National Governance Association
KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

Tackling disadvantage in education

A toolkit for governing boards

January 2023

Ethnicity



The expert organisation for school governors, trustees and governance professionals

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National Governance Association

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and governance professionals of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and governance professionals at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

Class 13

NGA would like to thank Class 13 for their support and expertise in the production of this toolkit. Class 13 are an award-winning anti-oppressive charity on a mission to transform the education system. They seek to empower educators to become an active threat to inequality.

They support educators to recognise, reflect and respond to their racial and wider biases so that all children can access an education that promotes free expression, as guaranteed to them by Article 13 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is part of a series aimed at tackling disadvantage in education. It identifies the link between ethnicity and educational disadvantage, signposts to resources to help tackle disadvantage, and includes questions for governing boards to explore.

We recommend that you first read our Widening the lens guidance which explains how to identify key areas of disadvantage in your organisation.

Other toolkits in the collection include:

Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Poverty

Mental health and wellbeing

Vulnerability

Terminology

The language that is used to describe different ethnic groups needs to be treated with care. When referring to groups of people of colour, we aim to distinguish the specific ethnic group being referred to.

We are also considering whether we should cease to use the term ethnic 'minority' in future resources. We recognise the use of the word minority can be problematic and the term 'minoritised ethnic groups' may be more appropriate. This recognises that individuals have been minoritised through social processes of power and domination rather than just existing as statistical minorities. It also better reflects the fact that ethnic groups that are minorities in the UK are majorities in the global population. (The Law Society).

Making the link

Children from ethnic minority groups can be discriminated against due to race. This may impact on their attainment, but also school exclusion rates, and mental health and wellbeing. However, not all ethnic groups experience racism in the same way, and schools therefore need to consider the effects on different ethnic groups separately.

As with all groups who are marginalised, these issues can be traced back throughout history. In his documentary, Subnormal: A British Scandal, Steve McQueen explores the experiences of Black children going back to 1945, who were considered "educationally subnormal" and sent to ESN provision. In this toolkit, we aim to highlight how racial inequality can still manifest itself in schools today.

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Addressing racial equality in schools doesn't have to be complicated, but it does require boards, school leaders and staff to be open and willing to facilitate change and reflect on their culture, policies and practice. Governing boards, working together with school leaders, have a crucial role in identifying and addressing racial inequality in order to achieve diversity and equity at all levels of the organisation.

Attainment

The Education Policy Institute's (EPI) analysis of data from the Department for Education (DfE) identifies groups of pupils who are significantly less likely to achieve a grade five or above in English and maths GCSE. The data highlights Gypsy/Roma pupils as being almost three years behind their White British peers by the end of secondary education and Black Caribbean children as being 10.9 months behind, while pupils of Indian heritage are more than one year ahead and of Chinese origin are almost two years ahead of White British pupils.

Ethnicity	Gap in months (2019)
Gypsy/Roma	34.0
Traveller of Irish Heritage	23.8
Late-arrival EAL	20.7
Black Caribbean	10.9
White and Black Caribbean	7.4
Any other Black background	6.9
Pakistani	1.4
Any other White background	1.4
Any other ethnic group	0.2
Black African	0.1
White British	0.0
White and Black African	-0.3
Any other mixed background	-3.3
Bangladeshi	-5.1
White Irish	-8.4
White and Asian	-9.2
Any other Asian background	-11.1
Indian	-14.2
Chinese	-23.9

Figure 1: Gap in months by end of secondary education (ethnicity) – EPI, 2020

White British pupils are used as the baseline, but this is not the highest performing ethnic group. This group also faces barriers to learning often linked to socio economic factors, as explored in the 2021 House of Commons Education Select Committee report: "How White working-class pupils have been let down, and how to change it".

The EPI data underlines why the barriers and needs of different ethnic groups need to be considered separately. Within each ethnic group there will be a wide disparity of attainment and the intersectionality of other barriers, including socio economic factors and other dimensions of disadvantage covered in this series of toolkits.

