



Guidelines for  
challenging and  
dealing with racial  
harassment

Education

January 2001

## Introduction

The purpose of these guidelines is to give schools practical support and advice in challenging and dealing with racist incidents.

Bracknell Forest Borough Council welcomes the breadth and diversity of tradition, belief and culture of its educational communities. It seeks to create, maintain and promote an education service in which each person has an equal entitlement to high quality educational opportunities irrespective of race, religion, gender, disability or social background.

To support this, the Local Education Authority believes pupils should learn in a safe and supportive environment. This applies to all pupils.

There is, however, a particular duty. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act, given Royal Assent in November 2000 places a positive duty on the public sector including schools to promote racial equality. The Education Service has a key role to play in this through the curriculum that it delivers and the way in which it responds to incidents as they arise. There is a duty on all schools, regardless of ethnic mix, to have strategies that prevent and address racism and a duty on Ofsted, through the inspection system, to monitor how effectively schools and local authorities are implementing these strategies.

## What is racist behaviour?

The Commission for Racial Equality defines racist behaviour as:

“any hostile or offensive act by a person of one racial group or ethnic origin against a person of another racial group or ethnic origin, or any incitement to commit such an act in:

- Such a manner that it interferes with the peace and comfort of the aggrieved person
- That the person aggrieved fears for their safety
- That the quality of life of the person aggrieved is reduced.”

Racist behaviour is damaging to society in general and to those groups and individual towards whom it is directed in particular. Racial harassment is a particularly direct and often violent form of racism. It could be argued that there is particular need for vigilance where there are isolated populations. Schools have a duty to promote good relations and mutual respect and tolerance between different racial groups. This document has a more narrow focus in terms of the way in which racist behaviour should be challenged and reported.

## **Racist incidents**

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (MacPherson) Reports<sup>1</sup> made specific reference to the duties of LEAs and school governors<sup>2</sup>. One of the recommendations arising from the Inquiry concerned the definition of a racist incident<sup>3</sup>. This has been widely accepted and is:

“any incident that is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person”

Governing Bodies in Bracknell Forest are recommended to adopt this definition<sup>4</sup>.

The following are examples of racist incidents, which may involve pupils, students, teachers, and auxiliary staff. If they occur they should be dealt with and recorded.

### **Disrespect and non co-operation**

- Ridicule of an individual's cultural differences, e.g. food, music, dress, language etc.
- Showing ignorance of a pupil's cultural practices, in a way which makes the pupil feel uncomfortable, belittled or harassed
- Refusal to co-operate with other people because of their ethnic origin

### **Verbal Harassment**

- Derogatory name calling, insults and racist 'jokes'
- Racist comments in the course of discussions
- Verbal abuse and threats

### **Physical harassment**

- Violent attacks or physical intimidation of children and adults of different ethnic backgrounds

### **Other Incidents**

- Damage caused to a person's property which is racially motivated

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<sup>1</sup> The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: Report of an inquiry by Sir William MacPherson of Cluny, The Home Office, February 1999

<sup>2</sup> Recommendation 68: 'that Local Education Authorities and school Governors have the duty to prevent and address racism'.

<sup>3</sup> Recommendation 12. Later in the report, Recommendation 14 states 'that this definition should be universally adopted by the Police, local Government and other relevant agencies'.

<sup>4</sup> The purpose of this definition is not to prejudge whether the motive was racist or not (that may have to be considered as part of any investigation into the incident) but to take full account of the possibility of a racist dimension to the incident.

- Provocative behaviour such as wearing racist badges or insignia
- Racist graffiti
- Bringing racist materials such as leaflets, comics or magazines into the school
- Attempts to recruit other pupils and students into racist organisations
- Incitement of others to behaviour in a racist way

### **Challenging and dealing with racist incidents**

Appropriate procedures need to be established and followed through when an incident occurs. Some general recommendations are set out below. It is recommended that schools adopt such procedures, adapted to their own circumstances and made explicit in their behaviour policy. The context, the age of the children involved and the seriousness of the situation will influence how an individual incident is dealt with.

