

## Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

### Priority Review: Exclusion of Black Pupils “Getting it. Getting it right” (September 2006)

The persistent underachievement of pupils from some ethnic minority backgrounds in our schools is unacceptable. Government want to ensure that all education provision, in the widest sense, plans for and takes into account the needs of minority ethnic pupils as part of all strategic planning and development.

The ‘*Aiming High, Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils*’ strategy (DfES 2003) gives greater impetus to ensure that the needs of minority ethnic pupils are being met with effective and targeted mainstream provision. The “*Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners*” (DfES 2004) makes it clear that Government is wholly committed to promoting equality of opportunity in our schools and to narrowing the educational achievement gap that exists between pupils from some minority ethnic groups and their peers. The creation of initiatives such as the Ethnic Minority Achievement grant (EMAG) has helped DfES make great progress to ensure minority ethnic children are supported and have an equal opportunity to fulfil their potential and succeed. DfES is aware that some minority ethnic pupils do well in schools and the latest Government statistics published in November 2006 showed that the percentage of Black Caribbean pupils achieving 5 good GCSEs is up 10 percentage points since 2003, compared with a national increase of 6 percentage points.

But there is more to be done and Government will not shy away from asking the difficult questions. Every year 1000 Black pupils are permanently excluded and nearly 30,000 receive a fixed period exclusion. Black pupils are three times more likely to be excluded than their White peers, after all other background factors are taking into account. Although the absolute exclusions gap narrowed somewhat during the late 1990s, at a time when overall exclusions rates were falling, the size of the gap appears to have stabilised, and shows no signs of going away. Exclusion is an iconic issue within Black communities and is routinely cited by academics as an example of the way the education system discriminates against Black pupils. The Government is determined that disproportionate exclusions should be investigated and tackled and that every child has the opportunity to fulfil their true potential.

In November 2005, the DfES High Level Group on Race Equality identified exclusions of Black pupils as a priority area for action. This led to a ‘Priority Review’ to examine the issue in depth. The review’s analysis of the issue was developed after a literature review, a series of in-depth interviews with academics, front line staff, voluntary sector organisations and Black young people themselves, and a three-day workshop involving officials from the Department, school inspectors, local authority representatives, headteachers, teachers, and Black parents’ representatives.

The proposals in the review were developed, shaped and fine-tuned by further engagement with these stakeholders. They reflect the concerns raised through the review process: that the exclusions gap is part of a larger set of issues affecting Black pupils within the system; that the system does not give this issue the same

weight as Black communities do; that those working in the system need support to improve their knowledge and understanding of the issue to deliver; and that compliance levers are so far failing to address this.

In September 2006, the findings of the Priority Review were presented to Ministers. The review and its findings have also been shared with those organisations that contributed towards the study. The findings identified concerns about the way the education system treats Black pupils and, in particular, the way that a succession of subjective judgements by school staff appear to impact differently on Black pupils.

The DfES are now developing a forward looking strategy to address the underlying causes of disproportionate exclusions. This will include:

- Through the National Strategies, identifying local authorities and schools with a high proportion of Black Caribbean and Mixed White and Black Caribbean pupils, helping them to take a key role in developing suitable strategic intervention and actions that will target this issue; this will include support for school leaders and staff to equip them with the knowledge and understanding to provide an effective learning environment for these pupils in particular;
- Focused work with relevant organisations to strengthen race equality awareness in school leadership and management programmes;
- Focused work with relevant organisations to strengthen coverage of race equality issues (and their relationship to effective behaviour management) in performance management and initial teacher training;
- Production of guidance and effective practice materials on exclusions and ensuring these are available to both primary and secondary schools;
- Sharpening the awareness of those people who operate our main compliance inspection levers and considering best use of data to support future Government Initiatives.

The Black pupil Exclusions Implementation Group has commissioned Ofsted to conduct a further study on Black pupil exclusions. The outcome of that study is expected to contribute towards our strategy for intervention measures and support our general direction of travel.

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