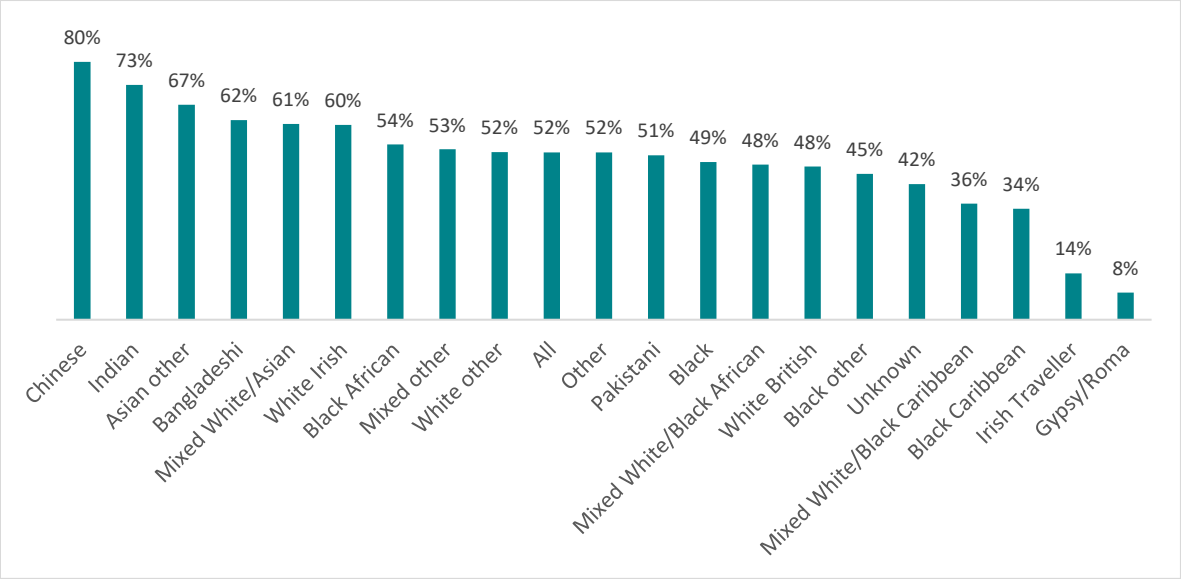


Figure 2: Percentage of pupils achieving grades 5 or above in English and maths GCSEs (DfE, 2022)

Educational inequality also disproportionately affects pupils from mixed White and Black Caribbean backgrounds and most significantly those from Irish Traveller and Gypsy/Roma backgrounds.

Exclusions

The Timpson review of school exclusion revealed that children from certain pupil groups are more likely to be excluded. There are longstanding trends whereby exclusion rates vary between pupils with different characteristics – children from certain ethnic groups are consistently more likely to be excluded from school.

In the academic year 2018/19 (the last full academic year unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic), pupils from Gypsy/Roma ethnic groups had the highest rates of suspension and exclusion, being almost four times more likely to be suspended or excluded, followed by Travellers of Irish heritage. Children from a Black Caribbean background were three times more likely to be excluded than their white peers (six times more likely in some local authorities according to figures obtained from the DfE by the Guardian).

Although data for the academic year 2021/22 was impacted by social restrictions, meaning comparisons to previous years should be treated with caution, the data continued to show similar trends.

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Barriers to achieving in school

Teacher perceptions

According to research carried out by the YMCA in 2020 (figure 3), the biggest barrier for young Black people in education, just above racism, was teacher perceptions. Respondents cited teacher-student interaction as a major aspect of their school experience and many reported being viewed as “less capable”, “unintelligent” and “aggressive”. If perceptions change, this can support teachers to connect the learning with their class.

