# Teaching learners from BME backgrounds

*“...while it is important to understand another person’s religion, ethnicity and culture in order to appreciate more fully who they are, it is then simplistic to define them by one of these alone. Stereotyping often goes further than that. Many African Caribbean boys, for instance, feel defined in school just by their blackness; a crude popular definition of what it is to be a Muslim is now developing”* (Ajegbo et al 2007:29)

‘One size’ does not fit all teachers any better than it fits all pupils. What we each bring to teaching our learners who have BME backgrounds will be influenced by our own ethnicity, by the ethnic diversity we have experienced at home, school and work, and by the attitudes to ethnic diversity that we have experienced. We hope that trainees and NQTS will read this guidance critically and will personalise it.

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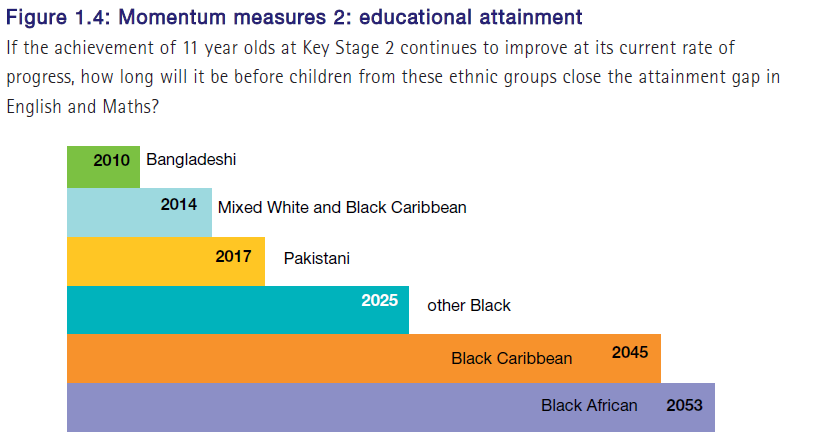
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# Why foc us on raising Blac k and minority ethnic (BME) pupils’ achiev ements?

National data on educational achievement reveal that what pupils gain from their schooling differs very considerably according to their ethnic backgrounds. The Cabinet Office (2007:25, cited in DCSF 2009) flagged the implications starkly, extrapolating recent progress to predict how long it might take to close the attainment gap at age 11:



Every year the government publishes a national analysis of *Attainment by Pupil Characteristics* (including ethnicity). The most recent report (DfE 2013) shows that pupils with certain Black or minority ethnic backgrounds continue to lag behind the national average in national assessments and examinations:

*“Chinese pupils remain the highest attaining ethnic group. The percentage of Chinese pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grade A\* to C or equivalent including English and mathematics GCSEs or iGCSEs is 17.6 percentage points above the national average... Pupils from a black background remain the lowest performing*

*group. The percentage of black pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grade A\* to C or equivalent including English and mathematics GCSEs or iGCSEs is 4.2 percentage points below the national average”*

While this shows that race equality in terms of educational outcomes requires more work, it does not mean that every school is replicating the particular inequalities shown in national data, nor that every pupil with a Black African or Black Caribbean background will underachieve, nor that every pupil with a Chinese background will overachieve. National data cannot tell us everything about a school or a pupil, and we must not use it to create new stereotypes, lower expectations or to justify attainment gaps.

Trainees and NQTS should be aware of the national data and of any attainment gaps revealed in their school’s current data, but they should focus their work on factors within their control.

Teachers are required to *“set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils”* , ”*establish a safe and stimulating environment for pupils rooted in mutual respect”* (Teachers’ Standard 1) and have *“a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils and to differentiate appropriately”* (Teachers’ Standard 5).

How these are implemented in an increasingly diverse country challenges many school communities. For many teachers and schools a fear of “getting it wrong” prevents them from addressing the issues faced by pupils with BME backgrounds; for others an investment into assisting pupils with EAL is seen as sufficient. There is no *“magic formula”* (Rollock 2009:8) for teaching pupils from a BME background but there are practical steps that teachers can take which will benefit the school community and allow all pupils to thrive regardless of socio-economic background, skin colour, language or race. To begin to accomplish this, teachers must have a sound understanding of the issues facing BME learners. However, caution needs to be exercised as *“the BME population cannot be viewed as homogenous as the challenges within and between groups vary starkly”* (Wells 2010:1).

