DfE Curriculum and Assessment Review: Call for Evidence
Action for Race Equality's consultation response

November 2024

About Action for Race Equality

Action for Race Equality (ARE)[1] was founded in 1991, and over the last 30+ years we have worked to champion fairness, challenge race inequality and pioneer innovative solutions to empower young people across education, employment, and criminal justice.

For ARE, having a more equal society means young people will be able to believe that their race, ethnicity or faith will not limit what they can achieve in life. Yet the educational attainment of Black, Asian, Mixed heritage and minority ethnic people is a measure of much that has yet to change in the English education system.

The data continues to tell us that across the education system pupils of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage (along with young people from Roma and Irish Traveller backgrounds) face barriers to reaching their full potential.

Through our flagship project Routes2Success[2], Action for Race Equality has developed a deep insight into the impact that role model and mentoring programmes can have, as well as the challenges young Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage children are currently facing in schools, including the early criminalisation of young people in schools. ARE has a long record of working closely with teachers and learning professionals in educational places such as schools, colleges and youth spaces, providing interventions tailored to address the factors we know can impede the development of a young person's self-esteem and aspirations. Our workshops are informed by research and deliver proven positive outcomes.

This response is submitted on behalf of Action for Race Equality, a registered charity. It

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[1] Action for Race Equality
[2] Routes2Success

was completed by Qasim Alli, Policy and Research Officer. We do not require our response to be kept confidential and are happy to be contacted at qasim@actionforraceequality.org.uk

Section 3 – Social Justice and Inclusion

12. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation (class ceilings) for learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage?

When considering the barriers of socioeconomic disadvantage, we encourage the government to consider the intersectional disadvantage of race and class. Low educational attainment and progress is closely associated with economic disadvantage and there is a disproportionate number of Black children living in poverty[3]. Poverty is higher among all Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage groups than among the white majority population[4]. 51% of children in Black/African/Caribbean and Black British families and 47% of Asian children, live in poverty[5]. In the current curriculum, racially minoritised learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage encounter increased barriers to improving attainment, progress, access and participation. The Institute of Race Relations released a 2020 report entitled "*How Black Working Class Youth are Criminalised and Excluded in the English School System*"[6]. Its special focus is on the most marginalised young people in society; those excluded from mainstream school and caught up in youth violence. It sets out to explore the race and class aspects of school exclusions, providing a historical overview of the legislation, policy and practices that have forced so many young people, stigmatised as 'disruptive' out of the mainstream state educational sector.

13. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation which may disproportionately impact pupils based on other characteristics (e.g. disability, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion or belief etc.)

Racism infects the entirety of the UK school system, causing harm to Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage learners in a variety of ways. It affects attainment, progress, access, and participation, leading to disproportionately worse outcomes and experiences. It is also felt in the lifelong impacts and trauma of racism. The academic call for decolonising curricular content by increasing teaching of race, migration, and empire is coupled with an urgent need to embed anti-racist practice throughout school systems. Anti-racism literacy for all students and staff must be an imperative for this government's curriculum review.

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[3] Timpson review of school exclusion: technical note

[4] BME statistics on poverty and deprivation - Institute of Race Relations

[5] Child poverty: Statistics, causes and the UK's policy response - House of Lords Library

[6] How-Black-Working-Class-Youth-are-Criminalised-and-Excluded-in-the-English-School-System.pdf

Racially disproportionate outcomes are visible across attainment with Black Caribbean, Mixed white and Black Caribbean, and Gypsy, Roma, and Irish Traveller children achieving disproportionately low attainment scores[7].

In terms of participation, the use of reactionary punitive measures such as detentions, suspensions, and exclusions are disproportionately used against Black, Asian, Mixed Heritage, and Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) children and for children subject to these measures they are more likely to face adverse life experiences including a higher risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system[8]. School exclusions disproportionately affect Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage children and their families, with Black Caribbean students facing exclusion rates up to six times higher than their white peers in some local authorities[9]. Dual heritage white and Black Caribbean children are suspended at nearly double the rate of white peers, while GRT children are suspended 3.2 times as much as white children. The suspension rate for Black children continues to grow and has nearly doubled from 3.85 in 2019/20 to 6.42 in 2021/2225. The high levels of exclusions for Black children are firmly rooted in racial discrimination and adultification[10].

