

# Evidence for the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities

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## Questions we answer

1. What do you consider to be the main causes of racial and ethnic disparities in the UK, and why?
2. What could be done to improve representation, retention and progression opportunities for people of different ethnic backgrounds in public sector workforces (for example, in education, healthcare or policing)?
3. How could the educational performance of school children across different ethnic and socio-economic status groups be improved?
4. How should the school curriculum adapt in response to the ethnic diversity of the country?

## Executive Summary

Our submission draws together key insights from contemporary research on race inequity in education. In particular, we focus on research concerned with the experiences and attainments of **Black British children and young people**, especially students of **Black Caribbean and Dual Heritage (Mixed: White/Black Caribbean) ethnic origin**.

### Question 1.

**What do you consider to be the main causes of racial and ethnic disparities in the UK, and why?**

#### The Role of Racism

- Racism refers to actions and processes that have the effect of unfairly discriminating against one or more minority ethnic groups (including unrecognized bias and processes that discriminate as the result of stereotyping, neglect and/or omission).
- Research repeatedly highlights the multiple ways in which racism is a key factor within the education system, operating through policy and practice at national, local, school and classroom level.
- Serious academic research has never argued that racism in the education system is the *only* relevant factor in understanding disparities in experience and attainment.

#### Understanding Racism in the Real World: a warning about causation and statistical models

- Statistics can be useful in mapping broad trends but they are far from perfect; there are *always* questions about the reliability and validity of the data.
- Quantitative research is shaped by the assumptions, theories and interests of statisticians; these can introduce unintended bias.

#### Exclusions from School: how Timpson got it wrong

- There are particular problems where quantitative research tries to model the role of racism: first, researchers often confuse association with causation. This is made worse when researchers adopt a so-called ‘garbage can’ approach that includes too many factors, many with a tenuous link to the problem, thereby lessening the apparent significance of each.
- Second, statistical models frequently reduce racism to a ‘left over’ category that assumes the dominance of other factors and does not recognize how race inequity threads through and influences those issues, e.g. income, social class, and poverty.

#### Policy Matters: the Myth of the ‘Worst’ Performing White Working Class

- For more than a decade education policy debate has been distorted by a widespread misunderstanding of education statistics. Headlines frequently present the ‘White working class’ as the lowest attaining group - left behind by their minoritized peers and forgotten by policymakers. This is factually incorrect and socially divisive.
- Official education statistics describe students who are eligible for free school meals (FSM). This is a crude proxy measure of poverty; this measure *excludes* most people who consider themselves ‘working class’. Around 60% of British adults consider themselves ‘working class’ but only one in ten White British school students are FSM.

- In every ethnic group FSM students achieve lower average results than their peers who are not eligible for free school meals (NFSM).
- White British FSM students are *not* the least likely to succeed in any of the main measures of achievement.
- Among the 87% of state school students who are NFSM the lowest attaining groups are consistently Gypsy/Roma, Black Caribbean, Dual Heritage (White/Black Caribbean) and Pakistani students.
- An obsessive focus on White British FSM students has diverted attention from the persistent and significant inequities of achievement experienced by Gypsy/Roma, Black Caribbean, Dual Heritage (White/Black Caribbean) and Pakistani students regardless of their FSM status.

#### Race Inequity in Classrooms & Staffrooms: problems at the school level

- Policy debate frequently lapses into deficit analyses that stereotype Black communities and divert attention from the role of schools.
- Qualitative research (drawing on interviews and observations inside schools) has for decades evidenced that Black students experience systematically more negative teacher expectations than their White peers of the same gender and social class background.
- A key problem is chronically low expectations of Black students, which are institutionalized through streaming, setting and tiering.
- Research has demonstrated that school-based policies which claim to operate in ‘colour-blind’ fashion, such as ‘zero tolerance approaches to discipline’, actually discriminate in systematic ways and lead to more frequent and harsher sanctions against Black students.

### Question 2. What could be done to improve representation, retention and progression opportunities for people of different ethnic backgrounds in public sector workforces (for example, in education, healthcare or policing)?

- The teaching force is disproportionately White and under-prepared for multi-ethnic classrooms.
- School leadership is often out of touch with the issues and replicate patterns of institutional race inequity.
- More than a third of minoritized teachers report having experienced discrimination at work in the last 12 months.
- Minoritized teachers who reach leadership positions often report feeling unsupported and over-scrutinized in a situation where they are judged more harshly than White peers.

- Meaningful training for key gatekeepers is urgently required. Current leadership training is mostly silent on race and racism.
- Ethnic monitoring can be a key to successful change, where data are used to identify pressing issues and inform ways forward. Unfortunately, much ethnic monitoring in education is an empty gesture that is unanalysed and absent from the policy-process.
- *The collection and use of multiple forms of data* (including but not restricted to quantitative material) could have a transformative effect at national, local and school-level. There have been important advances recently, including the *Ethnicity Facts and Figures Website*, but the quality, analysis and accessibility of the data could be radically improved.

**Question 3. How could the educational performance of school children across different ethnic and socio-economic status groups be improved?**

- *Ofsted* has a crucial role in identifying weaknesses and supporting positive change. Presently, however, race equality is treated as an optional extra that most inspection teams give little or no attention.
- *Initial Teacher Education*: there is currently no formal requirement for trainee teachers to undertake serious work in relation to patterns of discrimination related to race, ethnic origin or religion. This means that most teachers enter school unprepared to meet the needs of their increasingly diverse student body.
- *Equality Impact Assessments* were introduced following the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and could transform the effect of policy and practice across the entire system. To date, however, these assessments have not been used in a serious and constructive way.