All incidents need to be acknowledged and talked through even with young children. The following is a suggested approach for dealing with specific incidents:

- Acknowledge the incident, expressing disapproval;
- Give support to the victim, apologise for the incident;
- Identify the racist behaviour;
- Counsel the perpetrator while maintaining pastoral support;
- Explain to those responsible as well as any onlookers what is unacceptable about the incident;
- Consider appropriate action, from the range of sanctions outlined in the school's Behaviour Policy, and follow the school's procedure for recording the incident; and
- Contact both sets of parents if appropriate, explaining the action taken and relating this to the school's behaviour policy.

Where the perpetrator of the incident is a member of staff, the appropriate disciplinary procedures should be invoked.

Taking such steps can only be effective if there is a sound understanding of the purpose. It is important that staff have opportunities to discuss individual incidents, the steps taken and the position and policy of the school towards racist incidents. Individual members of staff should be aware of their roles and responsibilities so that the implementation of the school policy is effective. All staff should treat racist incidents seriously and consistently.

Pupils should be given the opportunity to discuss racism and racist incidents in appropriate curriculum time to ensure that they are sensitive to its causes and effects.

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report made reference to the curriculum<sup>5</sup>. Whilst there are matters for the DfEE to address through the National Curriculum, it is important that schools, in their curriculum reviews, make efforts to ensure that racism is challenged and not inadvertently reinforced. Both the curriculum and the school environment should reflect a positive attitude towards people from all backgrounds.

At regular intervals schools should review and monitor their policies and practices in dealing with and preventing the occurrence of racist incidents.

### **Recording and Monitoring**

Racist incidents have been under-reported in the past and treated as routine disciplinary issues or trivialised due to uncertainty and concern about the possible repercussions. It is important that seemingly minor incidents are recorded. If a more serious incident occurs later on, an accurate record of a previous incident would allow the subsequent incident not to be dealt with in isolation.

Effective monitoring will enable the school to gain a full picture of the nature and frequency of abuse and to measure the effectiveness of any strategies put in place to prevent its occurrence.

Circular 10/99, Social Inclusion: Pupil Support<sup>6</sup> makes it clear that schools should record all racist incidents and that parents and governors should be informed of the nature of the incident and the steps taken to deal with it. Governing Bodies are expected to inform the local Education Authority, on an annual basis of the pattern and frequency of any such incidents.

Schools are therefore asked to:

- Keep a record of all racist incidents and the action taken
- Where an incident is serious, inform parents of its nature and the action taken
- Provide information to the Governing Body on a regular basis
- Report to the LEA on an annual basis

The appendix to this document offers an example of a recording sheet which schools may wish to adopt.

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<sup>5</sup> Recommendation 67: 'that consideration should be given to the amendment of the National curriculum aimed at valuing cultural diversity and preventing racism, in order to better reflect the views of a culturally diverse society'. The DfEE has accepted this.

<sup>6</sup> Paragraph 4.32

**Racist Incident Record Sheet**

Victim: Ethnic Origin: Year Group:

Perpetrator(s): Ethnic Origin: Year Group:

Date, time and location of incident:

Type of incident: (tick appropriate) Disrespect/non co-operation  
Verbal harassment  
Physical harassment  
Damage to property  
Racist graffiti  
Incitement

Witness(es): Pupil/ Adult: Year Group:

Incident reported by: (tick appropriate) Victim  
Observer  
Other – Specify (e.g. parent, teacher, etc)

Action taken/to be taken: (tick appropriate) Discussion with pupil  
Information to class/form teacher  
Referral to Head of Year/House  
Formal discussion with pupil  
Letter to parents  
Meeting with parents  
Headteacher involvement  
Fixed period exclusion  
Permanent exclusion

Please make a brief note of the incident, including details of effect on the victim, medical treatment required, counselling undertake etc. continue overleaf

Signed:

Date:

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<b>Links to other policies</b>	All		
<b>Staff responsible</b>	PMS	<b>Monitoring &amp; Evaluation by</b>	Governors, LA
<b>School Group Responsible</b>	Head, SLT	<b>Governors Committee Responsible</b>	S&SW
<b>Date approved by S&amp;SW</b>	17.04.07	<b>Review Date</b>	Bi-annual
<b>Date approved by FGB</b>	30.04.07		