Race and Racism in English Secondary Schools

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Executive summary

This report is concerned with race and racism in England's secondary schools. Drawing upon the perspectives of secondary school teachers across Greater Manchester, the report focuses on the school teacher workforce, curricula, police and school policies. Showing that racism is deeply embedded in schooling, the report argues that schooling must be radically reimagined to place a commitment to anti-racism at its core.

Teacher workforce

The teaching workforce is still overwhelmingly white, and there is a need to increase the proportion of teachers from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds.[1] But while this is an important step, it is incomplete without a commitment to increasing the 'racial literacy'[2] of *all* teachers. By their own admission, many teachers are ill prepared to teach in ways that promote anti-racism, and this can include BME teachers. Racial literacy therefore needs to be placed at the centre of teachers' role and teacher training. It is important that *all* teachers take responsibility for teaching in ways that promote anti-racism.

Curricula

School curricula too often fail to reflect the diversity of contemporary society, and the National Curriculum does not mandate for engagement with the colonial legacies – or racist underpinnings – of contemporary Britain. Accordingly, curricula need overhauling to increase racial diversity, and to centre anti-racism.

Any transformation of the curriculum will require wider changes in examinations and school resources, and an increase in the racial literacy of teachers.

Police in schools

Despite the political impetus to place more police in schools, as this report shows, teachers have legitimate and urgent concerns that should be heeded. While a police presence in schools can be detrimental to all students, evidence suggests that the negative effects will be felt most harshly by BME and working-class students – both of which groups are already over-policed.

School policies

Much clearer anti-racism policies are needed to *institutionally* embed a culture of anti-racism in schools. Seemingly neutral school policies – like uniform and hair policies – should be reviewed from an anti-racist perspective to ensure that BME students are not systematically disadvantaged.

For our education to undergo the radical change it needs, each of these elements must be attended to. An anti-racist curriculum is dependent upon the delivery of racially literate teachers, and school policies must not undermine the efforts of teachers. There is a lot to be done, but the proliferations of racisms, xenophobia and general intolerance we have seen in recent years make this an urgent task.

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[1]   While 'BME' is certainly an imperfect term – particularly because of the way it flattens the ethnic differences between those categorised under the label – it is used in this report because it is widely used and understood, including in education research and policy.

[2]   'Racial literacy' refers here to the capacity of teachers to understand the ways in which race and racisms work in society, and to have the skills, knowledge and confidence to implement that understanding in teaching practice.

Introduction

Despite widespread denials of the ongoing significance of race, racism continues to underpin key socio-political events and to shape lives in profound ways. From the racisms that have surfaced in popular and political discourses on Brexit, to the racisms manifest in the government's 'hostile environment' policy and the racially uneven impact of the coronavirus pandemic, it *should* be increasingly difficult to deny that racism is an enduring and fundamental problem for our times.

One need not look far to find stories that show how these wider racisms permeate our schools. In June 2019, as I was interviewing teachers for this project, news broke of the tragic death of Shukri Yahya Abdi – a 12-year-old black Muslim girl who came to the UK as a refugee from Somalia. On 27 June, her body was found in Greater Manchester's River Irwell. While the police were quick to deny any suspicious circumstances, Shukri's family remained adamant that things did not 'stack up'. Shukri had been severely bullied at school, and there are concerns that the school failed to respond adequately despite being made aware of the issues (Townsend, 2019). Evidence heard at an inquest into Shukri's death suggests that the family were right to doubt the narratives of the school and the police (Taylor, 2020). As campaigners have made clear, Shukri's death, and popular responses to it, lay bare the realities of racism, Islamophobia and xenophobia in contemporary society.

Shukri's story is not an aberration, however. Even as I prepared this report, stories of racism in schools continued to emerge. In September 2019, only a few months after the death of Shukri Abdi, the story of Caleb Hills made the news cycle (Chantler-Hicks, 2019). Caleb, a 10-year-old black mixed-race boy, tried to hang himself after being subjected to persistent and explicit racist bullying by his peers. As his mother explained, his trauma was compounded by the failure of his teachers and the school to protect him.

Disappointingly, just months after these incidents, a high-profile BME headteacher advised parents to ignore young people's claims of racism. 'If [a] child says [a] teacher is being racist, back the teacher. Whatever the child says, back the teacher … If you don't, you are letting the child down and allowing

them to play you for a fool', argued Katherine Birbalsingh (Shand-Baptiste, 2019). As many critics pointed out, in Birbalsingh's framing, racism can only exist as a fabrication, in which parents and teachers are played 'for a fool'. As this report shows, the realities for BME students reveal how woefully misguided this advice is, and how urgent it is that schools prioritise anti-racism.

The stories of Shukri and Caleb, shocking and disheartening as they may be, are only the tip of the iceberg. As well as frequent reports of racist discrimination in school hair policies (Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly, 2018; Soni, 2019; Dabiri, 2020) and reports of deeply problematic teaching of black history (Doharty, 2019), there is evidence of deep-rooted institutional issues that do not so easily make the headlines. These issues are part of a much longer history.

Writing as early as 1971, the activist, politician and former teacher Bernard Coard lamented the racism that characterised the schooling experiences of black children in the UK. Crystallising concerns among BME communities, particularly black communities, the report was a catalyst for decades of anti-racist mobilisations that still endure today. In 1999, the Macpherson report marked a watershed moment in discussions of racism in the UK. The report into 'matters arising from' the racist killing of black teenager Stephen Lawrence not only brought discussions of 'institutional racism' into mainstream political discourse, but also cast schooling as central to wider societal issues regarding race and racism (Sivanandan, 2000). Two decades on from the Macpherson report, and almost half a century on from Bernard Coard's report (1971), evidence suggests that racism still plagues our society and our schools.

Bringing us into the contemporary moment, this report explores the nature of race and racism in contemporary secondary schools. It draws upon data from interviews with 24 secondary school teachers, from across Greater Manchester, in order to show that issues of race and racism continue to be a defining feature of our schooling system. Situating interviewee accounts alongside wider research, the report highlights a number of key areas of concern. While there are no easy solutions for

issues that are institutional and endemic, the report highlights a number of ways in which schools might be improved, if not transformed.

