & Hill 1999).

Accountability

To ensure that schools are meeting the national targets the government has proposed that school data on exclusions will be published on an individual basis at secondary school level and at the level of LEAs for primary schools. This data will be broken down by ethnicity. Ten schools with disproportionately high levels of exclusions, either overall or among specific groups, will be inspected by OFSTED upon request by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. LEAs will also have the right to ask OFSTED to inspect high excluding schools.

We support government plans to monitor exclusions by ethnicity and appreciate their intention to publish this data at the level of the school and LEA. On the subject of those schools that have disproportionately high levels of exclusion rates for ethnic minority pupils, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment should ask OFSTED to investigate them all and set targets at the school level for a reduction in the rate. OFSTED teams who carry out these inspections should receive training in the following preventative strategies: curriculum development; classroom management; techniques for reducing disaffection and resolving conflict, so as to advise and assist schools with high level exclusion rates for ethnic minority pupils (Sewell 1997; OFSTED 1999; Richardson & Wood 1999).

Prevention

The government recognises that the best approaches to exclusion ensure that problems are prevented and dealt with quickly. Circular 10/99 suggests a number of ways that schools can prevent exclusions from occurring. For example, the conception and implementation of school behaviour plans are to be the responsibility of headteachers and governing bodies but both groups must consult parents before making, revising and finalising the statement. The government wants school behaviour plans to have clear structures and procedures for dealing with racial harassment. To address the specific needs of children who

are at risk of exclusion the government proposes the use of In School Centres as a short term teaching and support programme. With the assistance of LEAs and the parents of the child at risk of exclusion, schools can draw up Personal Support Programmes, which will require multi-agency intervention. To meet the specific needs of ethnic minority pupils, mentoring has been put forward as a preventative strategy.

Government actions in this area are appreciated, but we do have concerns about the use of In School Centres because ethnic minority pupils could be disproportionately referred to these centres just as they already are to Pupil Referral Units. Schools should have clear procedures in place for referring students to the Centres and they should note how many are referred and the reason for the referral. This needs to be closely monitored by ethnicity, and OFSTED inspectors should have the power to investigate schools with high ethnic minority referral rates.

In general, government actions in this area will have a limited effect in reducing the exclusion rate of ethnic minority pupils because teacher-pupil conflict has been cited as an explanation for the high number of African-Caribbean boys being excluded from schools. The stereotype of black boys being aggressive and unruly is unconsciously communicated in the interaction between black students and school teachers. Therefore, it is important, as noted by NASUWT that the TTA, ITTIs and LEAs provide beginning and existing teachers with training and support in issues around: curriculum development; classroom management; reducing disaffection; conflict resolution and pedagogic practices that engage ethnic minority pupils.

Clear structures and procedures

Circular 10/99 has clarified the roles and responsibilities of LEAs, headteachers and governors in the prevention of exclusions and the actual exclusion procedure itself. The aforementioned groups are bound by Section

68 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 to follow the procedures. The headteacher is the only person who can decide to exclude a child. However, every avenue of prevention has to have been exhausted beforehand, and the decision to fixed-term or permanently exclude should be taken only:

- in response to serious breaches of a school's discipline policy;
- once a range of strategies has

Table 1. Number of permanent exclusions of pupils of compulsory school age by ethnic group (England 1997/98).

	Number		Of whom:							
	White	Black Caribbean	Black African	Black Other	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Chinese	Any other ethnic group	
Pupils:										
Number	6,638,603	5,878,534	99,127	68,774	49,595	164,951	166,354	62,905	23,494	124,869
Percentage	100.0	88.6	1.5	1.0	0.7	2.5	2.5	0.9	0.4	1.9
Permanent Exclusions:										
Number	12,076 ¹	10,132	753	198	282	106	209	58	11	321
Percentage ²	100.0	83.9	6.2	1.6	2.3	0.9	1.7	0.5	0.1	2.7
As Percentage ³	0.18	0.17	0.76	0.29	0.57	0.06	0.13	0.09	0.05	0.26

¹Includes 6 permanent exclusions of pupils unclassified according to ethnic group.

²The number of permanent exclusions of compulsory school age expressed as a percentage of the total number of permanent exclusions of compulsory school age.

³The number of permanent exclusions of compulsory school age expressed as a percentage of the number (headcount) of pupils of compulsory school age in each ethnic group, in primary, secondary and special schools (excluding dually registered pupils in special schools) in January 1998.

Source: Annuals Schools' Census (1999).

been tried and failed; and

- if allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or of others.

Once a headteacher decides to exclude he or she has to notify the LEA and the governors, and they either in turn uphold or overturn the decision.