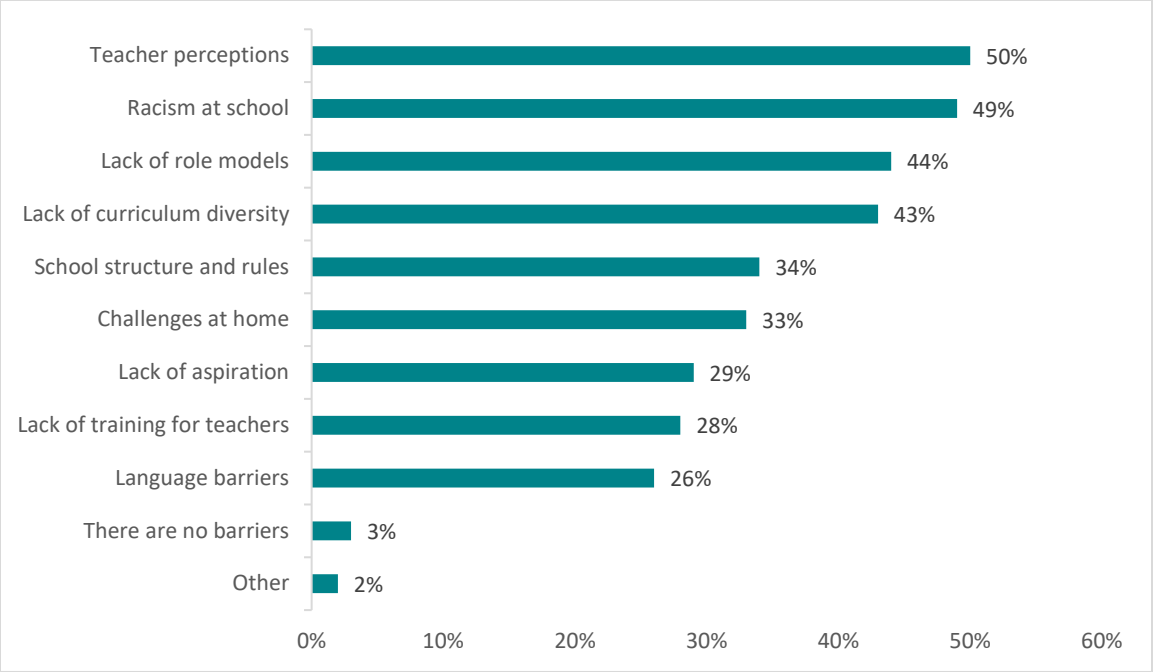


Figure 1: What are the biggest barriers to young Black people achieving in schools? (YMCA)

Teacher perception also encompassed pupils’ physical appearance, with 70% of respondents feeling pressured or required to change their hair to appear more “professional”. This has been a long-standing issue with uniform policies often stipulating requirements that directly or indirectly discriminate against pupils with afro-textured hair.

The Timpson review of school exclusion found that cases of “cultural misunderstanding” can lead to behaviour being misinterpreted, low expectations of some children, and “labelling of pupils”.

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Curriculum diversity

A lack of diversity in the curriculum was considered to be a barrier to academic achievement for 43% of young Black pupils according to YMCA research. According to the Institute of Race Relations, just 11% of GCSE pupils studied modules that referred to the presence of Black people in British history in 2019.

Case studies indicate that a lack of a sufficiently diverse or decolonised curriculum can mean it is often difficult for Black students to be able to connect content and assessments directly to their own lived realities. This can lead to pupils being disproportionately disadvantaged in their education and having to work harder than their peers to connect with assessment and curriculum content (Campbell, Hawkins and Osman, 2021).

A diverse curriculum should be inclusive of the experiences and histories of minority ethnic groups and allow young people to "see and be seen" in the curriculum (Diverse Educators). Diversity should not be an add on to the current offer, but rather embedded and woven throughout. When mapping out the curriculum offer, it is important for schools to include writers and resources from ethnic minority backgrounds (and other under-represented groups).

Questions to explore:

- What could you individually, or collectively, do to get to know our community better?
- Does your curriculum offer represent the lives, histories and experiences not only of the community you serve, but also wider society?
- How is knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity built into the curriculum?
- How do assemblies, classroom discussions, pastoral activities and visits promote equality and diversity?

Relevant resources

- Class 13's unique work focuses on deficit thinking, which is a primary factor of negative teacher perceptions of young people.
- The Chartered College of Teaching offer an online course on decolonising and diversifying the curriculum, covering the following modules:
    1. Defining colonisation
    2. Knowing our histories
    3. Why decolonise and diversify the curriculum
    4. Approaches to decolonising and diversifying the curriculum
    5. Belonging in literature
    6. Conversations about race
- The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families has published an instructional case study from a school who set up a working group to diversify their curriculum.
- Optimus Education has published a series of blogs including representation in the curriculum: culture, diversity and inclusion which includes useful links to resources.

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Staffing and ethnic diversity

The representation of minority ethnic backgrounds in the teacher workforce was also considered a barrier to attainment, with 44% in the YMCA study raising the lack of role models. Despite a small increase in representation over the last decade, just 9% of teachers are from a Black and minority ethnic background compared to 26% of the pupil population in England. Representation decreases with seniority; just 5% of senior leaders and 3% of headteachers identified as being from a minority ethnic background (Teach First, 2021).

It is important for governing boards and school leaders to consider how representative their workforce is of the school population and to be conscious of this in their recruitment and selection process. Schools should work to create an inclusive environment for staff from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Ensuring the staff workforce is representative of the communities they serve has an impact on many children and young people achieving their full potential.