Much of the academic, policy and lay discussion around racism in schools is limited to a focus on racial disparities in educational attainment and, secondarily, to exclusions. Undoubtedly, these are important issues with profound material consequences. While paying some attention to these issues, this report also moves beyond these confines to consider education as an enterprise that is far greater than student attainment. Indeed, as many of the teachers that I spoke to pointed out, the purpose of schooling has to be about more than metrics, attainment, examinations and the production of a future workforce. This report is therefore concerned with the extent to which schools can tackle racism and promote racial equality. The report is organised around four key issues: the *teacher workforce, curricula, police and school policies*. Before turning to consider each issue in turn, I want to offer a brief note on the participants and why – if it isn't obvious – we should consider the perspectives of teachers.

The participants

Teachers occupy the frontline of schooling. They are uniquely positioned in the vortex of students, their fellow teachers, parents and school policies. They are also directly impacted by school management and senior leaders, school governors, the government and the Department for Education, Ofsted,[3] the National Curriculum, national policies and initiatives, exam boards, and a range of other forces that have a bearing on schooling. It is the teacher who, alongside the students, is regularly in the classroom, on the frontline of delivery.

Academic and policy literature has highlighted the vital role that teachers play in schooling, and the impact that teachers can have on student outcomes. In terms of race and racism, a range of studies have shown that the role of the teacher is vital in shaping the experiences and outcomes of BME students (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Crozier, 2005; Maylor et al., 2006; Maylor et al., 2009), irrespective of class background (Gillborn et al., 2012).

The 24 participants in this study work(ed) in a range of secondary schools across Greater

Manchester. Participants were recruited via posters shared on social media, via email and through a teaching union. It is worth noting that all of those interviewed actively responded to the recruitment and thus identified as willing and able to have important conversations about race and racism. The interviewees ranged in age and career stage, from 22 to 57 years old, and from newly qualified status to over 20 years of teaching experience. The teachers taught a range of subjects including science, humanities, modern foreign languages, maths, geography, PSHE,[4] religious studies, citizenship, English and sociology. A range of administrative roles were represented, and the sample included teachers in academy schools, local authority schools and one private school. Nine of the participants were male and fifteen were female. Sixteen were white and eight were non-white: the sample included black, mixed-race and Asian participants. To protect the anonymity of the participants, the accounts are anonymised.

Before moving into a discussion of the findings, it seems necessary to say something about Greater Manchester, as the research site. Greater Manchester is a large combined authority and – with a total population of over 2.8 million inhabitants – is the third largest county in England. Greater Manchester has 'a higher proportion of minority ethnic pupils than England or the North West' (Manchester Urban Institute, n.d.). As the Manchester Urban Institute (n.d.) has shown, in terms of both 'the size and composition of the minority ethnic cohort', there are considerable differences between Greater Manchester's local authorities. Nevertheless, while the ethnic minority population is growing, at 80% (according to the 2011 census), the White British ethnic group remains overwhelmingly the largest in the region (CoDE, 2013).

In addition to this racial diversity, it is also worth noting the considerable class differences and disadvantage in the region. In comparison with England and the North West, the region has a higher proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (a crude indicator of socioeconomic disadvantage). While Greater Manchester is a specific context, as previous research has shown, it is likely that the findings in this report are applicable to England more generally.

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3 The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills.
4 Personal, social, health and economic development.

Teacher workforce

Teacher diversity and role models

Almost all of the teachers I interviewed spoke damningly about the lack of racial diversity within the teaching profession generally, and specifically within their individual schools. This was often highlighted as a key issue, even before my questioning. Teachers spoke of schools where the teaching force was 'mostly white', and in some cases exclusively white. According to the Department for Education (DfE), in 2018, nearly 92% of teachers in England's state-funded schools were white (DfE, 2018a). This is starker in relation to headteacher positions, with only 3% of heads coming from 'ethnic minority' backgrounds (DfE, 2018b).

These disparities were felt to be particularly acute in those schools where there were high numbers of BME students. Teacher perceptions reflect wider disparities between teacher and pupil demographics, with NASUWT and the Runnymede Trust (2017: 9) reporting 'a chronic shortage of BME teachers in relation to the BME pupil population'. DfE data from 2016 shows that while 27% of pupils in state-funded schools are 'from a BME background', only 13% of teachers are (Rhodes, 2017).

Concerns over the racial make-up of the teaching force are longstanding. While it might seem obvious that our teaching force should be more racially diverse, it is worth considering what the advantages might be (for students), as well as the limits to any interventions aimed at achieving this.

Most frequently, teachers spoke of a need for students from BME backgrounds to have role models within schools. As one white teacher working in a majority ethnic minority school put it,

> if you look at our workforce, I think it's mostly white and I think that is a problem because I don't think there are enough role models for black people or Asian people within the staff.

This sentiment was shared by almost all of those who participated in this research. The implication is that having more BME teachers would help to raise the aspirations, and thereby the attainment, of students from BME communities. As another

teacher suggested, 'what is important is that pupils have role models to aspire to'. The notion that BME teachers might serve as positive role models for BME students was given further weight by BME interviewees reporting having had such a positive impact. Simultaneously, a number of white staff reported having observed their BME colleagues having a 'role model' type of impact on BME students. But while the importance of efforts to get more BME people into teaching should not be underestimated, there are a number of caveats that are worth emphasising here.

Firstly, and perhaps most fundamentally, a focus on providing 'role models' risks slipping into stereotypes about the low aspirations of, and lack of role models for, students from BME backgrounds. Without a wider critique of how schools produce racial inequality, such interventions can feed 'cultural deficit' explanations that place the blame on already marginalised communities. Indeed, as Maylor (2009) has suggested in relation to her research with black teachers, it is not necessarily the case that BME teachers will (or should) see themselves as role models.