**Question 4. How should the school curriculum adapt in response to the ethnic diversity of the country?**

- The current school curriculum is out-dated and partial. Key facts about British history, for example, are inaccurately conveyed or ignored entirely, often erasing the vital role played by Black and other minoritized peoples.
- The English literature curriculum is almost entirely devoid of ethnic diversity. The main characters in children's books are almost eight times more likely to be *animals* than people of colour.
- There is a public appetite for greater diversity in the curriculum and more teaching about racial injustice. A 2020 survey of a representative sample of UK adults found that in each major ethnic group the largest proportion of people wanted *more* teaching about racial injustice and Black history (compared with those who thought the subjects were taught too much, or 'about the right amount').

**Question 1.**

**What do you consider to be the main causes of racial and ethnic disparities in the UK, and why?**

In this evidence statement we review some of the key lessons to emerge from the research on racism and race inequity in education. It is impossible to adequately summarise the entire scope of relevant research and so we focus, in particular, on research concerned with the experiences and attainments of Black British children and young people, especially students of Black Caribbean and Dual Heritage ('Mixed: White/Black Caribbean') ethnic origin. These groups are separated in official statistics – often lost amid the composite groups 'Black' and 'Mixed' respectively – but they are, of course, demographically inter-connected and frequently identify in close and complex ways.<sup>1</sup> Black Caribbean communities are one of the longest established minority groups in the UK and they have been at the forefront of campaigns for racial justice.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, they continue to experience persistent and significant race inequity in education, regardless of their social class status, and this pattern is often shared by their Dual Heritage (White/Black Caribbean) peers.<sup>3</sup>

The persistent and widespread inequalities experienced by Black British people are not limited to the field of education. The extensive reach of these problems and their long history demonstrates that there are no quick or easy fixes. As we will show, drawing on the most recent high-quality and rigorous research, many of the problems facing Black British students arise from deep-seated structural problems in the way that schooling is organised, how teachers are trained, and the priorities that feed into public understandings of education and the policies that shape the system, often regardless of the political party in power. Tackling systemic race inequality will require serious and far-reaching changes.

**The Role of Racism**

The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED) offers an opportunity to advance policy that takes seriously the multiple influences on race inequity in this country. Any meaningful inquiry must be mindful of the persistent and complex operation of racism as a key factor in the delivery of public services, including education.

By racism we mean actions and processes that have the effect of unfairly discriminating against one or more minority ethnic groups (including unrecognized bias and processes that discriminate as the result of stereotyping, neglect and/or omission). Contrary to tabloid headlines and scare-mongering, serious academic research has never argued that racism in the education system is the *only* relevant factor in understanding disparities in experience and attainment. However, research over several decades, by multiple different authors, and using a range of different approaches, has established that racism is a key factor within the education system, operating in multiple and complex ways through policy and practice at national, local, school and classroom level.

It has proven extraordinarily difficult to achieve a serious and extended attempt to address racist inequity in education. The impact of racism (both intended and unintended) was widely accepted following the Macpherson report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the police's failure to prosecute his killers.<sup>4</sup> Despite far-reaching changes in legislation and numerous public pronouncements, however, by the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stephen's death, racism had disappeared from the policy agenda and many stakeholders working the field believed that much of the initial progress had been wiped away.<sup>5</sup>

### **Understanding Racism in the Real World: a warning about causation and statistical models**

Statistics can be useful in mapping broad trends but they are far from perfect; there are always questions about the reliability and validity of the data. For example, most official education statistics draw on a count of all students in state schools; this ignores children in private schools and thereby removes from sight a group of disproportionately White and highly advantaged students.

Alternatively, some surveys use a relatively small group of children to *estimate* the national picture; the usefulness of such samples varies greatly between different projects depending, for example, on their size and composition. Put simply, *all* research analyses are subject to possible problems in sampling and interpretation: although many people automatically view numbers as objective and factual, this is far from the truth.<sup>6</sup> In short, statisticians choose what to count, who to count and how to count; these choices are not merely technical, they involve judgements about who - and what - matters most. Inevitably these decisions risk reinforcing unrecognized assumptions on the part of the researchers; the more that researchers manipulate the data, the greater the chance that they introduce unrecognized biases into the study.<sup>7</sup>

These questions become especially important where statistical models are used in relation to race equality and means that we must be extra cautious when statisticians claim that they can find hidden patterns and explanations buried in the data and revealed only through complex manipulation of the material. A recent US report, for example, used *regression modelling* to explore a wide variety of factors in relation to parental satisfaction with schools. By including a long shopping list of issues (many with no obvious link to the question) the authors engaged in what critics called 'garbage can' modelling: 'Simply, the signal is overwhelmed by the noise.'<sup>8</sup> This relates to the problem of interpretation and to a more technical issue known as '*overfitting*' a model; i.e. for any given data set 'there is an upper limit to the complexity of the model that can be derived with any acceptable degree of uncertainty'.<sup>9</sup> Put simply, overfitting happens when researchers ask too much of the available data.

These problems are not a trivial matter of technicalities that only concern a few academics; these issues shape the way that issues are viewed by practitioners, the media, community groups and policy makers; as can be seen in recent discussions about the significance of racism and discrimination as a factor in the disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on people of minority ethnic heritage.<sup>10</sup> *Essentially the problem is that many factors that are treated by statisticians as discrete drivers of inequality are themselves shaped by discrimination and unfairness* (e.g. socio-economic status, poverty, home ownership, level of parental education, pre-existing health issues).