Research shows that racism in the curriculum plays a key role in perpetuating these barriers and inequalities. 95% of young Black people report hearing and witnessing racist language at school, 49% of young Black people feel that racism is the biggest barrier to attaining success in school, while 50% say the biggest barrier is teacher perceptions of them[11]. Similarly, a 2020 survey of the experience of young Travellers found that two-thirds reported being discriminated against by their teachers and 40 per cent by their peers[12]. Navigating structural racism in Britain affects children's safety and mental health. It is critical to name racism as a safeguarding issue and classify its impact on the welfare of young people[13]. The 'Who's Losing Learning' Report[14], released by The Difference and IPPR this year, highlights the ways in which racism embedded in curricula and behavior policies leading to lost learning. - "*An underestimation of racism experienced outside and within school, combined with adultification bias, are partly why vulnerability among children from ethnic minorities may go under-recognised, and why behaviour stemming from such vulnerabilities may be read as poor and maliciously-motivated – and met with sanctions rather than investigation[15]. Furthermore, wider research suggests that teachers' perceptions of who is a 'good learner' in classrooms is shaped by gender, race and class, which in turn shapes which pupils are perceived to be less able to learn.[16]*"

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[7] GCSE results (Attainment 8) - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures

[8] Interventions to prevent school exclusion | Youth Endowment Fund

[9] Preventing school exclusions of Black children in England – a critical review of prevention strategies and interventions - Claire Stewart-Hall, Lorraine Langham, Paul Miller, 2023

[10] Race, poverty and school exclusions in London.pdf

[11] YMCA Report – Young & Black - YMCA Black Country

[12] Barriers-in-Education-Report-2020-1.pdf

[13] Protecting Young Black Lives, Celebrating Black Professionals

[14] Who_is_losing_learning_Sept24.pdf

[15] Adultification bias within child protection and safeguarding

[16] Who_is_losing_learning_Sept24.pdf

The current curriculum fails to adequately equip staff and learners to confront racism in school and in wider society. Steps must be taken to embed anti-racism, and increase racial literacy in the curriculum, as well as training for school staff. This includes changes to curricular content to include more honest histories of migration, empire, and race, as well as further training for teachers and support staff on embedding an anti-racist culture in schools. We firmly believe that addressing racism as a priority within the curriculum will lead to improved outcomes in attainment and participation for racially minoritised learners.

There are several organisations working specifically to identify ways in which the curriculum can be updated, supplemented, and decolonised to address racism in the content taught, as well as in pedagogy, including The Black Curriculum[17] and the Penguin and Runnymede Trust run 'Lit in Colour'[18] project. In 2019, just 11 per cent of GCSE students studied modules that referred to the presence of Black people in British history and just 9 per cent of GCSE students, over a two-year period, opted for modules that make specific reference to the British Empire. In April 2021, the NASUWT's national conference passed a resolution calling on the Union's National Executive to take action to decolonise the curriculum[19]. This included four broad actions: work with campaigners to press for inclusive curriculum frameworks and entitlements; publish materials and resources on decolonising the curriculum; lobby governments and administrations to secure inclusive curricular entitlements; and engage with teacher training providers to embed anti-racist teaching.

14. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers in continuing to improve attainment, progress, access or participation for learners with SEND?

We would draw the review's attention to the work of Global Black Maternal Health, and their '*Black Child SEND,* 2024' Report[20].