Secondly, any efforts must pay attention to the fact that the whiteness of staff increases sharply in more senior and management roles (NASUWT and Runnymede Trust, 2017). As one teacher pointed out, 'it is rare that you will see anyone of ethnic minority within a deputy headship or a headship'. Other teachers recounted how black staff were often only present in schools as teaching assistants, personal assistants or dinner-time staff, and in behavioural management and support roles. Previous research has shown that students are acutely aware of these issues. If the diversification of the teaching workforce focuses only on non-teaching roles, there is a risk that BME students will internalise a message that they are less suited to senior roles than their white counterparts (Joseph-Salisbury, 2016). Therefore, as the teachers in this study made clear, the diversification of the teaching force must be a holistic endeavour that focuses on all levels of teaching.

Thirdly, it is worth stating that ensuring a more diverse teaching force (incomplete as this intervention is) not only has the potential to benefit BME students, but should be of benefit to white students. With so

THE TEACHING WORKFORCE IS OVERWHELMINGLY WHITE

many negative stereotypes about BME communities circulating in society, it is important that white students see BME people represented in aspirational and professional positions, as leaders. In this *representational* sense, a more diverse teaching force should be of benefit to all.

Fourthly, notwithstanding the importance of the above point, it is vital that hiring more BME staff is not seen as a panacea for solving all of the issues of deep-seated *institutional* racisms in our schools. There is a danger that such ideas place the burden on individual BME people, while absolving white staff of their duty. It is vital that anti-racism is seen as the job of everybody. The reality is, and will continue to be, that the overwhelming majority of staff in UK schools are white. As such, it is imperative that they are a part of the solution. Evidence shows that BME teachers already report high levels of dissatisfaction with their jobs (NASUWT and Runnymede Trust, 2017), and institutional racism means that they face significant workload pressures and barriers to promotion (NASUWT and Runnymede Trust, 2017). If the challenges facing BME students are seen to be the responsibility of BME staff, then these issues will only be compounded (Maylor, 2009).

Fifthly, there is one further, interrelated point that is worth making with regard to the diversification of the teaching force. That is, beyond the representational and aspirational benefits, calls for such diversification are often predicated on an essentialist assumption about who BME students will see as role models, and about the skills, capacity and motivations of BME teachers (Maylor, 2009). A BME teacher made this point during an interview:

> you might get someone who's black in a school who's a teacher, but not about this life, and you get that a lot of the time, just here to get the pay cheque but not to make any social change.

While lived experiences of racism might mean that many BME teachers are committed to anti-racism, as student accounts in previous studies have demonstrated, this cannot be assumed. 'Research suggests that it is not enough for the teacher to be someone of the same colour, but it needs to be someone that does not believe the stereotypes' (Phoenix, 2014). This logic seems particularly resonant in relation to those earlier-

mentioned comments of Katherine Birbalsingh, a BME headteacher whose reputation is built – in part – on a disregard for anti-racism. While racial diversification is important, therefore, it is perhaps more urgent that the teaching force is *racially literate* and holds a commitment to anti-racism. As one BME teacher put it, 'representation is important but … the training of white teachers is also very important as well'.

The need for more racial literacy among teachers

In the context of schooling, 'racial literacy' refers to the capacity of teachers to understand the ways in which race and racisms work in society. It also involves having the language, skills and confidence to utilise that knowledge in teacher practice (Guinier, 2004). Focusing on racial literacy means that issues pertaining to race and racism become the responsibility of *all* teachers.

Given that society often actively denies the significance of race, it is perhaps unsurprising (though not excusable) that levels of racial literacy are low. It is worth noting that the focus on racial literacy is predicated on the good-faith assumption that most teacher racism is a consequence of ignorance or 'illiteracy' rather than an explicit and informed commitment to racist or white supremacist ideologies.[5] Several of the teachers in this study raised concerns about their own racial literacy, and many more raised concerns about the racial literacy of their colleagues and the profession at large. This was evident in the following account from a male BME teacher:

> no-one wants to talk about race, no-one does, it's difficult. It's a difficult topic and obviously I understand if you're a white female, you're talking about race and you're talking about racism it's an uncomfortable subject because again you need to have the training to speak about it, but training, I think everyone needs to be able to sing off the same hymn sheet.

Central to the concept of racial literacy is an understanding of the way that racism operates. Particularly amongst BME teachers who participated in the research, this was felt to be lacking in schools. As one (BME) teacher suggested,

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[5] While this assumption might be somewhat naïve, the majority of participants in this study showed a real desire to learn, and to improve the lives and education of BME students. It is also worth recognising that, sadly, there is perhaps no intervention for teachers who might hold more explicitly racist views.

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most teachers see acts of racism as individual acts of prejudice and they don't understand the structural racism and what it means or the history behind it – they don't know that, because they are just not equipped to deal with racism, both with members of staff and with the students as well.

To understand racism as institutional (and structural) is to recognise the ways in which racism is woven into the fabric of society's institutions. This understanding enables teachers to see, and therefore respond to, the ways in which the education system can and does reproduce racism and racial inequalities.

Often, low levels of racial literacy were perceived by research participants to be the consequence of inadequate teacher training (see Lander, 2011; Maylor, 2014).[6] Teacher experiences of training varied greatly: some teachers could not recall a single session on race and racism, while others felt that race was given some consideration. However, even for those who did recall race being included in their training pathways, there was a sense that issues of race and racism were often subsumed

under inequalities more broadly, and were sometimes marginalised by considerations of class, and the 'white working class' specifically. As such, there was a general consensus that – across the various pathways to teaching – anti-racism needs to be given a much more central focus.

Several respondents argued that the cultivation of racial literacy should be seen as an ongoing process of learning and unlearning. Rather than as a tick-box 'skill' that one might acquire and retain with little effort, teachers should understand racial literacy as a constant journey, and they should be given the time, support and resources to pursue that journey. It should be part of continued professional development within schools, and should be encouraged at all levels – including at the level of the Department for Education, local authority level and school level.

Despite the lack of institutional encouragement, a small number of the teachers who contributed to this study were already proactive in reading and increasing their racial literacy. As with much of

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[6] They were also seen as a result of teachers themselves having been through a schooling system that does not promote racial literacy.

the good anti-racist work taking place in schools, however, this was entirely dependent on the volition of individual teachers, who were often doing additional work on top of already heavy workloads. Teachers drew on a range of resources, particularly contemporary literature on race and racism written by popular authors such as Akala, Afua Hirsch and Reni Eddo-Lodge. There was a sense that more of this (and more specific) literature was needed,[7] that some guidance on appropriate materials would be useful and that time should be freed up from teacher workloads to prioritise racial literacy.