Unfortunately, many statistical models assume that 'racism' can only account for discrepancies that remain *after* they have tested for every other conceivable issue – as if each issue was a separate layer in a cake. But racism and other forms of discrimination cross-contaminate other factors through race discrimination in the economy, in the housing and labour markets. Fundamentally, this is a question of understanding how racism operates; not as a minimal thing to be measured as what is 'left over'

when everything else has been accounted for; but as a complex, dynamic set of processes working through each aspect of society.

### **Exclusions from School: how Timpson got it wrong**

Exclusion from school has a profoundly negative impact on young people's life chances and has, for decades, been one of the most high-profile concerns for Black communities.<sup>11</sup> A research study that charted the changes in educational policy and practice in the 20 years following the murder of Stephen Lawrence found that:

*the rate has fluctuated, including a peak of more than 4 times the likelihood of White exclusion in 2010, but at no time have Black Caribbean students been less than three times more likely to be permanently excluded than their White British peers.*<sup>12</sup>

It was surprising, therefore, when the Timpson Review of School Exclusions<sup>13</sup> failed to mention the word 'racism' and was met with widespread disappointment by race equality advocates.<sup>14</sup> The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities has publicly committed to considering the Timpson Review of School Exclusions as part of its work.<sup>15</sup> It is, therefore, vital to appreciate some major problems with the Review's working methods and conclusion, especially as they relate to the role of race and racism in the processes that shape exclusions from school. The Timpson Review fell into the trap (outlined above) of fundamentally misunderstanding the creation and meaning of statistical analyses. Specifically, the Review made two key errors:

- first, the Review confused patterns of *association* with deep-rooted *causal* mechanisms;
- second, the Review failed to understand how racism works. As a result, the review produced figures that systematically downplay the extent of race inequity.

The Timpson Review begins its statistical analysis by stating that the findings 'cannot infer that one thing *causes* another' but can reveal 'what *drives* higher rates of exclusion for children with particular characteristics'.<sup>16</sup> These two statements are incompatible: to assert that something is *driving* exclusions, is to infer *causality*.

The Review includes a separate 70-page 'technical note' which lists numerous factors that have been included in the calculations, but the information is insufficient for a thorough statistical evaluation of the work, e.g. the calculations cannot be replicated using the published material. Many of the factors appear to have a tenuous link to questions of exclusion and the approach has the characteristics of '*garbage can*' modelling; where the apparent significance of any single measure is automatically reduced, by including as many factors as possible.

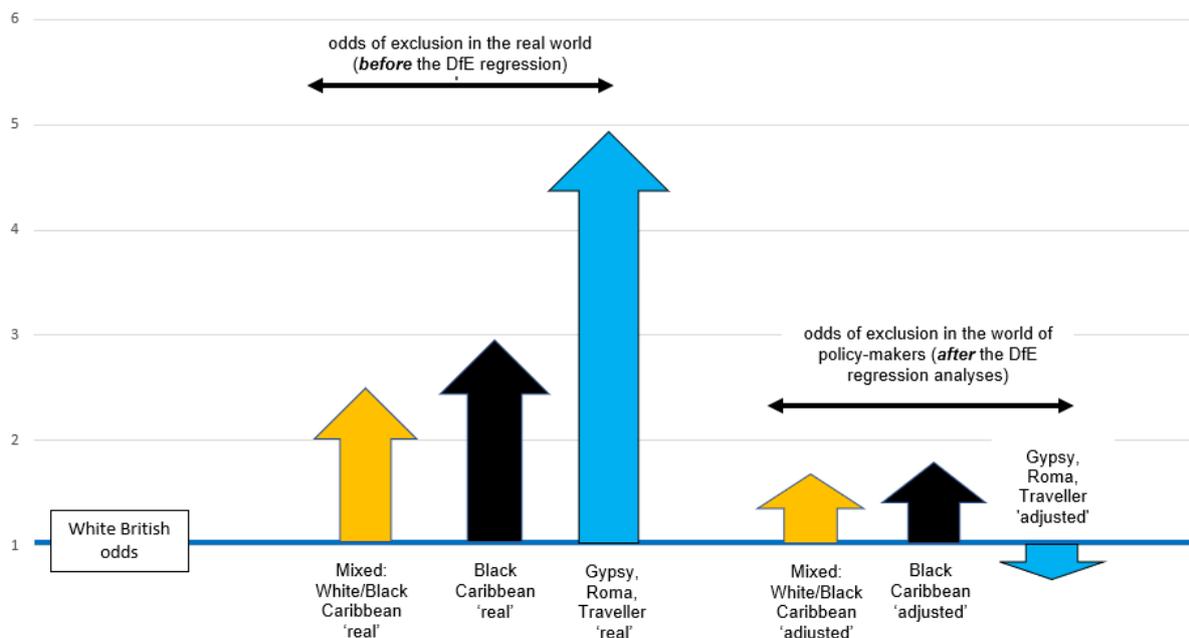
In addition, the model is based on a completely inadequate understanding of how racism works. By using regression analyses in this way, the DfE's statisticians seem to assume that 'ethnicity' is only relevant when all other factors have been accounted for. But racism does not operate separately from other factors. Black students, for example, are more likely to live in economically disadvantaged households, they are more likely to be labelled with certain SEND judgements (especially those that carry the most punitive and negative connotations)<sup>17</sup>, they are more likely to attend poorly funded and low attaining schools. These are some of the channels through which systemic racist inequity works in society.

