

Paper 9: Accountability and self-evaluation – messages from Ofsted

This paper

This paper reprints a section of *Race Equality in Education: good practice in schools and local education authorities*, published on its website by Ofsted on 22 November 2005. The section is entitled 'The handling and reporting of race-related incidents' and constitutes paragraphs 24–51 of the complete report.

Summary

24. This section starts with an outline of administrative and legislative requirements for handling and reporting race-related incidents, discusses the definition of such incidents, then sets out effective practice at local authority and school levels.
25. The main findings in this area are as follows:
 - ❑ authoritative, well researched and supportive LEA guidance helped schools tackle race-related incidents effectively
 - ❑ headteachers' strong stance on the unacceptability of racism provided staff with the confidence to manage incidents well
 - ❑ pupils and staff considered that the firm approach of the senior management team to incidents and racism improved relationships between groups of pupils
 - ❑ schools in most LEAs were confident that the LEA would provide effective support where serious incidents occurred; this was borne out by records in several LEAs
 - ❑ there was some under-reporting of incidents because of the perceived lack of confidence in defining and reporting incidents, or lack of clear LEA guidance.

Statutory background

26. One of the recommendations of the Macpherson Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence was that schools should record all race-related incidents, and inform local education authorities. A further recommendation was that Ofsted should examine the implementation of such strategies. The Department for Education and Skills's guidance on behaviour indicates that schools have procedures to record such incidents. The Commission for Racial Equality's *Code of practice on the duty to promote race equality* signals that, in assessing schools' policies, regard should be paid to steps to prevent racist bullying. Finally, the Home Office's *Code of practice: reporting and recording racist incidents* recommends that schools record all such incidents. In terms of school inspections under section 5 of the Education Act 2005, schools are asked by Ofsted to evaluate whether pupils feel safe from racist incidents. Pupils may also be questioned by inspectors on whether they feel free from any form of bullying or harassment within school. The outcomes of those aspects of inspection are taken into account in reaching judgements on, amongst

other things, the overall effectiveness of the school. Under the terms of the Children Act 2004, joint area reviews of services supporting children and young people in a local authority's area will seek evidence of contributions made towards ensuring that pupils are free from bullying and discrimination.

27. The legislation, administrative guidance, and inspectors' expectations consequently signal to schools and LEAs the need to put in place systems for handling and recording race-related incidents. Beyond that, the number and range of types of incident reported to inspectors in the survey, and the adverse impact of racist abuse on victims' attainment and attitudes, show clearly the need to deal with such incidents effectively and proportionately.
28. In deciding what constitutes a racist incident a number of LEAs use the Macpherson definition, with one headteacher summing that up cogently in the phrase "if the child feels the incident is racist, it is". It is for LEAs with their schools to decide what constitutes a racist incident, and inspectors found good practice meant liaison with other partners, such as the police, to ensure that each agency in the local authority's area has a settled, common definition of what represents a race-related incident.
29. The nature of incidents handled and reported in schools in the twelve LEAs visited ranged from verbal abuse, (the largest proportion of incidents, spanning name calling in infant schools to adults verbally abusing pupils), to assaults. The survey found that two principal features provided schools with the confidence and knowledge to tackle incidents effectively. These were guidance provided by LEAs; and the strong leadership of headteachers.

Local authority guidance

30. Authoritative, well researched and supportive guidance makes clear to school staff the need and reasons why such behaviour should not be tolerated. Such guidance, coupled with training, equips schools with knowledge, confidence and firm ground on which to prevent and respond to incidents. The quality of guidance examined by inspectors was, in the main, strong, and school staff said that they had found it to be extremely useful in handling incidents. This section illustrates two examples of guidance provided by LEAs to schools which they found useful in supporting and shaping their approaches to incidents.