In the absence of strong discourses on institutional racism and anti-racism, the language of diversity, inclusion and equality seems to have much more legitimacy and palatability in schools. Such language is often wrapped up in colour-blind approaches to racism. 'Colour-blind racism' refers to an ideology in which it is believed that not seeing and not talking about race is a solution to ending racism. One teacher gave a particularly clear account of how colour-blind approaches are adopted in teaching,

> I know that I, for example, I challenge a lot of our students. We've got a lot of kids from Africa. We challenge them even with the word[s] 'race' and 'racism', [by] saying [things] more along the lines of 'there's only one human race'.

Regardless of intention, such approaches can act to obscure the deep-seated nature of structural racisms. To talk of 'only one human race' is to deny and erase the lived experiences of BME students, who live with the daily effects of racism.

To increase the capacity of schools to meaningfully tackle racism, racially literate teachers should look to move beyond colour-blind approaches to racism. This should include moving away from the language of diversity, inclusion and equality, as concepts that are detached from racism. Racially literate teachers should place the concepts of

anti-racism and institutional racism at the centre of their understandings. Alongside these concepts, as scholars like Sleeter (2001) and Pearce (2005) have shown, white teachers should look to engage with concepts of whiteness, white privilege and white complicity, in an attempt to reflect upon their own positions in a society that advantages white people. While, again, some teachers were proactive in engaging in this kind of reflection, this was in no way the norm and does not seem to be actively encouraged at a school level.

In this reflexive sense, racial literacy can enable teachers to reflect on the racist views they themselves might hold, and to understand their own complicity in (re)producing racism. This is particularly important given the ways in which teacher stereotypes and low expectations are known to impact upon student experiences. Indeed, as well as wellbeing and self-belief, racialised teacher expectations can impact upon the sets that pupils are put in, disciplinary procedures and teacher assessments (the latter being a particularly pertinent issue given assessment changes in response to the coronavirus pandemic[8]) (Gillborn, 2014; Millard et al., 2018). Racial literacy also enables teachers to identify racisms among their colleagues within the school, and to be proactive in working to challenge its effects. Amongst interviewee accounts there was evidence of teachers perpetuating implicit racisms (through racial stereotyping, for example[9]). There was also evidence of more explicit racisms among teachers. The cultivation of a more racially literate teaching force may help to identify and challenge, if not prevent, these racisms.

Racial literacy and anti-racism should not be left to the volition of individual teachers, but need to be part of a whole-school, institutionalised approach. And this institutionalised approach also needs to extend beyond the teaching workforce, to shape issues pertaining to the curriculum.

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[7] Teachers were particularly keen to have access to resources that were not US-focused.

[8] As the Runnymede Trust (2020) and others have made clear, this latter point is likely to be particularly pertinent for the awarding of GCSEs and A-levels in 2020. With examinations cancelled due to the pandemic, assessments will be reliant on teacher assessments (and prior attainment).

[9] For example, several respondents spoke about how their colleagues too often saw black students as 'aggressive', 'angry', 'really big' and lacking motivation for, or interest in, their own schooling.

Curricula

Across those who took part in this study, there was an abiding sense that the narrow and insular curriculum constitutes a fundamental barrier to a more racially equitable education system. As one teacher put it, the curriculum is simply 'too white and too narrow'. Criticisms of the curriculum have a long history in the UK (DES, 1985; Tomlinson, 2014), and intensified in response to the launch of a new curriculum in 2014 (Alexander, Weekes-Bernard and Chatterji, 2015: 4). As Alexander, Weekes-Bernard and Arday (2014: 4) wrote at the time, under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, '[t]he National Curriculum has been overhauled to herald a return to "traditional" subjects and teaching methods which have sought to overturn decades of more diverse, socially inclusive and multicultural curricula'. These changes include an emphasis on the responsibility of schools to promote 'Fundamental British Values'.[10]

In this study, across school types, teachers expressed a general and widespread dissatisfaction with the restrictiveness of the curriculum.[11] It was noted, however, that certain subjects had more scope than others for engaging with race and diversity. Subjects such as citizenship, English, religious education and sociology were seen to have some flexibility. In subjects such as science and maths, it was seen to be more difficult. As one teacher suggested, though, 'if you have got good staff' – which we might read as *racially literate* staff – 'you can do it anywhere, so there is loads of room'. Indeed, there were examples of teachers engaging in questions of race and ethnicity in a range of ways even in those spaces where it was seen to be more difficult. One science teacher spoke of providing examples of BME people who have impacted on the development of the subject, while a modern foreign languages teacher described how they ensure that the language flashcards that they use depict a diverse group of people.
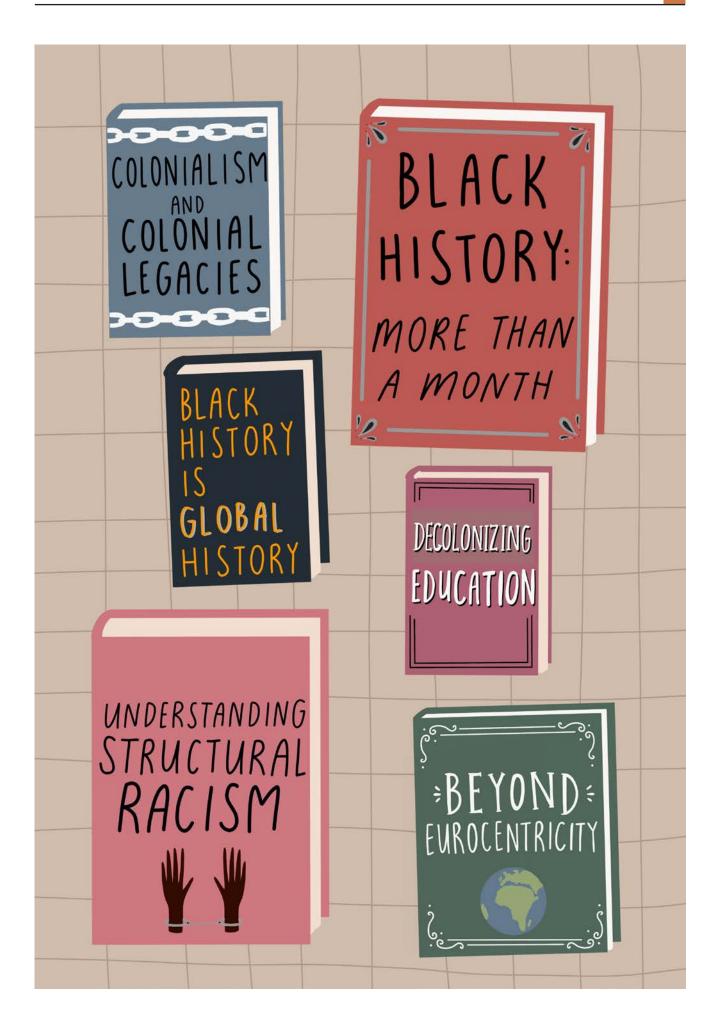
As well as the variation across subjects, it was also felt that the opportunity for teaching about race and ethnicity was greater in the first two years of secondary education. At this stage, teachers argued, the curriculum was less constrained by the pressures of GCSE examinations. Those interested in transforming education should therefore think about how the opportunities presented in these first two years can be maximised, while also considering how the primacy of results and examinations leads to the sidelining of important issues pertaining to race, diversity and racism.