In view of these limitations it is hardly surprising that the DfE's calculations reduced the supposed level of disproportionate exclusion experienced by Black British students. In the case of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students the calculations actually remove the over-representation entirely (see Figure 1) – this means that, according to the Timpson Review, although Roma children are excluded from school at *five* times the White rate, they are not excluded as much as they should be all other things considered.

On the basis of the ‘adjusted’ data,<sup>18</sup> the Timpson Review concluded that ethnicity (and, by implication, racism) is not the factor that many previously assumed:

This is not to say we should not be concerned about the higher rates of exclusion ... However, it does suggest the causes – and therefore the action that should be taken – are complex and wider than just focused on ethnicity.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 1: Real versus Manipulated Rates of Exclusion in the Timpson Review (2019)**  
*Odds of permanent exclusion relative to White British peers*



On the basis of calculations (which systematically under-estimate the significance of race/racism as a factor) the Timpson Review concluded that previous understandings about racialised exclusions are over-blown and that the solution must lie elsewhere. The very wording that Timpson employs to persuade readers (that the issue is more ‘complex’ and ‘wider’ than ‘just’ ethnicity) belittles the historical experiences of Black and other minoritized communities, who are only too aware of the vast reach of racism. The review is either unaware of, or chooses to ignore, previous criticisms of statistics as ill-suited to understanding racism,<sup>20</sup> and instead projects the analysis as offering a superior (‘more detailed’) insight.

### **Policy Matters: the Myth of the ‘Worst’ Performing White Working Class**

For more than a decade education policy debate has been skewed by a widespread misunderstanding of education statistics. Headlines frequently proclaim that ‘White working class’ students are the lowest attaining group in school, presenting them as left behind by the attainments of their minoritized peers and forgotten by policymakers:

White working-class the worst GCSE students, study finds (2008)<sup>21</sup>

White working class boys are schools' worst performing ethnic group by age of 11 (2009)<sup>22</sup>

White working-class boys are the worst performing ethnic group at school (2015)<sup>23</sup>

Why does no one speak up for poor white boys? They are now the lowest-achieving group in Britain (2016)<sup>24</sup>

White working class boys 'at bottom of heap' because of focus on minorities and women (2018)<sup>25</sup>

White, working class boys are the UK's most underprivileged (2020)<sup>26</sup>

The sheer frequency of the stories suggests that this group is not as 'forgotten' as is claimed. For example, since 2010 the Education Select Committee has conducted 90 inquiries, including six in the current session to date; only 2 inquiries have focused on a single ethnic group and *both* concern White students.<sup>27</sup>

There are numerous factual and conceptual problems with the way that the 'White working class' are presented in policy debate and news stories<sup>28</sup> but, for the sake of brevity, we will review the most important. These are important because the current misunderstandings distort education policy priorities and feed into a policy climate that is generally hostile to issues of race equality.<sup>29</sup>

- *It is highly misleading to describe official education statistics as relating to the 'White working class'; the figures exclude most White people who think of themselves as working class. Around 60 per cent of British adults consider themselves 'working class', a figure that has remained relatively stable since the 1980s.<sup>30</sup> This means that headlines, such as those above, appear to relate to the experiences of a majority of White people. But the relevant education statistics do not measure social class directly; the quoted statistics relate to White students who are eligible for free school meals (FSM), a sign of family poverty which is used as a proxy indicator of social disadvantage. In the most recent official data, FSM students accounted for around 11% of White British students in state schools.<sup>31</sup> Although six in ten adults identify as 'working class', the education statistics relate to around one in ten White students.*
- *White students are among the ethnic groups who are least likely to be in the FSM group. Of the main ethnic groups, only Chinese (6%) and Indian (7%) students are less likely to be FSM than their White British peers. Those most likely to be FSM are students categorised as Gypsy/Roma (39%), Bangladeshi (25%), Mixed: White/Black Caribbean (23%), Black Caribbean (22%) and Black African (20%).<sup>32</sup>*
- *White British FSM students are among the lowest attainers but they are not the least likely to succeed, in any major measure of achievement, regardless of their free school meal status. Figure 2 presents the most up-to-date official data on educational achievements by students in the main ethnic groups, broken down by their FSM status. The three measures of educational achievement are those highlighted in the government's 'Ethnicity Facts and Figures' website:*
  - *The percentage achieving the English Baccalaureate (EBacc); i.e. those with a 'strong pass' in 'each of their GCSEs in English, Maths, Science, a language, and either history or geography'.<sup>33</sup>*
  - *The proportion of students achieving 'a strong pass (grade 5 or above)' in English and maths GCSE examinations.<sup>34</sup>*
  - *The average score in each group calculated in relation to 'Attainment 8', which is described as measuring 'pupils' performance in 8 GCSE-level qualifications'.<sup>35</sup>*