"The UK's SEND system is in crisis, with long delays in diagnosis and a lack of a cohesive approach. Race and poverty only exacerbate these issues. Data shows that Black Caribbean and mixed white and Black Caribbean school children in the UK are over-represented for any SEND relative to white British schoolchildren. This is, in part, related to greater social disadvantage experienced by this group. In spite of this over-representation, Black children are less likely to receive adequate support for their additional needs. For instance, Black children are more likely than white children to have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) but are less likely to receive support for their condition. With this disadvantage in mind, it is important to consider that the rate of permanent school exclusions is higher for

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[17] The Black Curriculum

[18] Lit in Colour | Supporting inclusive reading in schools

[19] NASUWT | Anti-racism and Decolonising the Curriculum

[20] Wheeler, R., Agyepong, A., Benhura, C., Martin, M., & Peter, M. (2024). Accessing special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision for Black and mixed Black heritage children: Lived experiences from parents and professionals living in South London. Global Black Maternal Health)

children with SEND who do not have adequate support, and that even without an identified SEND, Black children are nearly twice as likely to be permanently excluded than their white British counterparts. SEND in children of Black heritage is frequently misinterpreted as purely behavioural, which is then criminialised rather than treated with additional care. This flawed perspective contributes to misunderstandings about neurodiversity in these communities, resulting in incorrect assessments, delayed recognition, and lack of early, appropriate support." - Black Child SEND, 2024 – Global Black Maternal Health[21].

15. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any enablers that support attainment, progress, access or participation for the groups listed above? [e.g. socioeconomically disadvantaged young people, pupils with SEND, pupils who are otherwise vulnerable, and young people with protected characteristics]

Action for Race Equality has run our flagship mentoring programme for Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage children, Routes2Succcess[22], for over 10 years and in that time, we have seen the transformative power that positive interventions such as mentoring can have on a young person. Mentoring has been shown to reduce violence by 21%, and other positive interventions such as counselling, therapeutic techniques, workshops on emotional skills such as self-confidence, self-regulation, and communication skills have also been found to be more effective alternatives to detentions, suspensions, and exclusions[23]. Trusted adult relationships and mentoring have a positive impact on the experience of racialised pupils, as seen in our own work on Routes2Success, as well as the work of organisations like Football Beyond Borders[24].

Supplementary curriculum sessions on Black British History and embedding anti-racism in the classroom are crucial to improving the experiences and engagement of racialised youth who do not see themselves in the content they learn. They are also key to increasing racial literacy amongst the whole learner population to understand histories of migration, and the contributions of immigrant communities. The Black Curriculum[25], and Every Future Foundation[26] are examples of anti-racist organisations who run a large programme of these sessions in schools, to great success in increasing students' knowledge of Black British History, and confidence in their sense of identity[27].

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[21] Wheeler, R., Agyepong, A., Benhura, C., Martin, M., & Peter, M. (2024). Accessing special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision for Black and mixed Black heritage children: Lived experiences from parents and professionals living in South London. Global Black Maternal Health)

[22] Routes2Success

[23] Mentoring-Technical-Report_Final.pdf

[24] Football Beyond Borders

[25] The Black Curriculum

[26] Homepage • Every Future Foundation

[27] TBC+Impact+Report+2021.pdf

The Lit in Colour[28] project run by Penguin and The Runnymede Trust is another positive intervention in schools focused on taking down barriers to a more representative English curriculum. They carried out research to better understand what the barriers might be preventing more diverse texts from being taught in school, and to made practical recommendations for change, including curating and providing resources for teachers, teacher training and exam boards. The Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot[29] has also shown that this change required high levels of investment and effort to achieve, as the programme is swimming against the tide of 'normal' practice, current policy, and the social reproduction of canon. The Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot has provided a useful model that can be leveraged into system wide sustainable change, whether through curriculum change, specification change, or more exam boards providing similar levels of support.

We recommend the government learn from, work with, and support these organisations and projects enabling positive interventions to address racism in schools, and racially disproportionate outcomes in attainment, progress, access, and participation for Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage young people.

Section 5: Curriculum and qualification content

23. Are there particular changes that could be made to ensure the curriculum (including qualification content) is more diverse and representative of society?

We cannot understate the importance of a curriculum that prioritises learning about Britain's imperial past, that offers a history to the diverse present and actively seeks to use honest curricula as a tool to erode racism and the effects of racism. We encourage the use of positive racial identities and figures being taught across the curriculum.

24. To what extent does the current curriculum (including qualification content) support students to positively engage with, be knowledgeable about, and respect, others? Are there elements that could be improved?