We welcome the clarification of roles, responsibilities and procedures for the prevention of exclusions and the actual exclusion procedure itself. However, we feel that pupils should be excluded only where they are a danger to themselves, other pupils and teachers (Sewell 1998). Also, pupils should be excluded for the event that led to the recommendation of exclusion and not for past misdemeanours. Exclusions should be used as the last resort and every other avenue should be exhausted before arriving at this decision.

For a fairer representative procedure at least one member of any discipline and appeal committee should be from the same ethnic background as the child recommended for exclusion to thus advise on community and cultural issues. Also, all those involved in the discipline and appeal committee should receive training in exclusion procedures and anti-racist strategies (Richardson & Wood 1999).

Re-integration

Where pupils have been excluded from school the government requests LEAs whenever possible to re-integrate an excluded pupil into mainstream schooling. The LEA is responsible for drawing up the pupil's individual re-integration plan and in the interim it has to provide full-time education. The government has given schools and LEAs discretion to decide the arrangements for accepting excluded pupils and the strategies to be put in place to support their re-integration.

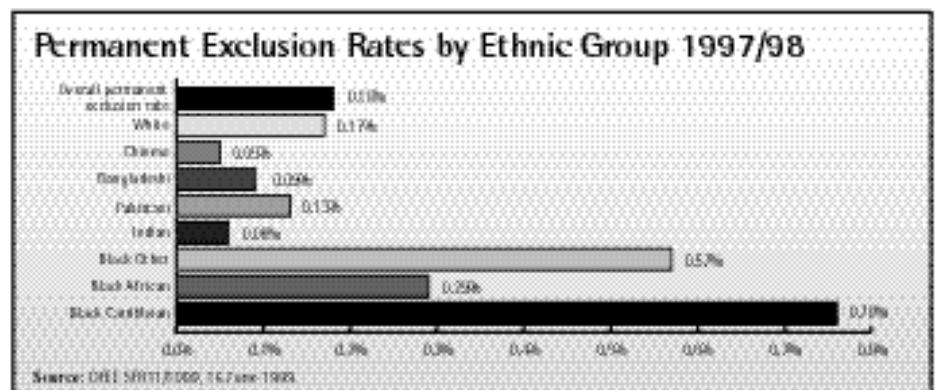
Government plans for the re-integration of excluded pupils into mainstream schooling are to be welcomed, especially as many excluded pupils do not receive formal or informal schooling once they have been excluded. However, there needs to be clarity and guidance on the arrangements for schools accepting excluded children. Schools may be apprehensive about taking on excluded pupils because they are conscious of needing to maintain their position in the school league tables. We propose that the government should address the way league tables are devised so that there is an incentive for schools to take on excluded pupils. As for the support that excluded

pupils will receive during re-integration, LEAs and schools should consult and utilise the work and knowledge of local community organisations/provisions for ethnic minority pupils.

Recommendations

Target setting

➤ Government targets must aim to reduce the number of ethnic minority pupils excluded from school so that specific strategies can be used to reduce exclusions for these particular pupils. A colour-blind approach would reduce exclusions for all groups but the rate for black pupils would remain disproportionately high.



➤ A statutory requirement should direct LEAs and schools to consider and include the specific needs of African-Caribbean students and other ethnic minority groups as distinct groups within such relevant LEA and school initiatives as Education Development Plans, School Development Plans and Behaviour Support. This should be achieved through genuine consultation with representatives of relevant ethnic groups within the school, for example pupils, families and teachers, along with the wider community of supplementary schools and local groups.

Whole-School Approach

➤ Schools should actively develop a whole-school multicultural approach to school inclusion, not only in relation to the school curriculum, but across all other aspects of school life, culture and policies, e.g. anti-bullying policies. A genuine and dynamic whole-school approach to multiculturalism would aim to reflect and celebrate the various historical, social and cultural identities and perspectives of different ethnic minority groups as an integral component of an inclusive school culture. This stretches beyond the formal representation of multi-ethnic diversity within the school curriculum and is part of an

inclusive school ethos that incorporates, listens to, and respects the manifold values and perspectives of all members of the school community.

- Schools should foster an ethos and relationships where pupils and parents feel genuinely listened to and, more importantly, where the issues and concerns that they raise are properly investigated.
- Schools should develop clear complaints procedures that recognise the need to address racist behaviour, not only amongst pupils but school staff too. The aim should be to promote accountability and confidence within the school community and demonstrate that racial equality is a genuine priority within the school.

➤ Different schemes that place the school firmly in the local community can make different ethnic minority groups feel that they belong to the school community. The school can develop work to build practical links with supplementary and Saturday schools from which both sides benefit through sharing information, materials, premises and awareness of different cultural perspectives, needs and interests.