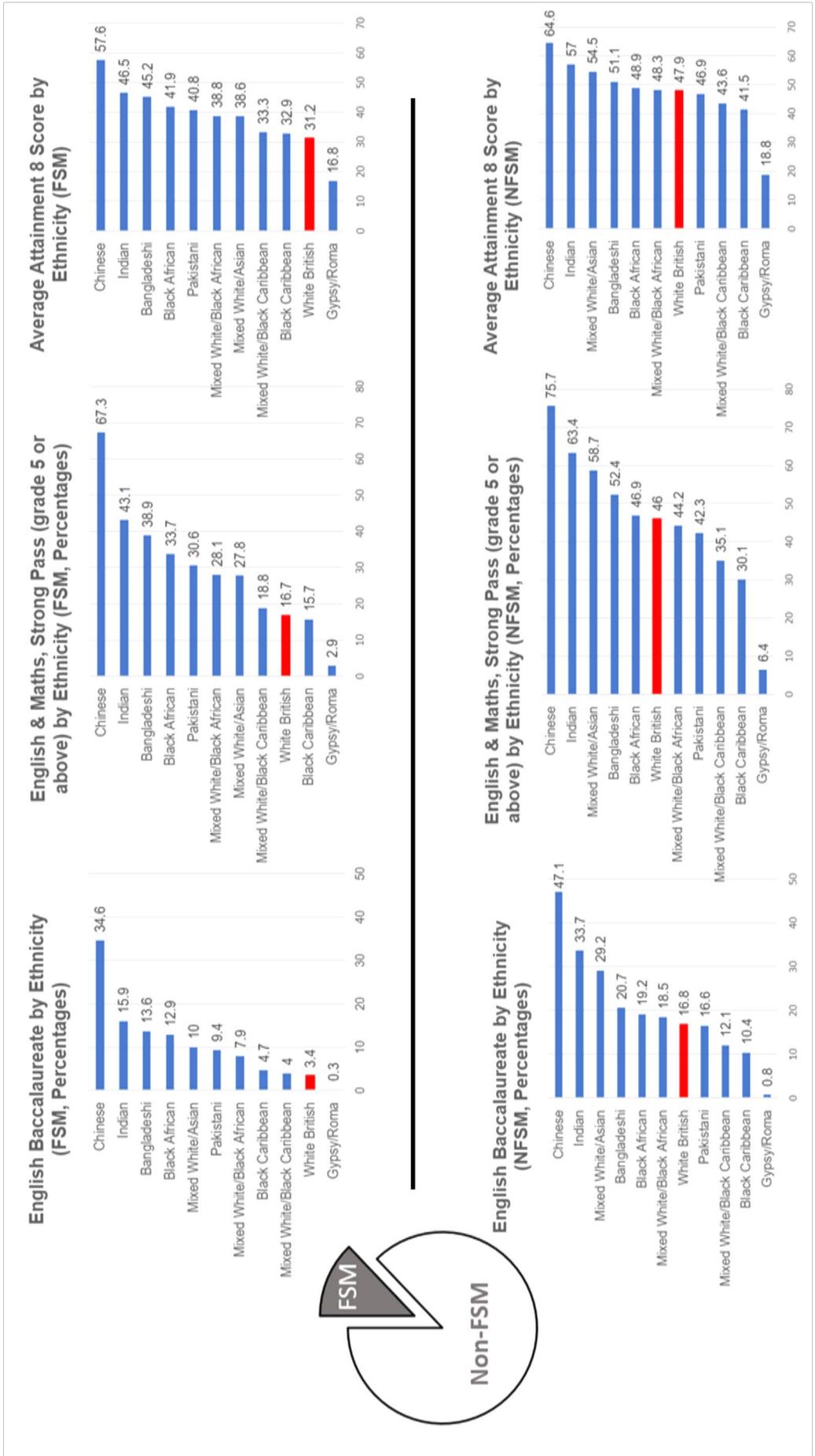
In Figure 2, for ease of reference, we have highlighted the White British group. The following patterns of attainment are clear:

- Overall FSM students do less well than their peers of the same ethnic group who are not eligible for FSM. This pattern is repeated in each ethnic group for each of the three measures of achievement.
  - Gypsy/Roma students are the lowest attaining group in each measure and regardless of FSM status.
  - Four ethnic groups consistently score the lowest among FSM students, although not always in the same order; Gypsy/Roma, White British, Black Caribbean and Dual Heritage (White/Black Caribbean) students.
  - Among non-FSM students, in each measure, the bottom four places are again occupied by four ethnic groups (Gypsy/Roma, Black Caribbean, Dual Heritage (White/Black Caribbean) and Pakistani students. It is worth noting that among non-FSM students, who form the majority of all school students (around 87%) the order is always the same, and White British students do *not* appear in this group.
- *An obsessive focus on White British FSM students has distorted policy and distracted from persistent patterns of minority ethnic under-attainment.* The educational under-achievement of White British FSM students is an important matter that deserves urgent attention. However, *the focus on the one-in-ten White students who are eligible for FSM has come to eclipse wider questions of unequal attainments between ethnic groups across the whole of the student population.* The majority of school students (the 87% who are not eligible for FSM) rarely feature in keynote policy speeches or in media headlines; among these students four *minority* ethnic groups consistently experience significant inequities of attainment.
  - *The misrepresentation of FSM data risks feeding anti-diversity sentiments and could inflame racial hostility.* As we have shown, the familiar narrative of ‘White working class’ failure is a gross misrepresentation; by reporting White FSM data (based on 11% of White British students) as if it describes the experiences of 60% of White people (who identify as ‘working class’), this language risks giving the impression that a majority of White children are failing and that this is somehow directly related to the presence of minoritized students in their schools.

