

## GEORGE GREEN' SCHOOL – PREVENTATION OF RACISM AND THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

### Project Title

Inclusion through focusing on Anti-Racism in Education at George Green's School – A benefit not a cost (part 2)

### Aim

To continue to identify and share good practice about embedding the principles of anti-racism in every aspect of school life.

### Objectives

#### From an Anti-racism perspective:

#### 1. Investigate the experiences and perceptions of students and staff.

Within the school community different people see and experience racism and education in different ways. The aim of this aspect of the project is to explore:

- **With students and staff their experiences and perceptions of anti-racist policies/practices within the school**
- With students and staff whether the school values and encourages them in recognising and valuing their cultural/racial identity
- With staff from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds their perceptions of career development within the school
  - How students and staff contribute to developing anti-racist practices and culture within the school

#### 2. Examine policies, practices, processes, procedures and school culture.

The aim of this aspect of the project is to ensure that all forms of unwitting stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination are identified, examined and understood. Existing policies and procedures will be examined for examples of good practice.

#### 3. Write up the findings of the existing good practices, and also identify what further issues have been raised, in order to further support the School Development Plan 2000-2004.

### Introduction

George Green's School demonstrates a strong commitment to equal opportunities. Under the leadership of the current Principal, Kenny Frederick, Inclusion has become a school priority. The Equal Opportunities Policy, with the slogan "All Different, All Equal" is widely publicised and displayed along with posters, which show positive images of the diverse student population. The School Development Plan includes several references to Inclusion.

Under the Inclusion umbrella, racism is an issue, given the nature of the school's location. Situated in the south of the Isle of Dogs, the area was traditionally a white working class area with many people working in the docks. With the decline in this industry in the 'Island' due to the use of larger ships, which cannot navigate the Thames this far, employment opportunities have changed. Jobs in the docks were often restricted to family connections so it is not surprising that the ethnic mix of the community has now changed as the nature of the available work has changed.

Today the school population consists of approximately 50% White, 30% Bangladeshi heritage, 7% Black and 6% Chinese/Vietnamese. Many families in the latter category came to this country as a result of the Vietnam War in the 1970s.

Within this context, the school embarked on the project.

### Research Activities

Research was carried out by Meena Patel and Sarah Wilkinson in the Spring and Summer Terms 2001.

Confidential questionnaires for staff and students were drawn up by MP and SW and agreed by the Principal at the start of the project. Initially the project suggested a working group from within the school, which would work with the consultants to carry out the research. It became apparent that difficulties recruiting staff on a short term and long term basis would make this impractical.

The school felt that confidentiality was important so that people would talk freely about their experiences. The use of external consultants was also a benefit here as expressing one's views frankly is often easier to an outsider rather than to a colleague.

Separate questionnaires were written for students and for staff (see appendix).

MP and SW spent some time in the school becoming familiar with the environment prior to starting the research. Familiarisation activities included a tour of the school, meetings with staff and students and lesson observations. It was important to absorb something of the ethos and atmosphere of the school. Every school is different and has its own distinct 'personality'. An awareness of this 'personality' is important when assimilating research findings. Both MP and SW felt the school was a very positive place in terms of equal opportunities and anti-racism. Positive images and positive language helped to generate a feeling that this was a place that encouraged respect for others. MP observed, as an Asian woman, that she felt the environment was 'safe'.

MP and SW were able to carry out confidential discussions based on the questionnaires with the following:

- the school council (Years 7 - 11, from a variety of ethnic backgrounds but mainly white)
- a group of eleven 6<sup>th</sup> form students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds
- a group of three Bangladeshi heritage girls (Year 10)
- a group of four Bangladeshi heritage boys (Year 9)
- a group of five white girls (Years 9 and 10)
- a group of three white boys (Years 9 and 10)
- a group of four Black girls (Years 9 and 10)
- a group of four Black boys (Years 9 and 10)
- a group of three Chinese girls (Years 9 and 10)
- a group of three Chinese boys (Year 10)

- the Year 8 council
- individual members of staff from a variety of ethnic backgrounds with varying lengths of service in the school
- a group of supervisors

Some single sex/ethnic groups were interviewed for two reasons: to try to discover if they shared experiences; and as a way of encouraging them to talk openly.

During an early visit to the school it emerged that the School Council had distributed some questionnaires to students relating to equal opportunities in May 2000 and had not collated the responses. They had been interested in learning whether students understood the Equal Opportunities Policy and to investigate issues relating to its implementation. MP and SW offered to take some of these and collate the aspects related to equal opportunities generally and racism specifically. The responses from two different year groups were collated in this way and the outcomes are integrated into this report.