Invariably, questions about the presence of race in the curriculum prompted teachers to refer to Black History Month (BHM). The extent and quality of activity related to BHM seems to vary greatly between schools, and is largely dependent on the overworking of individual teachers who go above and beyond their duties. Because BHM activities are not *institutionalised*, without these teachers (when they leave, for instance) the work often does not get done. While BHM offers a useful catalyst for the centring of race, and specifically blackness, it is telling that BHM was often the totality of what teachers were able to say about race, diversity and anti-racism in the curriculum. It is also worth noting that, due to a lack of racial literacy and a lack of guidance, many teachers reported it often being done very badly (see Doharty, 2019). Moreover, BHM activities were often seen to be at odds with exam requirements and were therefore consigned (or relegated) to the first two years of secondary schooling and to school assemblies.

School assemblies emerged as a key and recurrent space for discussions of race, diversity and racism, and social justice and identities more generally. Time and time again, teachers told me of the importance of utilising school assemblies as a corrective to the restrictions of the exam- and results-driven curriculum. To increase the teaching of issues pertaining to

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[10] It is revealing, and troubling, that the antecedents of these responsibilities lie in the deeply problematic Prevent agenda. Despite its more benign facade, as Sally Tomlinson (2014: 10) explains, the teaching of Fundamental British Values in schools is 'a response to fears of extremist religious ideologies, terrorism and Muslim sharia law'. 'In effect', she argues, the promotion of so-called Fundamental British Values in schools, places teachers and schools on 'the front line of the ideological and religious wars of the 21st century' (Tomlinson, 2014: 10). In this context, schools appear to be placing 'emphasis on the surveillance and control of BME students rather than their education' (Alexander, Weekes-Bernard and Arday, 2014: 4).

[11] While academies are thought to be free from the constraints of the National Curriculum, teachers still felt that they were limited by expectations imposed by exam boards and bodies such as Ofsted.

race and racism, schools and teachers should think strategically about how they make use of assemblies. But we should not let assemblies become the only space for this important work. Indeed, we should also ask why these issues – along with issues of class, gender, disability and sexuality – are not embedded more fundamentally in schooling structures.

Under a reorientation of values, schools would begin to move beyond the (important) racial diversification of school curricula, towards the implementation of an *anti-racist curriculum*. This means moving beyond representation,[12] and the pitfalls of tokenism, to thinking about how schools can be proactive in tackling racism. In this sense, schools can and should contribute to the development of a more racially literate society. That is, the racially literate teachers referred to in the preceding section would work to cultivate a generation of racially literate students and, in turn, a racially literate – and anti-racist – society.

An anti-racist curriculum would involve showing how the history of modernity is shaped by racism, coloniality and white supremacy.[13] So, while diversity might stop at the inclusion of BME people, anti-racism would urge learners to look at the socio-political context of BME people in relation to white people. Learners would engage not only with histories of Hitler and Nazism, but also with histories of slavery and colonialism. Hitler would be understood alongside King Leopold II,[14] while the resistance movements that countered both would be centred. From this more critical understanding of history, students and teachers could begin to better understand the forces that shape contemporary racial inequalities. In other

> *… the curriculum itself is very narrow, history – it's all about white history, it's about kings and queens. What is all that about? You are not talking about colonialism, you are not talking about the East India Company, you are not talking about slavery, you are not acknowledging any of that stuff – it's all about kings and queens, about Henry 8th was promiscuous and he married all these women. With science – the curriculum again in science is very white. English texts – why aren't we studying poems by Benjamin Zephaniah? Why aren't we studying the poems of Lemn Sissay? Why it is all about Wordsworth and Edgar Allen Poe – which is fine and there is a place for it, but why can't you introduce other poets?*

subjects – like English, for example – learners could start to question whose work gets celebrated, which topics get covered and from which perspectives.

Anti-racist education should be based on an understanding of racism as a structural and historical phenomenon as well as an interpersonal one. As one teacher suggested of the curriculum, 'at the moment it tends to deal with how language and individual acts of racism are wrong, but are we teaching about structural racism? To teach about colonialism and the empire and things like that?'

Through this re-envisioning of the curriculum, white students could be engaged with considerations of white privilege, power and complicity, in order to better understand and question their position in contemporary society. Simultaneously, BME students might also engage with content that prepares them for life in a racist society.

It is important to note, as many teachers did, that the curriculum does not operate in abstraction from other factors. That is, curricular content is shaped by the politics of wider society. More specifically, the curriculum is tied to exam boards. As one teacher noted,

> the curriculum is very white … that comes from … what we are dictated to on exam specs and stuff: that is very white … the people on exam boards are going to be overwhelmingly white because they come from that very high academic position.[15]

As well as the exams board, the curriculum is tied to the textbooks and resources available to teachers[16] and, as mentioned, to the racial literacy of those teachers expected to deliver the curriculum. Several

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[12] Particularly since this representation can often be stereotypical and harmful.