Questions to explore:

- Does the school have a workforce that represents the diversity of the local community?
- How do you monitor diversity within the workforce?
- Do all staff feel they are treated fairly? How do we know that this is the case?
- How do our values and culture serve to protect people from being discriminated against?

Staff CPD

Increasing representation of the workforce is important to create an inclusive environment for all pupils, but in their report, Race and Racism in Secondary Schools, Runnymede found it to be incomplete without increasing the 'racial literacy' of all teachers and school leaders. The report states that, by their own admission, many teachers are ill-prepared to teach in ways that promote anti-racism, and this can include teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds. Addressing the issue of racism and bias is not down to those from ethnic minority backgrounds but is everyone's responsibility.

Racial literacy means **having the knowledge, skills, awareness and dispositions to talk about race and racism**. Staff growth and development is essential to improve practice.

Questions to explore:

- How confident are school staff to talk about race and racism; does this need to be addressed with CPD?
- Does the CPD available to teachers ensure the required skills and knowledge are in place to support effective delivery of a diverse curriculum?
- Have Black, Asian and minority ethnic members of staff been encouraged to undertake leadership development?
- Are Black, Asian and minority ethnic members of staff aware of the range of specific networking, support, coaching and development programmes available to them?

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Relevant resources

- Class 13 is the Fair Education Alliance 2021 Innovation Award winner. They offer courses for school staff to recognise, reflect and respond to their racial and wider biases.
- The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and families has a collection of resources:
  - Micro-aggressions: staff meeting presentation and guidance
  - Improving staff knowledge and confidence around anti-racism
  - Teaching curriculum topics linked to racism and handling racist world events

Developing inclusive policies

Ensuring that you have clear and unambiguous school policies in relation to equality and diversity are an important part of creating an inclusive environment for all pupils. Senior leaders and their boards should consider how their policies address not only incidents of overt racism, but also practices that could exclude pupils and staff from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Questions to explore:

- Are data on racist incidents reported to the board?
- How are racist incidents dealt with in school?
- Does our data on behaviour sanctions, up to and including exclusions, indicate any bias towards pupils with particular ethnicities?
- Is our uniform and appearance policy inclusive of all pupils from all backgrounds?

Relevant resources

- The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families has produced the following resources for those responsible for writing and reviewing policies:
  - Reviewing existing policies with an anti-racist lens
  - Anti-racism policy template
- The Equality Human Rights Commission has produced resources for governing boards and school leaders to help prevent hair discrimination.

Governance and ethnic diversity

NGA's Increasing participation in school and trust governance report highlights the impact the decisions made by the board have on pupils, parents/carers and staff. It is important that boards understand the experiences of the community they serve and offer a healthy difference of perspectives.

However, many governing boards are not representative of their communities. NGA's 2022 annual governance survey reported only 6% of respondents were Black, Asian or minority ethnic, which compares with 15% for the general population. We talk more about the issue of representation in our blog.

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NGA has resources to support boards to increase diversity and participation from under-represented groups, and has for several years campaigned to increase the number of volunteers from ethnic minorities, for example through our Everyone on Board campaign.

NGA also works with other national organisations to improve equality, diversity, representation and inclusion across the education sector and has made commitments to continue to do so.

Relevant resources

- NGA's guidance, The right people around the table provides practical advice to help ensure that your board has the right blend of knowledge, skills, perspectives and backgrounds to govern effectively.
- NGA's diversity indicators form for governing boards is designed to gather diversity data on their membership and use this as a basis for discussion and action.

All of NGA's resources relating to equality, diversity and inclusion can be found here.

Governance and school/trust culture

As those that set the culture, ethos and vision of a school, it is important that governing boards take a leading role in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion. NGA has collated a range of tools to help boards evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies, including our equality and diversity guidance which covers the legal duties that boards have as well as how to achieve a culture that champions equality and inclusion.

Creating an inclusive culture: e-learning



NGA has worked in partnership with the Association of School and College Leaders to develop a programme of e-learning modules focusing on creating an inclusive culture and going beyond compliance by giving users the knowledge, understanding and tools to do so.

Further reading

- The Runnymede trust report: Race and Racism in Secondary Schools
- Explore education statistics – GOV.UK
- Class 13's training aims to make **deficit thinking** and anti-racism considerations in education the responsibility of all.

Deficit thinking refers to the idea that students from various "at risk" groups fail in school due to their internal deficiencies. This could be a number of different factors: home life, social and economic status, gender and race.