The school was committed to and supportive of the project from the outset and made appropriate arrangements to facilitate the work of MP and SW.

## **Research Findings**

The project objectives cover four main areas and these headings are used to organise and present the research findings.

### **Student responses**

#### **Experiences and perceptions racism and of anti-racist policies/ practices/procedures within the school**

##### **Equal Opportunities Policy**

All students interviewed were aware of the school's Equal Opportunities Policy and referred to "All different, all equal". They said they are told about the policy before they join the school, it is in their journal, it is talked about in assemblies, there are posters on the walls and it features in newsletters. The majority feel it is good to have a policy, they understand the policy but they do not believe it is followed by everyone in the school.

"The equal opportunities policy makes people feel more comfortable - it is good because society has discrimination".

" The policy should state punishments".

##### **Experiences of racism**

All students interviewed had either direct or indirect experiences of racism in school. In many cases it was name-calling, stereotyping or feeling they had not been treated fairly. Students observed that sometimes teachers say that a conflict between students is not racist when it is. Sometimes it is interpreted as racism by adults when it isn't. Some pupils may accuse others of racism because they know it will "get to them" - they make out it is racism when it isn't.

However, many commented that George Green's is better than other schools in terms of racism and is moving in the right direction ("it is better than when I first came here in 1995 but there is room for improvement"). They seemed to base their comments on experiences of neighbours, friends and relations at other schools; and most of their comparisons seemed to be with other schools in the area. It is unlikely that they really know what it is like in other schools but they certainly have the perception that George Green's is better.

There is an expectation that most staff will deal with racist incidents ("the school tries hard to address racism"). However, some pupils feel that some teachers are not very aware. Negative comments included references to staff believing the stereotypes, having favourites, not listening to what the students say, believing what they want to believe, not practising what they preach. Amongst Year 11, Bangladeshi heritage students were the least likely to feel treated fairly and equally but in Year 9 this group was the most likely to feel this way.

For many students, racism is seen as a problem between Asians and whites, Chinese students in particular seem to feel it has little to do with them. Asian students seemed to feel that white students benefit from preferential treatment, while white students felt the same way about Asian students.

### **Curriculum**

When questioned about the curriculum, students mentioned that they learn about racism on Social Education Days, in R.E. and in history. Further questioning elicited a description of lower school R.E. as being about different religions, while for GCSE they carry out an investigation into racism in the media.

In history, students said they learn about slavery, but this was seen by Black students as negative Black history rather than positive Black history. Black students feel they get a lot of attention in class when Black/racism issues arise and it can make them feel uncomfortable. Black students said they would like to learn about positive Black history, to engage in more challenging activities and to go into issues in more depth.

Students have mixed feelings about Social Education Days. Some students enjoy them but others feel they are boring. Others commented that they don't have very many and there are big gaps from one to the next.

Students feel that it is good to learn about racism and to learn about cultures other than your own ("It prevents fights").

Some white girls said that they learn a lot about Muslims, Chinese and Vietnamese but they don't learn about white culture.

"We should have more talking, discussions and activities about equal opportunities and less reading and writing".

In general, students made far more references to a multi-cultural curriculum than an anti-racist curriculum. The idea seems to be that if everyone becomes more familiar and knowledgeable about different cultures it will lead to the elimination of racism.

#### **Whether the school values and encourages students and staff in recognising and valuing their cultural/racial identity**

Most students mentioned school closure/time off for Eid. This was frequently followed by a discussion about Chinese New Year, when time was allowed but it had to be initiated by the parents. They seemed to feel there was an inconsistency here in the way Chinese students were treated compared with Muslim students. This observation was not confined to the Chinese students.

Bangladeshi heritage girls felt their culture was valued. They talked about a fashion show, and said they can wear Shalwar Kameez on Equal Opportunities Days. They referred to the prayer room provided for Muslim students. However, they were the only group of students to say they felt their culture was valued.

Black and Chinese students made it clear they do not feel valued and respected. White students seemed to lack an awareness of their own culture/identity. Bangladeshi heritage boys seemed to have a negative view of school in the aftermath of a recent conflict involving Asian and white boys where they felt a Bangladeshi heritage boy had been treated unfairly.

A member of the School Council made the observation that "each culture feels neglected to some extent". It was also interesting that Black and white students thought there were far more Asians in the school than there actually are (estimates ranged from 50% and 85%).

### **How students and staff contribute to developing anti-racist practices and culture within the school**

Students were positive about the roles of the School Council and Year Councils. They saw them both as agents for change and an opportunity to be heard. However, some feel that change through the school/year council can take a long time and it may be quicker to get hold of the 'right' teacher.