[13] White supremacy here refers to a system that privileges whiteness and white people, rather than solely far-right racist hate groups (see Ansley, 1989; Gillborn, 2008).

[14] Although given far less attention than Hitler, as the King of Belgium, Leopold II instigated the colonisation of what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo. Between 10 and 15 million people are believed to have died under his incredibly brutal rule, in what might be thought of as a 'forgotten holocaust' (Hochschild, 2012). We might well ask why this history is not taught alongside that of Hitler and Nazi Germany.

[15] A 2017 report found that the boards of the exams regulator, Ofqual, and the schools watchdog, Ofsted, were entirely white (Busby, 2017).

teachers suggested that curricular change could be counterproductive if teachers are ill prepared to teach it. As one teacher questioned, 'a lot of it is our limits as teachers. What do we know? Where are we getting this information from?' While a transformation of the curriculum is essential, therefore, it needs to occur alongside a broader transformation of our education system, in which each of the above elements are addressed, and in which the presence of police in schools is also considered.

[16] Participants felt strongly that there were few available resources that were racially diverse, and even fewer that did not perpetuate racial stereotypes. It was felt that there was a further dearth of resources that could be considered anti-racist.

Police in schools

The issue of an increasing police presence in schools has gained renewed political attention of late. Concerns around 'knife crime' have led MPs to call for more police in schools, and a Home Affairs Select Committee on Serious Youth Violence has recommended an increased police presence in schools, with a dedicated police officer in 'all schools in areas with an above-average risk of serious youth violence' (Home Affairs Committee, 2019: 4). Following this suggestion, in a so-called 'Manifesto for Children', the Children's Commissioner made a demand for 'neighbourhood police officers [to be] attached to every school' (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2019: 6).

The accounts of teachers cast an interesting light on these proposals. While the panic around knife crime creates fertile ground for an increased police presence, some of the perspectives shared by teachers offer notes of caution that are worth considering.

Teachers emphasised that schools should be places of learning and development, where young people feel comfortable. For many students, schools offer a place of sanctuary. In contrast, several teachers warned, a police presence had the potential to disrupt such an environment, particularly for already marginalised students. The punitive nature of policing, coupled with longstanding experiences of over-policing in BME communities, means that the police can be an intimidating and threatening presence for BME students. Several teachers spoke of working in schools where the BME young people are 'stopped and searched quite a lot … and not really on good grounds'.[17] As such, students from those communities are – quite rightly – already wary of police interaction (Long, 2018). While many of

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[17] Evidence that stop and search is ineffective in preventing crime (Bradford and Tiratelli, 2019), and that BME young people are disproportionately stopped (Long, 2018), suggest that this teacher is right to argue that stops are often without grounding.

the proposals are about making schools safer, the perspectives of teachers – particularly with regard to BME students – cast some serious doubt on the effectiveness of this intervention. We might therefore ask: whose safety is it that we're talking about?

As well as undermining efforts to cultivate a 'safe space', teachers raised concerns that placing more police in schools acted to criminalise and pathologise students:

> it's just criminalising kids really.

> I don't think the police have any place in the school, to be honest with you … it suggests the worst in the students.

Much has been written about how negative stereotypes and low expectations can impact on students, and this is worth thinking about in relation to the placement of police in schools. As the educationalist Karen Graham (2016: 140) has suggested, punitive interventions like these are often more likely 'to produce delinquency' than prevent it. Interviewees were concerned about not only how the stigma of apparently requiring a police presence would impact directly upon individual students, but also how it would impact on the image of the school (and, in turn, the student). That is, certain schools might come to be seen as spaces that require a police presence: '… what's it showing the kid? And again, as a parent I'd be thinking, "Why's a police officer in school?" and the parents wonder what this police officer is doing here.' This stigma, it was warned, could weigh heavily on the school and the students who attended it.

While many of the concerns raised were in relation to all students, and the education system at large, many of the issues were seen to be compounded by race and class inequalities. This was certainly the case with regard to the stigma that came with placing police in schools:

> if we are going to have police officers in school then they should be in every school, but they are not, are they? They are only in schools in areas of high deprivation and what does that say to the children walking into the school every day?

While this teacher was ardently against police in schools, they make a noteworthy observation. The proposals for police in schools are particularly targeted at areas of 'high deprivation'; these

areas are more likely to be inhabited by BME communities. As such, the stigma of police in schools is more likely to be felt by students from working-class and BME backgrounds.

It is those communities, too, that historically and contemporarily have been subject to over-policing. For example, data shows that black and Asian young people are significantly more likely to be stopped and searched by the police, and more likely to be arrested (Long, 2018). There is evidence that the police force is institutionally racist (Long, 2018), and that this – coupled with individual racisms – impacts on the ways in which police interact with BME people. Given that BME students are already subject to racial discrimination in schools, specifically in relation to disciplinary procedures (Gillborn, 2008), the placement of police in schools should raise concerns with regard to how BME students will be treated. As one teacher noted with regard to young BME people, 'I think generally it will be a negative [experience] in terms of the trend to stop and search'.

'you should come to school because it's a positive place to be – it's not a prison!'

This issue is particularly acute when we consider the dangers posed by the installation of a 'school-to-prison pipeline'. Emerging in the context of the United States, this term describes the ways in which – through discipline, social control and subjugation – schools prepare certain students for prison. As UK-based research by Karen Graham (2016) has shown, this is a racialised issue that is greatly exacerbated by the presence of police in schools.

It also seems that the placement of police in schools is tied up with a racialised moral panic around terror and Islam. Under counter-terror strategies, and particularly the Prevent duty, police in schools are being tasked with tackling and preventing so-called extremism (ACPO, 2013). Given that Prevent produces 'highly racialised surveillance of Muslim and South Asian pupils' (Alexander and Shankley, 2020: 93), the presence of police in schools is likely to be particularly detrimental for students from those groups.