# Outstanding teaching

In many respects the key to teaching pupils with BME backgrounds is the same as that to teaching any pupil: to respect them, get to know them as individuals, hold out high expectations, identify their strengths and areas for development, identify potential barriers to learning , select and use appropriate teaching and learning strategies -including differentiation- to best serve their learning and progress, and use assessment to monitor progress and inform our ongoing planning and teaching. There are, however, additional factors to consider. Some **but not all** pupils with BME backgrounds will face obstacles that white pupils do not.

# Additional challenges that pupils with BME backgrounds may face

* Racism
* Struggles with identity - particularly for Mixed heritage children
* Economic disadvantage
* Lack of role models
* Low teacher expectations
* Weak parent-school relationships
* Community pressures (Springate 2008)
* Religious requirements
* Language

The National Union of Teachers (2007, cited by North West Regional Development Agency 2010:11) found that *“for young black boys there has been a long term concern about peer pressure/culture of anti-learning, lack of role models, teacher expectations, institutional racism, parent-school relationships”* For other community groups other factors play major roles such as *“community expectations and a lack of English spoken at home….These factors are not experienced consistently even within BME groups and deeper or complex inter-relationships between authorities, economic factors, relationships within the school and with parent/carers and community and family issues”* (Wells 2010:12) may also play a significant role.

A pupil with a BME a background may face none, some or all of the above.

# Pupils with BME bac kgrounds i n ‘mainly w hite’ sc hools

We need to avoid any assumption that teaching in a predominantly white school negates the need to address ethnic diversity. Cline et al (2002), in their study of schools in which only 4 - 6% of pupils were from minority ethnic backgrounds , discovered that:

* Few mainly white schools adequately prepared pupils for adult life in a culturally and ethnically diverse society
* ‘One size fits all’ solutions created extra problems for pupils with BME backgrounds
* Many pupils with BME backgrounds in mainly white schools “played white”
* Many teachers minimised the significance and value of cultural and ethnic diversity

# Understanding our own background and experience

The Runnymede trust, whilst training NQTs, noted that the fear of “getting it wrong” reflected “*a wider inability of white NQTs (on their training) to view themselves as part of an ethnic group where ‘race’ is seen as only relevant to Black and minority ethnic groups. This lack of understanding about their own ethnicity and diversity within white groups results in race equality and cultural diversity being viewed as an insurmountable challenge at odds with and irrelevant to their own experiences”* (Rollock 2009:9). The first step to preparing to teach learners from a BME background needs to begin with the teacher themselves. A greater degree of understanding of a teacher’s own ethnicity will equip them with the necessary tools to understand more clearly the needs of all their pupils and enable them to identify their own ethnicity and in doing so create a greater degree of mutual understanding and respect.

# Preparing ALL pupils for life in our increasingly diverse society, AND creating an inclusive classroom

*“It is not enough to teach children how to read, write and count. Education has to cultivate mutual respect for others and the world in which we live, and help people forge more just, inclusive and peaceful societies.”* (UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon at the 100 day countdown to the Day of World Peace: cited by INEE 2013)

# Proactive strategies:

* Educate about diversity and help pupils to value it
* Investigate discrimination: myths, stereotypes and realities
* Promote mutual respect
* Teach pupils how to respond to racist comments and incidents within the school
* Challenge pupils view of culture: enable learners to understand that everyone has a culture and a world view which inform their own values and behaviours
* Enable pupils to embrace and understand their own identity through identity games or PPT
* Celebrate achievement and excellence regardless of ethnicity i.e. highlight Black inventors
* Educate about diverse (BME ) contributions to history and to modern life and include in general curriculum planning to avoid a purely tokenistic approach (“Ethnic Diversity in Curriculum planning” leaflet)
* Educate pupils to read critically the news and electronic media (especially that relating to social diversity)
* Communicate effectively with parents and engage them within the school community e.g. story sacks in primary school