Example One

31. In one LEA, the racist incident procedures were developed with the local racial incident action group. The material refers to the relevant Macpherson recommendations, and Ofsted guidance. The LEA uses the Macpherson definition of an incident and makes plain early on in the guidance that all incidents must be recorded. The guidance is put into practice by, for example, each school having a nominated monitoring officer, whose responsibilities include overseeing the handling of all incidents and, importantly, identifying particular trends. The officer's role extends beyond mere processing and tracking, and covers work on developing the curriculum to reflect racism and diversity, as well as training on incidents and the analysis that the RRAA requires.
32. This guidance also refers to behaviour that might be symptomatic of racist and other bullying, as well as providing advice for pupils. It suggests that the educational context and level of adverse personal impact should both be considered as part of the teacher's immediate intervention. It also examines "indirect racism" – in plain terms, stereotyping, such as when pupils with English as an additional language are incorrectly categorised as having special educational needs; Black

boys are assessed as “difficult”; and parents in some minority ethnic groups are involved in school, but only in activities such as modelling traditional dress or cooking. The guidance states that, if an institution does not intervene authoritatively in incidents, there is real danger that the school itself may be viewed by the unsupported victim as colluding with the perpetrator. Inspectors found the guidance to be thoughtful, thorough and coherent. It rightly begins with national policy; sets out central principles; is practical and reasonably detailed; and, when complemented by effective training, was reported to be of great use to teachers and other staff.

Example Two

33. The second set of guidance begins by setting out principles, based on legislation (including the Crime and Disorder Act 1998) and on inspection’s expectations. The guidance states that the Macpherson definition of an incident should be used and goes on to widen the context by referring to curriculum guidance on race equality and Ofsted’s references to race equality. Importantly, the guidance draws the reader’s attention to the LEA’s school self-evaluation material and its references to race equality. The LEA suggests that schools adopt a preventative approach on incidents, through mentioning anti-racism in schools’ prospectuses and formalising what some schools do informally at induction meetings with parents. The guidance also sets out a range of incident types, and offers suggestions on handling each one. They range from name calling, to comments made in lessons, to assaults. This approach is seen as welcome, and of material help, to staff. The guidance also advises that a collated report on incidents should be included in the Governors’ report to parents. Inspectors found the guidance to be clearly written, offering practical suggestions to senior management teams on how to handle particular kinds of incidents.
34. In light of the good practice seen in the survey, the following areas should be covered in local authorities’ revision of guidance to schools on handling and reporting incidents:
- relevant legislation and administrative guidance
 - inspection’s expectations
 - the definition of what constitutes an incident
 - the adverse educational and emotional impacts of racism on pupils
 - the incorporation of race equality into school self-evaluation
 - advocacy of preventative approaches to racism, such as covering anti-racism in a school prospectus and at parents’ induction evenings
 - the range of incident types
 - ways of handling incident types, exemplified by anonymised case studies
 - guidance on how to record race-related incident reports
 - advising that a digest of incidents should be made available to governing bodies, and mentioned in schools’ annual report to parents
 - outlining the use made by local authority officers and elected members of data and collated digests of incident reports
 - helpline numbers for further guidance and advice
 - contact names and telephone numbers in case of a serious incident.

35. Finally, in most local authorities visited in the survey, local authority officers prepared collated reports for members' consideration. The best examples included: breakdowns by geographic area; by phase; by victim and perpetrator type, such as teaching staff as victims; and incident type. Such reports conclude with details of action taken by schools, including where there have been exclusions, or police involvement. Elected members would then consequently be able to take a strategic view on schools' and officers' responses to rises or decreases in incident rates.