### **Race Inequity in Classrooms & Staffrooms: problems at the school level**

Both inschool and out-of-school factors seem to make a contribution to the picture of Black exclusions. However, in seeking a solution to the exclusions gap, a focus on out-of-school factors has very real drawbacks (lack of an evidence base, risk of locating the problem with Black communities and thereby excusing inaction by the system). Consequently, a focus on in-school factors seems preferable. (Wanless Report) <sup>36</sup>

Following the Lawrence Inquiry Report, and renewed controversy about the level of school exclusions experienced by Black British students, an official Department for Education ‘*Priority Review*’ investigated the relevant academic research and canvassed the views of numerous stakeholder groups. Led by Peter Wanless, the Review concluded that any meaningful attempt to reduce the disproportionate Black rates of exclusion from school must address the fact that research consistently produces evidence that, overall, schools treat Black students, especially students of Black Caribbean and Mixed (White/Black Caribbean) ethnic origin in different, more negative ways. Whenever such evidence is highlighted there is often a chorus of ‘*what about...*’ responses, featuring arguments about economic disadvantage, single-parent households and the like.<sup>37</sup> As the Wanless Review made clear, however, such arguments frequently adopt a deficit perspective that stereotypes minoritized communities and shifts attention away from the very institutions that are amenable to change by policy-makers and practitioners. In understanding the shape of educational inequity – and what can be done about it – it is essential to focus on life inside schools.



**Figure 2: Three Measures of Educational Achievement by Ethnic Origin & Free School Meal Status**  
 Source: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/> (November 2020)

For decades, qualitative research (drawing on interviews and school observations) has shown that Black students experience systematically more negative teacher expectations than their White peers of the same gender and social class background.<sup>38</sup> We address the teaching workforce and the curriculum in Questions 2 and 4 (below); other key issues include:

- *chronically low expectations of Black students, which are institutionalized through streaming, setting and tiering:* Black students are more likely to be placed in low ranked teaching groups, where they receive poorer-quality teaching and are less likely to make good academic progress. For example, placement in the lowest ‘foundation’ tier of GCSE examinations means that, no matter how well the students perform, they cannot exceed their teachers’ low expectations and attain the best pass grades (because these are formally restricted to those entered for the higher tier papers only).<sup>39</sup>
- *School-based policies, such as zero tolerance approaches to discipline, which claim to operate in ‘colour-blind’ fashion but actually discriminate in systematic ways:* it is common to hear the argument that race inequity can best be addressed by ‘colour-blind’ approaches which focus on an individual rather than their ethnicity. Unfortunately, decades of research have demonstrated that the reality is not so simple. Although teachers may claim (and sincerely believe) that zero tolerance policies are applied without fear or favour, in reality they tend to lead to more frequent and harsher sanctions against minoritized students.<sup>40</sup>

## **Question 2. What could be done to improve representation, retention and progression opportunities for people of different ethnic backgrounds in public sector workforces (for example, in education, healthcare or policing)?**

It is widely accepted that the quality of teachers and teaching in a school is one of the most important factors in raising attainment and building supportive and inclusive educational environments.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, despite the best of intentions and sometimes without their conscious awareness of any discriminatory effect, *White teachers tend to view Black students as more likely to cause trouble than to excel academically.* Many terms have been used to describe this situation: currently ‘unconscious bias’ is popular, partly as a means of emphasizing that the processes are not necessarily crude cases of overt race discrimination. When this kind of stereotyping becomes part of the fabric of a school, and is given additional force through academic selection and disciplinary processes, it is a textbook example of *institutional racism*.

The problems in the teaching force and educational leadership go beyond mere questions of representation; the issues go to the heart of the quality of education offered in our schools, including:

- *A teaching force that is disproportionately White and under-prepared for multi-ethnic classrooms:* initial teacher education courses, and school inspections, do not include any mandatory focus on race equality and, although minoritized students make up around a third of state school rolls, the teaching force is more than 90% White<sup>42</sup> - a problem that is most acute in primary schools.<sup>43</sup>
- *School leadership that is out of touch with the issues and replicates patterns of institutional race inequity:* around 97% of headteachers are White,<sup>44</sup> and the minoritized teachers who succeed in achieving leadership positions report feeling unsupported and over-scrutinized in a situation where they are judged more harshly than White peers.<sup>45</sup> A 2020 survey, including more than 400 teachers of minority ethnic heritage, found that:
  - 35% of minoritized teachers report having experienced discrimination at work in the last 12 months (compared to 19% overall);

- 55% report being described as ‘oversensitive’, ‘paranoid’ or ‘aggressive’ when they challenged racially unacceptable behaviour;
- around one in three minoritized teachers state that racism in their school/college has *increased* in the last 12 months.<sup>46</sup>

There is, therefore, an urgent need for action to improve the quality and representativeness of the educational workforce.