# Reactive strategies

* Respond promptly and proportionately to racist comments or incidents, guided by schools policies and strategies (see *Responding to racist comments or jokes* (Givens 2009) and *Responding to Islamophobic comments or jokes* (Bennett & Givens 2010)
* Set clear rules for behaviour including transparent school policy on racism
* Monitor, record, report and act on data so as to reduce the frequency and range of future incidents
* Enforce appropriate and proportionate sanctions
* Identify and employ proactive measures (above) to prevent (or reduce the frequency or severity ) of further incidents

# Pupils with English as an Additional Language

Some pupils with BME backgrounds also have English as an Additional Language, which can create the need for further differentiation. These needs are complex and may not be apparent:

* + While EAL pupils often develop ‘interpersonal’ communication skills within two years, it takes five to seven years to acquire cognitive and academic language proficiency to acquire for example the full range of literacy skills needed to cope with the literacy demands of GCSE English. (Cummins 2000:3)
  + A silent (receptive) period is natural in the early stages of second languages learning, and not a sign of learning difficulties
  + A focus on mother tongue is a valuable channel to learning support and not a hindrance (teachers should not advocate the use of English only either at home or at school) e.g. Work of Bristol Academy on promoting mother language as an asset language on Teachers TV.
  + Bilingualism should be valued as a special achievement

For guidance on teaching pupils with English as an Additional Language see the EAL topic in the *PGCE Secondary Professional Studies* section of ELE- <http://vle.exeter.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=896>or in *Topic 6* of the *PGCE Primary Professional Studies* section of ELE - [http://vle.exeter.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=914&topic=6](http://vle.exeter.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=914&amp;topic=6)

# Summary of Strategies and how they relate to the Teachers’ Standards

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Strategies** | **Teachers’ Standards** | **Example** |
| Set high expectations, rooted in a rich knowledge of BME pupils’ past and current attainment | 1; 5;  6; also pream  -ble | * set challenging teaching objectives, informed by an up- to-date knowledge of pupils’ progress and attainment maintained through the use of a range of range of appropriate assessment strategies |
| Make discriminatory language and behaviour unacceptable in your teaching spaces and lessons | 7;  also part 2 | * demonstrate respect, consideration and fairness towards pupils * value pupils as individuals and respond to them consistently * create a purposeful and safe atmosphere where pupils respect each other and co-operate well * ensure that pupils feel that they are valued equally and are confident that they will be supported by their teachers and peers. |
| Respond promptly to racist comments and incidents, making appropriate use of school procedures | 7;  also part 2 | * recognise and respond appropriately to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. verbal and physical behaviour that is threatening or demeaning or may create obstacles to pupils’ learning; do this in the context of school &   national policies and procedures. |
| Question and challenge stereotypes | 1; 3;  7; also  part 2 | * teach about stereotypes in Circle time / Tutor time / Citizenship /PSHE; identify and discuss stereotypes that arise in the context of other subjects * avoid stereotyping , reinforce positive messages about ethnic & cultural diversity and provide a range of texts and teaching materials that do the same * demonstrate use of non-stereotyping vocabulary in your teaching |
| Stretch and support pupils’ from all ethnic groups, including pupils with EAL, to ensure that they can make good progress | 1; 5 | * plan and teach lessons that take account of and support pupils’ varying strengths and needs so that pupils from all ethnic groups can make good progress * select resources that implicitly acknowledge and value diversity * with assistance where appropriate, identify levels of attainment of pupils with EAL * provide appropriate challenge and support to pupils with EAL |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Know relevant policies, guidance and legislation and how to work with them  Know your limits: seek advice and support from mentors and other colleagues | 7;  also part 2 | * be familiar with the school’s Equality & Diversity policies (including Race Equality Policy) and procedures * deal with incidents of racial / religious harassment or bullying, following appropriate policies & reporting procedures, seeking help from experienced teachers where appropriate * know where to find out about key legislation (Children Act 1989, 2004; Education Act 1996; Education and Inspections Act 2006; Human Rights Act 1998; Protection from Harassment 1997; Special Educational Needs   & Disability Act 2001) |
| Be well informed: from literature, colleagues, pupils | 8;  also part 2 | * draw on your awareness and understanding of pupils’ social, cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic backgrounds, disability, sex, sexual orientation and social class to support learning and to teach in ways that engage and challenge pupils * be aware of the specific challenges which may be faced by children from a variety of (respective) backgrounds * use your knowledge of pupils’ interests and motivations positively in your teaching |
| Beware of discriminatory differential treatment / expectations | 5 | * avoid making assumptions about their pupils’ abilities or potential based on their backgrounds, sex, sexual orientation, social class etc * show fairness in dealings with pupils; avoid showing favouritism * establish positive professional relationships with pupils, and maintain high expectations |
| Find opportunities in Circle Time, Tutor time, PSHE Citizenship, AND other NC subjects to address issues of difference in a structured way | 7 | * use stories, poetry, drama, TV clips, music to help pupils ‘wear someone else’s shoes’ * identify culturally and ethically diverse figures who have contributed to subject disciplines (e.g. scientists, inventors, mathematicians, authors), our history and modern life. |
| Build positive professional relationships with parents of pupils with BME backgrounds | 8;  also pream  -ble | * work with parents of pupils with BME backgrounds in ways that are welcoming and accessible |
| Assist pupils to understand the nature of culture and to recognise their own cultural and ethnic backgrounds | 1 | * Plan and teach lessons through which pupils identify their own cultural backgrounds and their world views * enable pupils to explore the aspects of their identity, belonging and belief structures that inform their values and behaviour, through age appropriate activities/games |
| ©Nick Givens & Ruth Flanagan 2013 | | |