We direct the review to the submission from Every Future Foundation[30], which highlights how learning about different cultures would help students understand each other better and reduce bullying.

Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum

34. To what extent does the current pre-16 vocational offer equip pupils with the necessary knowledge and skills and prepare them for further study options,

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[28] Lit in Colour | Supporting inclusive reading in schools

[29] Lit-in-Colour-research-report.pdf

[30] EFF Guidance Document for Labours Curriculum Review Call for Evidence

including 16-19 technical pathways and/or A levels? Could the pre-16 vocational offer be improved?

The number of young people of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage who access apprenticeships is too low. Our research report, 'Ethnic Minority Young People and Apprenticeships in England'[31], reveals the racial disparity in the take up of apprenticeships as a route for earning while training.

ARE understands that the reasons for under-representation on apprenticeships do not primarily lie with lack of awareness among young people, or a reluctance from parents for their children to take the vocational rather than academic route to employment. Far too many young people are being encouraged to participate in programmes that are promoted as 'apprenticeships', that can push them further away from the labour market than those able to access genuine apprenticeships. They need information on the range of apprenticeships and vocational qualifications now available, both in traditional trades and those which are an alternative to university, in fields such as human resources, finance or IT in the retail sector.

Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

54. Do you have any further views on anything else associated with the Curriculum and Assessment Review not covered in the questions throughout the call for evidence?

Teacher Training: We know that racial literacy and cultural competency training of all SLT, teachers and teaching assistants is key to the success of a new curriculum - It is vital that all teachers, headteachers, senior leaders and governors are trained on racial literacy, cultural competence and unconscious biases.

More global majority teachers: Labour's plans also include the hiring of 6,500 new teachers, we need more ethnically diverse teachers to enter and be retained in the educational system to increase diverse role models within the system and also to have people with lived experience of racial prejudice to help shape and deliver a new diverse curriculum. Figures from 2019 show that 85.6% of all teachers are White British but just 65.4% of pupils are currently from a White British background; in comparison, 78.5% of the working age population of England were recorded as White British in the 2011 census[32]. As a result, minority ethnic pupils do not see themselves represented in their teachers, and all pupils miss out on the diversity of experiences and understanding, and potentially socially just and race-conscious teaching[33]. Some pupils, such as those from Traveller, Gypsy and Roma backgrounds, may never be taught by a teacher from the same ethnic group[34].

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[31] BTEG-BRIEFING-ETHNIC-MINORITY-YOUNG-PEOPLE-AND-APPRENTICESHIPS-IN-ENGLAND-JULY-2021.pdf

[32] Tereshchenko_Improving the retention of minority ethnic teachers in England - Policy Briefing.pdf

[33] (PDF) Race and Racism in English Secondary Schools, Runnymede Perspectives

[34] IOE_Report_BAME_Teachers.pdf

Police in schools: We have seen an increase in securitisation in schools, targeting Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage children. This directly impacts learners' experience, opportunity, and participation. We direct the review's attention to the Decriminalise the Classroom report[35] from the No Police in Schools project[36]. This is, community campaign led by Kids of Colour[37] and the Northern Police Monitoring Project[38], united by their shared concern over the increasing presence of police in schools in Greater Manchester and beyond. The work of the Alliance for Police Accountability (APA)[39] has highlighted the severe case of Child Q, and the Runnymede Trust report 'Over-policed and under-protected; the road to safer schools'[40] provides wider context to the experience of racially minoritised learners in schools. Longstanding concerns over islamophobia in the implementation of PREVENT in schools have been highlighted in the Runnymede Trust 2024 report on Islamophobia[41].

We would be happy to contribute further to this process if helpful. For further information, please contact Qasim Alli, Policy and Research Officer, at
qasim@actionforraceequality.org.uk

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[35] Decriminalise the Classroom - A Community Response to Police in Greater Manchester's Schools.pdf

[36] Home | No Police In Schools

[37] Home | Kids of Colour

[38] NPMP | Northern Police Monitoring Project

[39] Alliance for Police Accountability

[40] Over-policed and under-protected: the road to Safer Schools

[41] Islamophobia: the intensification of racism against Muslim communities in the UK