- *Meaningful training for key gatekeepers is a basic starting point:* someone with no training in best-practices for equity and avoiding racist stereotyping is simply not adequately qualified for involvement in the selection of teachers, headteachers and leaders of children’s services. Around one-in-three school students identifies as of minority ethnic heritage, and the figure is rising; in this context, an awareness of racism and the pitfalls of institutionalised barriers to recruitment and progression are basic matters of professional competence:
  - a recent study of key texts on a major educational leadership programme found that ‘race’ or ‘racism’ appeared in just *four* of the 69 recommended texts.<sup>47</sup>
- *Meaningful ethnic monitoring that identifies problems and helps to support solutions:* following the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Equality Act (2010) many organisations have begun to routinely monitor the ethnic origin of job candidates, those seeking promotion and colleagues involved in disciplinary actions. But *data gathering is not an end in itself; the data is worthless unless it is analysed and lessons used to inform better practices moving forward.* Ideally there should be a continual loop between data monitoring and policy/strategic action, e.g. in relation to recruitment, promotion, disciplinary processes, and attainment support. This may sound obvious but *there is evidence that in education, at present, little or nothing is done with the data once it is gathered:*
  - a survey of all English local authorities found that around 40% monitored headteacher appointments by ethnic origin but less than 10% reported that data publicly.
  - *None* of the authorities evidenced any improvement in the appointment of headteachers of minority ethnic origin in recent years.<sup>48</sup>

We need to be clear here - the problem lies in the authorities’ failure to analyse and learn from monitoring data; the way ahead is to *use* monitoring data, not to abandon the process entirely.

### **Question 3. How could the educational performance of school children across different ethnic and socio-economic status groups be improved?**

Since the late 1980s, the attainment of school leavers in England has risen dramatically, demonstrating beyond doubt that there is no intrinsic reason why young people in any group cannot succeed.<sup>49</sup> Research suggests several steps that could improve the situation quickly if there was the political will to follow through on such actions.

- *Ofsted:* scrutiny by the official schools inspectorate is one of the biggest single drivers of change in the school system. A major two-year research project examined the changes that had happened in the 20 years following the murder of Stephen Lawrence.<sup>50</sup> As part of the project the researchers interviewed a range of educational stakeholders, including community advocates, headteachers, educational consultants and civil servants; their overwhelming view

was that race equality had ceased to be an important issue for most schools as soon as it was no longer required as a mandatory aspect of Ofsted inspections.

- *Initial Teacher Education*: there is currently no formal requirement for trainee teachers to undertake serious work in relation to patterns of discrimination related to race and ethnic origin. This cannot be defensible in view of the decades of research that confirms persistent patterns of race inequity in school experience and achievement. Moreover, there has been considerable research on the effects of this absence on early career teachers, with some coming to believe that the lack of focus on race equality in their training implies that race is only a marginal issue, while others express frustration at the lack of preparation for working in multiracial settings.<sup>51</sup>
- *Meaningful Equality Impact Analyses*: There is a formal requirement for policy proposals to be subject to Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs); i.e. those proposing the policy should examine the available evidence to judge whether the policy is likely to negatively impact on disadvantaged groups. This requirement arose directly from the *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report*. Potentially this was a very important development, meant to anticipate negative unintended consequences *before* policies are rolled out nationally. In practice, however, EIAs are often completed hurriedly and with an eye to *justifying*, rather than *scrutinizing*, a policy. Michael Gove, a former Education Secretary, has stated that impact assessments 'are often produced after the fact in an attempt to retrofit a justification on to the policy. That is a problem with the way in which Whitehall works that needs to be addressed...'<sup>52</sup> Once again, as with ethnic monitoring more generally, the lesson of past failures is to improve the system, not abandon the attempt. High quality EIAs would potentially improve social justice in *all* aspects of the education system, including student achievement, leadership, and teacher recruitment, retention and promotion.
- *Better Collection and Use of Data*: Data alone solves nothing; but the government's commitment to greater transparency around issues of social injustice – seen most clearly in the publication of the *Ethnicity Facts and Figures Website* - displays a welcome commitment to the power of knowledge and understanding as a driver to positive action. However, we have shown (above) that numbers can be misused in powerful ways that obscure and mislead. In addition to the 'garbage can' style of regression analyses, seen in the Timpson Review, there are additional ways in which official statistics have become *less* useful in recent years.
  - *'Mixed' is not a useful category*: as we have noted above, research with Dual Heritage students reveals the complex and fast-changing nature of multiple racial identifications. Unfortunately, the current use of a broad composite term 'mixed' acts to obscure rather than enlighten. Dual heritage students who identify as 'White/Black Caribbean', in census terms, tend to experience higher rates of exclusion and lower achievements than the national average; in contrast, students who are categorized as 'Mixed: White/Asian' tend to experience lower rates of exclusion and higher average achievements; combining these groups in a crude composite category makes no sense and hides important differences in educational experience and achievement.
  - *'Asian' is not a useful category*: official reports frequently use the term 'Asian' to refer to composite statistics for people categorized as Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi. These groups have very different social, political, economic and demographic characteristics; to simply subsume them in a single category is not merely simplistic and patronizing, it also obscures important differences. For example, Indian students achieve, on average, better than their White peers but this is not the case for Pakistani students. Such differences are erased by the use of a crude catch-all 'Asian' category.

- *Treating 'Chinese' students as a 'major' ethnic category is misleading:* the same reports that present data on a composite 'Asian' group tend to also present findings on Chinese students as a separate 'major' ethnic grouping. Nowhere is a rationale offered for this. There are many problems with this approach, perhaps the most serious is that the categories 'Chinese', 'Asian' and 'Black' are frequently cited together without reference to their very differently sized populations: Chinese students account for 0.4% of state school students compared with 5.7% Black and 11.4% Asian.<sup>53</sup> Listing Chinese students as a 'major' ethnic group gives a false sense of their equivalence to the 'Asian' category which is, in fact, 28 times larger. This is another important example of the point made earlier about the ways in which researchers make choices about what, whom and how to count.