Although there was some consensus over the dangers in having the police handling disciplinary issues, particularly with the risk of minor disciplinary

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18 Echoing evidence from the United States (ACLU, 2017), teachers were concerned that the placement of police in schools might see minor issues that would previously have constituted no more than a school detention being handled by the police and escalating into criminalisation.

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issues escalating into criminal issues,[18] some teachers felt that there could be positive outcomes if the police were in schools in a more pastoral, supportive and community-relations-building role. However, there is no clear evidence that this is the capacity in which police are being placed in schools, and there is even less evidence that this is the role of school-based police officers in practice (Henshall, 2018). Moreover, rather than benign, as Nijjar (forthcoming) argues, community policing is perhaps better thought of as 'an iron fist in a velvet glove'.

Evidence from the United States suggests that confusion over the actual role of officers in schools creates a range of issues (Coon and Travis III, 2011), with schools and officers often being at odds in

their understandings (Jackson, 2002), and officers often reverting back to their crime-control roles. Significantly, research from the United States also shows that simply placing police officers in schools does not necessarily improve the standing of the police in local communities. That is, even the more community-relations-focused work is not necessarily effective in its apparent aims (Hopkins, 1994; Jackson, 2002), and – as with police community relations work more broadly – can be deeply insidious and harmful (Tufail, 2015). While some participants felt that police officers could play a positive role if they engaged in youth work, counselling or teaching, as several respondents argued, it would surely be better for schools to hire professionally trained youth workers, counsellors and teachers.
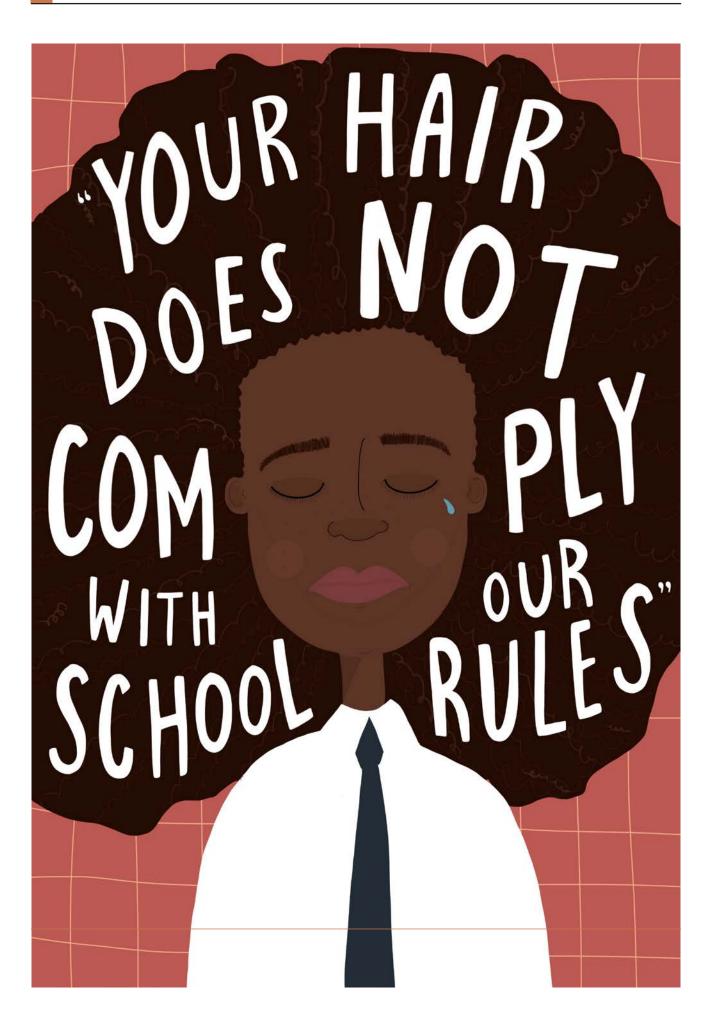
School policies

School policies play a significant role in how schools operate. This extends to the context of racism and anti-racism. While school policies have been an undercurrent in much of this report, and particularly the preceding section, it is worth considering their impact more directly here.

Interpersonal racism between students is a significant issue that schools contend with. The death of Shukri Abdi in the summer of 2019 attests to this harsh reality. As discussed in the introduction, Shukri's family have suggested that bullying might have been a factor in her death, and that, prior to her death, the school failed to take their complaints about bullying seriously (Wolfe-Robinson, 2019). The school's anti-bullying policies have been brought into question.

While many of the teachers I spoke to worked in schools that had policies for dealing with interpersonal racism between students, some teachers worked in schools that did not, and many schools' policies were unclear or unknown. In those schools without policies, the handling of racist incidents became the responsibility of individual teachers and staff and therefore became heavily dependent upon their levels of racial literacy. In one particular school, an interviewee reported that racist language was so normalised that it was sometimes used in front of, and in conversation with, teachers. School-wide policies can offer guidance to teachers and ensure that responses are institutionalised. Simultaneously, school policy can help ensure that students are able to refer to the guidance and have a pre-emptive understanding of the unacceptability of interpersonal racisms. Teachers generally felt emboldened in dealing with racism where they had a policy document to refer to. As teachers explained, clear anti-racist policies are needed. These policies should detail how schools intend to combat racism, as well as offering guidance on responses to interpersonal racist incidents.

Notwithstanding the clear advantages of an explicit anti-racism policy, a number of teachers felt that zero-tolerance policies could sometimes be restrictive and unhelpful. Such zero-tolerance responses, while invariably well intentioned, were criticised for two key reasons. Firstly, exclusions and isolations offered little scope for educational or reparative responses. That is, a number of teachers

felt that education on the wrongs of racism would be a more effective response, or should at least be used in combination with more punitive approaches. Of course, if anti-racism was already at the heart of our schooling system, this education would be proactive rather than reactive. The second concern relates to the universalism of policies, and the inattention to specificities. To give a surprisingly common example, a rigid anti-racist policy that excludes students for the use of the 'N-word' does not leave scope to consider how the term was used, and by whom. That is, a black student using it as a term of endearment to another black student would be reprimanded in the same way as a white student who directs the term pejoratively towards a black student. Missing from the school policy, therefore, is a consideration of power and context. While clear policies are advantageous, some recognition of context is necessary.