Students feel that most staff take racism seriously and will take action if they report a racist incident. Students comment that staff frequently refer to "All different, all equal".

Punishment will often be exclusion but many students questioned whether this is really a punishment. Some students might respond better to a mediation session with their victim and this might make them change their behaviour in the future.

Another way in which students contribute is through peer listening/counselling.

All students were positive about the seating plans, which mean that students work with a variety of pupils in lessons. They see the benefits of mixing with students with whom they would not normally spend time.

### **Staff responses**

#### **Experiences and perceptions racism and of anti-racist policies/ practices/procedures within the school**

All staff were positive about the effort made to tackle racism. Staff said that George Green's tries very hard to be an anti-racist school. Racism is taken seriously. Equal opportunities is seen as high profile but one teacher said that there should be a separate Anti-Racist Policy - it should not be under the umbrella of Inclusion.

Staff described a great many strengths, which included taking racism seriously; not tolerating racism; commitment from staff; having a policy which is a working document not just a piece of paper; staff willingness to challenge students and parents; a shared understanding of equal opportunities; and good leadership, ethos and organisation [enhanced since Kenny's arrival].

A frequent sentiment was "The school is good and is going in the right direction".

Staff considered good practice to include seating plans (by Year 11 they choose to mix); displays and posters; and the rapid removal of graffiti. SMT were praised for dealing quickly with racist incidents and for the ways in which incidents are dealt with - everyone gets a chance to put their views across. One member of staff observed that Bangladeshi heritage boys do well academically against national trends. With respect to the curriculum, staff were positive about Social Education Days and curriculum content in some subject areas. Subjects mentioned were A' level history, English, geography, R.E. (everyone's rights), science (all the same except colour), maths (SMILE).

At the same time a number of issues and concerns were raised. Staff have witnessed racist language and fights. One member of staff suggested that pupils find it easier to be disciplined by white teachers than Black/Asian teachers. There is also a gender balance amongst staff but not a racial balance.

A number of comments related to white students: white students generally underachieve; white working class students lack an identity and find discussions about other racial groups threatening, they feel insecure; and exclusions include more white boys and mixed race students (both groups lack strong role models). The observation was also made that it is white people who plan and organise the Social Education Days.

"Any white middle class institution will have a tendency to discriminate. The school wants passive students but wants to empower them at the same time. This does not always work."

### **Whether the school values and encourages students and staff in recognising and valuing their cultural/racial identity**

A large number of respondents said that the school includes all members of the school community. Staff recognised the effort made by the school to work with the local community as well as the difficulties of working with parents due to class and language barriers.

Support staff interviewed were positive about the fact that they are included in meetings and said that the Principal is very clear with students that they must show respect [adults are in charge whether or not they are teachers].

However, one member of staff suggested that some staff are not committed to the policy of inclusion and felt there were limited opportunities to express their discontent.

### **The perceptions of staff from Black and minority ethnic groups of career development within the school**

There were a very large number of positive comments about the encouragement from the Principal in terms of professional development, having high aspirations, being given opportunities etc. In general staff feel encouraged to aim high, attend courses and think about their

professional development. They feel their professional development is taken seriously. An example offered was that the Management Pathways programme is for all staff, not just teachers.

Some staff observed that there is no Black member of SMT but other related comments included 'it is only a matter of time' and 'Kenny would welcome it'.

Promoted posts do not reflect diversity but people do not apply for these posts.

One teacher suggested there should be a Black Teachers' Group to offer support and encourage staff to put themselves forward.

### **How students and staff contribute to developing anti-racist practices and culture within the school**

Staff see themselves and their colleagues as positive role models. They see it as their responsibility to challenge racism and stereotyping. However there were comments that there is a need for more discussion about the policy of inclusion.

One teacher mentioned the work with parents through the Family Learning Programme.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations for Discussion**

#### **Staff**

There was much praise for the leadership of the school in terms of having moved forward with equal opportunities and anti-racism. It seems that many staff are relatively new to the school and it is possible that many discussions underpinning the current work of the school took place before they were in post. At the same time, students feel that most staff will take action when a racist incident is reported but a minority do not.

The issue of a lack of positive role models is difficult to address. If people do not apply for posts then they cannot be appointed. The school is described as supportive of the professional development of all staff. There seems little point in advertising more widely for teaching staff as teachers looking for posts read the TES.

#### **It is recommended that:**

All staff revisit anti-racism, review the Equal Opportunities Policy, reflect on the progress made and the issues still causing concern.

Staff receive training in dealing with racism which would build on the recent conflict resolution training.