Training

- The National College for School Leadership should train headteachers in preventative exclusion strategies, anti-racism and whole-school race equality policies and practices.
- Existing Headteachers should also receive inset training in the above.
- To assist and advise schools the OFSTED team inspecting high excluding schools should receive training in preventative exclusion strategies, anti-racism and issues around:
 - curriculum development
 - classroom management
 - reducing disaffection
 - conflict resolution, and
 - pedagogic practices that engage and raise the attainment of ethnic minority pupils.

Support

- Children should have the time and space to talk about academic and personal concerns through forums such as PSHE lessons, circle time and school councils.
- Teachers need the time, space and support to deal with vulnerable and disruptive pupils.
- Teachers should infuse PSHE and other subject areas with conflict resolution skills – skills aimed at all pupils, and which take into account the potential racial dimension of disputes.
- Peer mediation: trained pupils should help classmates to identify problems behind conflicts and bring about final solutions.
- Learning mentors can offer pupils a positive role model who can provide personal attention, advice and information to remotivate those who otherwise feel alienated from the school's structure and values.
- Home-school relationships that place families on an equal footing with the school can help to promote communication and a shared set of values between parents/carers and teachers. The school can develop more effective home-school links through the appointment of school-based community and home-school liaison officers, or develop local partnerships with voluntary sector projects to provide mediation, conflict resolution, information and support when relationships threaten to break down between student, family and school.

Monitoring

- LEAs and schools should be required to collate, monitor and analyse data on fixed-period exclusions with specific reference to ethnic background. This would lead schools and LEAs to a position from which they could identify and challenge emerging trends of exclusion amongst certain ethnic minority groups and develop targeted strategies to prevent fixed-period exclusion patterns from hardening into those of permanent exclusion.
- Schools should have clear structures and procedures in place for determining referrals to In School Centres and monitoring who is referred and why. This should be monitored by ethnicity.
- An OFSTED team of inspectors should inspect all schools that have high exclusion rates and high referral rates for ethnic minority pupils to In School Centres.

Exclusion procedure

- Mediation committees – bodies (separate from the governors) consisting of par-

ents, community leaders, pupil reps and teacher reps – should investigate grounds given for exclusion, and examine ways of retaining a child in school before the recommendation for exclusion goes before the governors and the LEA.

- Governing bodies should include someone from the local community who is familiar with local community provisions and services for ethnic minority young people.
- Disciplinary and appeals committees should include at least one person from the same ethnic background as the pupil recommended for exclusion.
- Disciplinary and appeals committees should receive training in exclusion procedures and anti-racist strategies.
- At the appeal stage the headteacher, LEA, governors and parents should all be required to make a verbal and written presentation of their case.
- Parents should be provided with the services of trained and experienced advocates in preparing and presenting cases.
- Children and young people should have the legal entitlement to participate, with the necessary support, in all formal stages of the exclusion process. Decision-makers should be obliged to actively seek and take into account the views of children and young people.

Re-integration

- LEAs and schools must establish clear arrangements and guidelines for the acceptance and re-integration of excluded pupils. Appointing a high-profile person to be responsible for re-integration within the school as the contact through whom child, family, school, LEA and any other relevant external agencies communicate, before and throughout the re-integration process, could help in evaluating and coordinating the best support for both child and school.
- Schools should be required to develop whole-school re-integration policies which are flexible and receptive to the individual pupil's needs, and which get reviewed at regular intervals to monitor progress.
- Children and young people should have access to confidential school-based counselling services to effect smooth re-integration into school and ongoing emotional health on a long-term basis. Families and school staff should also be referred to external agencies such as counselling services.
- The government should devise a formula for schools league tables that gives schools an incentive both to retain children at risk of exclusion and to take on excluded pupils.

References

- Our ideas were supported by reference to the following publications:
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The Runnymede Trust, founded in 1968, is an independent think tank

on race relations, ethnicity and cultural diversity. Runnymede's core mandate is to challenge racial discrimination, to influence anti-racist legislation and to promote a successful multi-ethnic Britain. While maintaining a broad general interest in all matters to do with race and racial discrimination, one of the Trust's priority areas is to develop specific and targeted strategies to raise the educational achievement levels of ethnic minority pupils.

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The Children's Society is one of the country's largest and most innovative children's charities. It was the first to develop a programme of work in primary schools to promote school inclusion. It has since expanded its practice base to secondary schools and works with teachers, parents, pupils and local communities to tackle school exclusions and promote the rights of all children to access the education system.

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