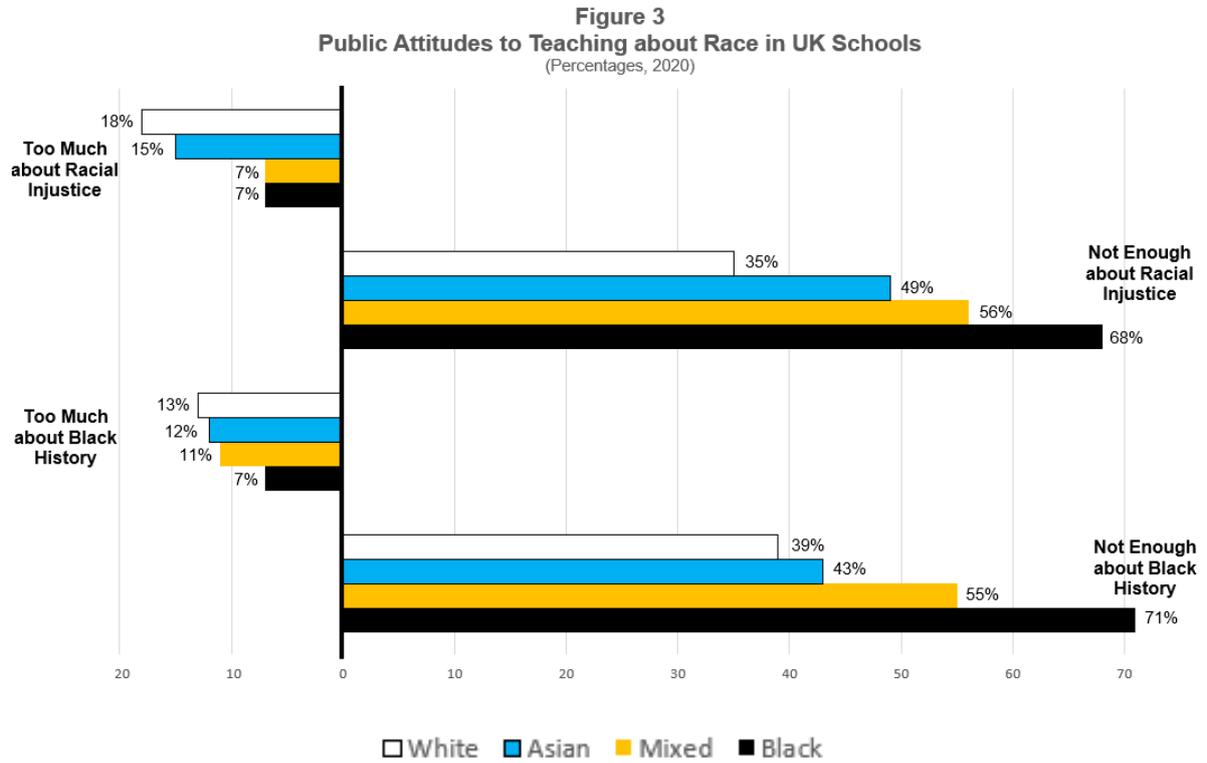
#### **Question 4. How should the school curriculum adapt in response to the ethnic diversity of the country?**

Following this summer's *BlackLivesMatter* protests, and the aggressive (often racist) counter-demonstrations, the content of the school curriculum has become a highly contested arena for political and public debate. There is, of course, no room here for detailed suggestions about necessary changes, but it is widely acknowledged that the curriculum needs to be up-dated to suit the needs of children and young people in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, there is evidence that a more diverse and representative curriculum can have direct positive impacts on students' attendance and achievement.<sup>55</sup>

Some useful observations for advancing the debate include the following:

- *The current school curriculum is out-dated and partial:* the debate about the rights and wrongs of colonial-era statues has over-shadowed much more pressing questions about the content of lessons and exams across the country. Remembering that around one in three school students identify as of minority ethnic heritage, it must surely be a cause for concern that:
  - *The history element of the official UK citizenship test (as described in the Home Office handbook) presents a factually inaccurate picture that erases the presence and actions of minoritized people:* a letter signed by some of the leading historians in the country has noted that 'People in the colonies and people of colour in the UK are nowhere actors in this official history (and) the abolition of slavery is treated as a British achievement, in which enslaved people themselves played no part.' Among the 200+ individuals named in the history, only one of 'colonial origin' appears – the co-founder of England's first curry house in 1810.<sup>56</sup>
  - *The English literature curriculum is almost entirely devoid of ethnic diversity:* a 2020 study by Teach First noted that 'the biggest exam board, accounting for almost 80% of GCSE English literature entries, does not feature a single book by a Black author, and just two books by ethnic minority authors'.<sup>57</sup>
  - *Children's books are dominated by main characters who are White:* Children's literature rarely features main characters who are of minority ethnic heritage (around 5% of books published in 2020). In fact, main characters are almost eight times more likely to be animals (or inanimate objects) than people of colour.<sup>58</sup>
- *There is a public appetite for greater diversity in the curriculum and more teaching about racial injustice.* Contrary to the incendiary language of 'culture wars' and 'identity politics,' which often distorts debate in parts of the press and on social media, *public attitudes in the UK are supportive of teaching that explicitly addresses racial injustice and Black history.*

Drawing on a nationally representative sample of British adults aged 18+ (in June 2020) a large majority in *all* ethnic groups believed that these subjects were taught too little or ‘about the right amount’.<sup>59</sup> As Figure 3 illustrates, the proportion of people advocating for *more* attention to these issues significantly outnumbered those who wanted less in all ethnic groups.



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