

Racism Excludes:

**Why schools
need to make
the difference.**



Exclusions from school constitute a significant risk to life chances

1. There is a widespread conclusion in the research literature that young people who are excluded from school are at far greater risk of a variety of negative outcomes, including poor educational attainment, prolonged periods out of employment; poor mental and physical health; involvement in crime; and homelessness (Parsons 2009; IPPR 2017)¹

Creating a sense of belonging for Black students in their school is central

2. The NEU commissioned research, Place and Belonging in School: Why It Matters Today, was published in November 2020. A number of authors in the literature review for the report suggest that from primary to higher education stages, a sense of belonging is a reliable predictor of attainment outcomes and is characteristically lower amongst students from marginalised ethnic groups. The research reinforced that Black Caribbean children are much more likely to be excluded than their peers². One author recommends improving a sense of belonging in relation to Black pupils in particular, and other pupils from racial groups that face historically negative perceptions, stereotyping and 'othering'³

The report highlights how a sense of belonging has been linked to:

- Increased student motivation
- Increased staff well-being, motivation and retention,
- Reductions in student absenteeism
- Other positive social outcomes e.g., health and wellbeing
- Improved academic achievement
- A growing sense of agency in students and staff: a belief that they can make a difference⁴

The national racial disparity in school exclusions requires school-level action

3. We must acknowledge that the racial disparity in exclusions needs an urgent response.

A whole school anti-racist approach is required. There are system-level commitments from Government that are needed on issues such as a representative national curriculum, a more diverse teaching profession and better preparation for incoming teachers around race in the classroom and curriculum.

¹ Parsons, C. (2008) "Race relations legislation, ethnicity and disproportionality in school exclusions in England." Cambridge Journal of Education 39 (3):401-419 IPPR (2017) [Making the Difference: Breaking the link between school exclusion and social exclusion](#). London: Institute for Public Policy Research

² [Place and Belonging in Schools: Why It Matters Today](#). November 2020

³ [Belonging, behaviour and inclusion in schools: literature review](#)

⁴ [Place and Belonging in Schools: Why It Matters Today](#). November 2020

However, schools can make a difference and must create spaces and professional opportunities to consider, and respond to, the impact of racism, poverty and mental health on their student population. This is more important than ever, after Covid.

What does the data tell us?

- More than one third of Black Caribbean pupils receive at least one exclusion between year 9 and year 11 – which obviously impacts on GCSEs. (Gilborn, 2019)⁵
- Black Caribbean pupils are permanently excluded from school at three times the rate of white British pupils. (DfE Timpson review, 2019)
- Low educational attainment and progress is closely associated with economic disadvantage and there is a disproportionate number of Black children living in poverty (Timpson 2019)
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are permanently excluded at five times the rate of White British pupils.
- Additionally, recorded exclusions are potentially the tip of the iceberg in terms of the real picture for children and young people not in school.
- An EPI analysis of pupil data, commissioned by the NEU about Off-rolling, managed moves and

unexplained exits, present a deeply disturbing picture. One in 12 pupils (8.1%) from the national cohort who began secondary school in 2012 and finished in 2017 were removed from rolls at some point, for unknown reasons. Over a five-year period of 55,300 unexplained exits more than 49,000 pupils from a single cohort disappeared from the school rolls without explanation⁶ The NEU concern is that those most likely to be 'off-rolled' or forgotten are from disadvantaged communities.

It is worth noting that in the 2018 to 2019 school year, 15 permanent exclusions (0.2%) were due to racist abuse. For temporary exclusions, 4,889 (1.1%) were due to racist abuse.

Government is failing to develop national strategies to counter race inequality

4. The Timpson review was supposed to address the phenomenon of exclusions in education and was specifically prompted by the findings of the government's own Race Disparity Audit of 2017.
5. However, since its publication there has been widespread disappointment in its findings and conclusions and there have been calls for a further review. The 2019 Timpson review acknowledged that children from African-Caribbean, Irish Traveller

⁵ Gillborn, David (2018) Exclusions Review 2018 –Evidence on the Exclusion of Black Caribbean and Mixed: White/Black Caribbean students. Centre for Research in Race and Education. University of Birmingham.

⁶ Cabinet Office (2019) Race Disparity Audit.

⁷ Upton, Mark, December 2020, LGIU 'Ethnic Disparities in Education' Local Government Information Unit.

⁸ [NEU, 07/05/2019](#)

⁹ [Pupil Exclusions: Ethnic Groups. UIN HL8834, 06/10/2020](#)

and Gypsy/Roma backgrounds are three-to-four times more likely to be excluded from school than other groups but concluded that the trends are complicated.

6. If factors such as poverty are considered the differences between ethnic groups are substantially reduced. Children with some types of special educational needs, those supported by social care and children who are disadvantaged in other ways account for three-quarters of all excluded children.
7. However, the important critique of Timpson's report is this: while the NEU accepts that the causes of exclusion are complex and wider than ethnicity, it has to be understood that the higher exclusion rates between African-Caribbean or Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children remain after taking account of such factors."

Racism needs explicit discussion rather than ignoring it as a factor

8. The NEU believes that because the exclusion figures show a clear disparity for Black students and students eligible for free school meals, it is time to ask serious questions about the curriculum, and students' perspectives about what is on offer to them in school. The focus needs to be on the issues that provide barriers to learning for Black students; the role of stereotypes and how they create barriers to high expectations; the way racism is

internalised by students; and the lack of professional development for staff about responding to the differences in children's lives. Stereotypes around race and stigma around poverty are part of this discussion.

9. Commenting on the Timpson Review in May 2019, the NEU said, "Ultimately we need to tackle the high stakes accountability system and allow all schools to teach in ways which best suit their pupils. At the same time all schools should be brought within local accountability mechanisms under the local authority, and schools need to be properly funded and supported to ensure all children get the education they deserve."
10. The NEU wants to see more support for schools to help them prevent and reduce exclusions; more investment in mental health services; a more flexible and representative curriculum; more training for staff.
11. Talking about racism explicitly and auditing the experience of Black students in your school is vital. We're urging schools to use the NEU Anti-Racist Framework to audit your approach and make an evaluation plan.

Case Studies

We are seeking case studies about what schools are doing to support students who are at risk of exclusion or to work with agencies or partners or PRUs to prevent exclusions. Please send examples to equality@neu.org.uk

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