# Conclusion

It is crucial for teachers to maintain high expectations of all their pupils regardless of their ethnicity, social class or gender: stereotyping can damage a pupil’s educational development as they may lower their own expectations to meet those of their teacher.

A fuller understanding of culture and difference is essential for all learners and teachers to enable them to live and work in an increasingly diverse country. Additionally, effective teaching on ethnicity and diversity from an early age may help to stem the growth of racism. As educators, we need to embrace and celebrate diversity in every area of the curriculum to facilitate the educational development of all their pupils regardless of ethnicity.

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# A small sample of links and teaching resources

*100 Great Black Britons* (Biographies) [http://www.100greatblackbritons.com](http://www.100greatblackbritons.com/) Compiled as a response to the BBC Great Britons debate that took place in 2003. Patrick Vernon, founder of black heritage website *Every Generation* saw that no black people even made it to the Top 100, due in part to many people being unaware of black achievements and contributions made over the centuries.

*Black Inventor Online Museum* [http://www.blackinventor.com](http://www.blackinventor.com/)

*Britkid website* [http://www.britkid.org](http://www.britkid.org/)

*“This is a website about race, racism and life - as seen through the eyes of the Britkids. Would you like to...hang out with a Britkid, or go into town?”* Designed for pupils in mainly white schools, the appearance of the website now looks a little dated, but content remains highly relevant

*Channel 4: Race- science’s last taboo* <http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/R/racedebate/index.html>

<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/race-and-intelligence-sciences-last-taboo> accessed 13/10/16

*Equality and Human Rights Commission* <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/Pages/default.aspx>

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/search?text=human+rights> accessed 13/10/16

*Let’s kick racism out of football* <http://www.kickitout.org/>

*Race Equality Teaching*: a **practitioner’s journal** published in three issues per year

<http://www.trentham-books.co.uk/acatalog/Race_Equality_Teaching.html>

<https://www.ucl-ioe-press.com/journals/race-equality-teaching/> accessed 13/10/16

*Show racism the red card: Fans and footballers against racism:*

<http://www.srtrc.org/educational/teachers-area/home>

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<http://www.srtrc.org/get-involved/football-clubs> also accessed 13/10/16