The role of headteachers and leadership teams

36. Although effective guidance offers authoritative support to schools, the role of the headteacher and the leadership team is crucial to the success of such schools in handling incidents, and maintaining a racially harmonious atmosphere. Zero tolerance of racism depends on the headteacher's insistence that incidents are treated seriously and crucially through putting this policy into action. Effective practice was found when headteachers made their position clear at induction meetings with parents of new pupils. One headteacher used an emergency assembly, when a serious incident occurred, to reinforce the school's zero tolerance of racist attitudes. In one primary school, the headteacher confronted the negative attitudes of a small minority of parents, and made plain that she was not prepared to tolerate racist attitudes in and around her school.
37. Other effective leadership by senior management teams in this area involved, in one primary school, the new headteacher monitoring and reviewing the racist incident log and identifying particular areas where staff required further training, and where possible under-reporting might occur. A programme was put into place in the school to train dinner supervisors, and involved pupils acting out three short scenarios:
- ❑ *'The Push'* - reinforcing how to resolve a dispute between pupils
 - ❑ *'Grace's Story'* – to show the effects of persistent, intentional victimisation
 - ❑ *'Jew Boy'* – dealing with a racist incident.

The work here generated knowledge and confidence amongst staff in managing subsequent incidents.

38. In one primary school, a log has been diligently kept and reported to the LEA since 1999. The management team saw to it that all staff, including lunchtime supervisors and part-time staff, received training on reporting and recording incidents to ensure consistency of approach and application. Dealing with incidents is a component of the equal opportunities policy, which is managed by the deputy headteacher, and is part of the wider school policy on behaviour. Most recorded incidents are linked with name calling. Action is taken immediately and for all incidents the school involves parents at appropriate stages. Sanctions follow a code of conduct, which is well understood by pupils, parents and staff. The same code is applied to clubs and other activities before and after school. The procedure for monitoring involves all staff and members of the governing body.
39. In one primary school, the headteacher held a meeting between victim and perpetrator a month or so after the initial incident and interview. That sent a strong message to the perpetrator and to others involved about how the headteacher viewed such matters. In another school, the headteacher sent letters to both the victim's and the perpetrator's parents, emphasising how seriously the matter was

taken by the school. Once again, this approach sent out clear messages about the unacceptability of racism within the school.

40. Although the survey focused on schools and LEAs exhibiting effective work on race equality, inspectors encountered some weaker practice on handling and reporting incidents. This was characterised by a lack of confidence in defining and reporting such incidents; reported lack of clarity in LEA guidance on incidents; and under-reporting of incidents.

The impact of effective work

41. The impact of effective work is twofold. At school level, firm approaches to racism by the school's leadership affected both staff and pupils. Staff interviewed endorsed the approach and commented that addressing racist incidents was seen as a normal part of the school's behaviour strategy. In schools where staff are confident about handling incidents, action was swift, proportionate, discreet but influential and effective. Staff at such schools commented that they had a collective understanding about what represented an incident and the types of incidents, as a consequence of effective LEA guidance, and staff training (including non-teaching staff).
42. Pupils also welcomed the firm approach to racism on the part of the school's leadership. In one school, a pupil commented 'there is racism outside the gates, but not here'. Pupils commented that in such schools, they felt confident in reporting incidents; that incidents would be dealt with quickly; and that the school took racism and bullying seriously. Pupils in such schools understood that boundaries were clearly drawn, and knew that the school did not take racist behaviour lightly. The strong line taken by headteachers contributed to a harmonious ethos at such schools. Finally, parents expressed confidence in the ability of such schools to deal with incidents effectively and confidently.
43. The second impact was the effect on the numbers of incidents reported. In some LEAs visited in this survey there was an increase in the number of incidents; and, in others, a drop between 2002/03 and 2003/04. Reasons for **increases** in numbers of incidents were said to be: the impact of external events, such as the Iraq war and its aftermath; and/or greater confidence on the part of staff in handling and reporting incidents. The reasons for **decreases** in incidents reported were said to be: pupils' growing realisation of the seriousness of incidents, and the sanctions available; and/or improved cohesiveness amongst groups of pupils.
44. It is impossible, given the number of schools and pupils in these LEAs, to assess how much of an effect the quality of handling and of reporting processes has had on the increase or decrease in incidents reported. Inspectors found, however, that the strong line taken by headteachers in schools visited has helped in developing a more harmonious ethos in those schools. Pupils from minority ethnic groups see and acknowledge that racist behaviour is tackled confidently and effectively in their schools and the racial harmony is testimony to the effective handling of racism by headteachers and staff.
45. The characteristics seen in the survey of good practice on handling and reporting incidents are as follows:
- the senior management team ensures that pupils, parents and staff are aware of the school's approach to race-related incidents, through publishing the school's policy in the school's prospectus, and mentioning the policy at induction sessions with new pupils and parents