As well as those policies that address racism directly, policies that appear to be race-neutral (that is, policies not seen to privilege any particular group) can in fact discriminate against BME students. School hair policies are a prime example of this (Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly, 2018; De Leon and Chikwendu, 2019). The last few years have seen numerous cases of black students being excluded due to their hair not meeting school uniform requirements (Soni, 2019; Dabiri, 2020). As critics have argued, these policies are shaped by racialised value judgements on what is 'neat', 'tidy' and 'acceptable' – and this discriminates against black students. Many of the teachers in this study were aware of and concerned about these issues. A little while after we met for interview, one teacher got in touch with me to tell me that her school was looking to introduce a uniform policy that would discriminate against hairstyles that were common amongst the school's black students. The teacher challenged this decision and referred decision-makers to relevant literature, and the school did not proceed with the implementation of the policy. This was down to the racial literacy of the individual teacher, her commitment to anti-racism and her access to relevant resources: without this teacher, it is possible that the policy would have been implemented without challenge. Specifically, schools should ensure that black hair is not discriminated against through school hair policies.

More broadly than hair policies, it is necessary for schools to review all of their policies to weed out normalised racisms and to ensure that anti-racism is at the centre of everything that the school does. Such a review would draw attention to the deeply problematic nature of the government's Prevent duty and the impact it has on BME students, and specifically Muslim and South Asian students.

There was one further school policy (or practice) that was raised several times. A number of teachers described how their schools had implemented policies that directly targeted white working-class students. This was seen to be a directive that had been influenced by Ofsted, and by various research and media reports that focused on the plight of white working-class students. While the attainment of white working-class students (and particularly boys) is certainly worthy of attention (and has rightly generated lots of it), there were concerns raised by teachers that this detracted from the attention given to BME students. One teacher, for instance, described how she set up the classroom to ensure that white working-class students sat close to her desk, so that they could be given the required attention to raise their grades and she (the teacher) could hit the targets she had been set. As she reflected, the extra focus on white working-class students (which often was inflated to a focus on white students generally) perhaps came at the expense of BME students (see Sveinsson, 2009).[19] While it is legitimate for schools to target free school meals recipients[20] for additional support, the accounts of teachers point to the importance of recognising that BME students may also be recipients of free school meals.

[19] See David Gillborn's (2009: 15) article for a consideration of how the 'white working class' have come to be constructed as the 'new race victims'.

[20] In education research and policy, free school meals is often used as a somewhat limited indicator of poverty – it has been widely taken to crudely indicate a 'working-class' background. Thus, a white student who is eligible for free school meals becomes a white working-class student.

Conclusion and recommendations

To improve England's schools, there is a lot that needs to be done. While the recommendations that follow are not exhaustive, they would represent a significant step in the right direction. For these changes to be successful, however, they will need to occur alongside some fundamental changes pertaining to the workload of teachers, and to the metrics culture of UK education. Teachers in this study explained how educational cuts and heavy workloads were causing great harm to education in schools. This harm, it was argued, too often saw the sidelining of issues related to social justice generally, and race and racism specifically. The following recommendations, therefore, should be situated alongside a call to increase teacher numbers, reduce teacher workloads and reverse cuts in education. Such changes would provide the conditions in which we can seriously call for significant anti-racist change in education. The recommendations are split into four sections that correlate with the substantive sections of this report.

Teacher workforce

- All efforts should be made to increase the proportion of teachers from BME backgrounds. This would involve increasing the numbers of trainee teachers from BME backgrounds, across teacher training pathways. It would also involve considering any implicit or explicit racisms in recruitment and hiring processes.

- Signalling a focus on the contribution of *all* teachers, racial literacy should be placed at the heart of all teacher training routes and should be a key component of continued professional development.

- Racial literacy and a commitment to anti-racism should be considered a key competency for entering the teaching profession. This racial literacy should involve teachers understanding racism as structural and institutional, as well as interpersonal.

- More specific resources are needed to enable teachers to increase their racial literacy levels. As part of this, white teachers should engage with concepts of white privilege, white power, white complicity and white supremacy, in order to reflect on their own racialised positions.

Curricula

- Considerations of race and racism, from an anti-racist perspective, should be embedded more fully across the school curriculum.

- The production of a racially literate society should be considered a fundamentally important aspect of schooling. This should be implemented through an extensive review of the National Curriculum, conducted in consultation with anti-racist organisations, individuals and educators.

- Assemblies should be used as key spaces for engaging students with anti-racist pedagogy in order to increase racial literacy levels within schools. However, this should supplement, rather than replace, efforts to embed anti-racism in the curriculum.

- Race-conscious curricula should include scope for white students and teachers to reflect upon racist social structures as well as their own white privilege, while also enabling BME students to understand their position in contemporary society.

- Curricular changes, including the suggested review, should pay attention to the interlocking issues of exam specifications, textbooks, school resources and teachers' racial literacy levels. If these issues are not considered, the impact of any curricular changes will remain limited.

Police

- Police should not become a normalised presence in schools, and the separation between education and criminal justice should be protected.

- Those involved in introducing more police into schools should take seriously the warnings of teachers in this report, as well as the damning evidence in the United States and emergent evidence in the UK.

- The views of BME young people should be sought to consider the impact that an increasing police presence in schools might have.

- Funds spent on police in schools should be spent on reversing cuts to the teaching force.

- Police should only be called into schools as a last resort, to respond to specific criminal or safeguarding incidents.

Policies

- Schools should have strong and clear anti-racist policies that provide guidance on how to respond to interpersonal student racisms, but that also set out how the school plans to centre an institutional commitment to anti-racism.

- All existing policies should be reviewed, through consultation with anti-racist organisations, in order to identify and tackle any implicit or normalised racisms. Specifically, and by way of example, school hair policies should not racially discriminate against black students.

- Policies that focus specifically on the attainment of white working-class students should not come at the expense of BME students.

In order to be effective, any anti-racist commitment to change in school must be multifaceted and must recognise the interconnections between teachers, their curriculum, the presence of police and school policies.

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