- ❑ pastoral managers conduct regular staff audits to establish whether they have received training on incidents, and initiate in-house or LEA-led training events where necessary, reflecting both the school's policy, and the LEA's guidance and reporting procedures
- ❑ pastoral managers ensure that incidents are properly recorded, and responses judged appropriately to reflect the seriousness of the incident.
- ❑ the adverse effect on the victim is emphasised, with the accent placed on an assertive approach to perpetrators (possibly through role play – such as putting the perpetrator in the shoes of the victim)
- ❑ parents/carers of perpetrators are apprised of the incident, and the action taken by the school.
- ❑ in the case of serious incidents (such as repeated verbal abuse, or physical intimidation) the views of the headteacher and the relevant LEA officer are sought, before determining sanctions
- ❑ the number of incidents handled and recorded is reported on at least a termly basis to governors, and annually to all parents.

Partnership working

46. This section now focuses on examples of how partnership working between the LEA and a school has supported the handling and reporting of incidents. Although the majority of schools visited were submitting racist incident returns to their LEA, in one LEA staff said that not all incidents were logged and reported, but were dealt with informally, partly because it was considered by headteachers that 'first time offenders' should be dealt with informally. In addition, the LEA's guidance was said to lack clarity.
47. The role of an LEA extends beyond providing written guidance and training courses, to supporting a school when a serious incident occurs, and involving other local partners as appropriate. Most schools visited expressed confidence in the ability of the LEA to respond effectively in the event of a serious incident.
48. In one LEA, a headteacher noticed an incident between racial groups outside school, and after receiving what she considered to be an inadequate response from the local police, contacted a senior LEA officer. He, in turn, got in touch with the area commander and explained the background and concerns of the headteacher that the issue might escalate. Given the good relationships at that high level, the commander was able to ensure there were police officers at the school the next day to prevent possible escalation.
49. In another LEA, a secondary school reported tension between groups of girls from the Somalian and Turkish communities that had spilled out beyond the school gates. The school's senior management team, its governors and the LEA worked effectively with a counsellor to mediate with the two groups, and that intervention assisted in defusing a situation that could, otherwise, have escalated. Both incidents reflect the importance of seeking advice from experienced LEA officers.
50. Proactive and effective work by an LEA's link advisers on race-related incidents was also seen. For example, an analysis of incidents by LEA officers which compared schools with similar intakes indicated that some schools may be under-reporting incidents: potential under-reporting was then tackled in subsequent link advisers'

visits. In one case, a termly monitoring of schools signalled that inclusion was not being properly addressed in a secondary school. As a result, race equality was put on the agenda of the link adviser's visit. The ethnic minority achievement team was then invited in by the headteacher to discuss minority ethnic attainment and inclusion. There were subsequently no further reports of an apparent failure to address inclusion at that school.

Conclusion

51. What emerges clearly is that judicious support by the local authority, and clear leadership by the senior management team, is a forceful combination. Improved staff confidence in the light of the senior management team's lead contributes to pupils' perception that racism is not tolerated, and firm action will be taken with perpetrators, and that all groups of pupils are treated with respect. That, in turn, contributes to the pupils' sense that all groups are valued, and that greater harmony exists within the school. The harmonious atmosphere contributes to the improved well-being and education of pupils.
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