SMT facilitate a meeting of Black members of staff to discuss establishing a Black Teachers Group (or a group for all Black staff), which would support Black members of staff through the job application and preparation for interview process.

#### **Students**

Many students say they do not feel valued and respected and they do not feel they are treated fairly (other groups receive preferential treatment). They may not be looking at the situation objectively but they still seem to have this perception. There would appear to be issues related to culture and identity, including the culture of the white students in the school. All groups may need more in the way of positive role models and a greater recognition of their own cultural heritage.

Students spoke positively about the seating plans and welcomed opportunities to mix. Many said they would like more chances to engage in activities with a wide range of pupils including different ages. Examples suggested include activities taking place on Social Education Days, sports activities, residential trips and visits out of school.

One issue that arose during discussions with both staff and students was that of 'gangs'. The most common reference was to Bangladeshi heritage boys going around in gangs. This may help to account for the perception amongst white and Black students that there are far more Asian students in school than the figures show. It might be beneficial for students to have an opportunity to discuss this and consider why students may form gangs and how it affects the perceptions of others.

#### **It is recommended that:**

The Year Councils/School Council meet with staff to discuss these issues in detail. Specifically:

- how the school can offer more positive role models;
- ways in which students can learn more about identity and cultural heritage;
- a programme of activities and events which involve students interacting with a wide range of other students;
- issues relating to 'gangs'.

The outcomes of such discussions are incorporated into an action plan detailing implementation arrangements.

#### **Curriculum**

Students and staff offered several examples of a multi-cultural curriculum, however these tended to be confined to certain subject areas. One student talked about work in R.E. in Year 10, which involved an analysis of racism in the media. This was striking in that it was the only example offered, which engaged the students in critical thinking with respect to racism. Whilst there is much value in a multi-cultural curriculum, this alone may not be enough. An anti-racist curriculum, which investigates the roots of racism, colonial experiences, cultural identity and issues of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination is equally important. The curriculum also needs to develop independent thinkers, so that young people do not just 'follow the crowd'.

#### **It is recommended that:**

A curriculum review is carried out from an anti-racism perspective in line with LEA policy and Recommendation 67 of the MacPherson Report which states "That consideration be given to amendment of the National Curriculum aimed at valuing cultural diversity and preventing racism".

In relation to the above, there is a review of the nature, purpose, frequency and organisation of the Social Education Days.

#### **Community**

Staff seem to feel there would be much value in strengthening links with the local community. Efforts to date have had limited success. One member of staff suggested that white parents mistrust the school, Bangladeshi heritage parents are unfamiliar with the school so they don't get involved, while there is a language issue with Chinese/Vietnamese parents. Different problems may call for different solutions.

**It is recommended that:**

The Year Councils/School Council work with staff to:

- discuss and review possible strategies;
- visit other schools to find out different approaches used and their success;
- organise Social Education Days, perhaps with a community focus and/or the emphasis being on positive role models in the community.

The school uses the Principal's newsletter to build a stronger partnership with parents. If this approach was fully supported by students (through the School Council) it might enable the school to receive feedback from parents related to a range of issues.

**Policies and procedures**

The school clearly has policies and procedures in place to deal with racism.

The issue of sanctions, in the event of racist behaviour, was raised by students and staff. There were mixed feelings about exclusion from school as a form of punishment. For some students it might give them time to reflect on their behaviour and hopefully change their ways. Other students might see it as a 'holiday'. It was suggested that there could be more use of mediation between the victim and the perpetrator of racist incidents. This would build on the recent conflict resolution training.

**It is recommended that:**

The use of mediation in dealing with racist incidents is monitored with a view to extending this approach.

**Appendix 1 - Questionnaires**

Confidential questionnaire for students

1. What do you understand by racism?
2. What was the last racist incident that you know of in school?
  - Can you describe it?
  - How did it make you feel?
  - Was the incident reported, if so to whom?
  - Was any action taken?
3. Do you feel confident that if you were to report a racist incident to a teacher, that they would take it seriously and do something about it?
4. Are there any lessons where you learn about racism?
  - If so, which?
5. Is your particular cultural/racial background respected and valued in school?
  - If yes, how?
  - If no, what should be done?
6. Are you aware that school has an equal opportunities policy?
  - If so, how did you find out about it?
  - How does it affect you?
7. What else should the school do to develop an anti-racist environment?
  - How can students be involved?
8. Do you feel that changes in school policies and practices in relation to equal opportunities have made a difference?
  - If so, explain how.
9. Do you ever discuss the school's equal opportunities policy at home?
  - If so, how do your family feel about it?
  - Do you feel there has been any change in the attitudes of your family as a result of the school's equal opportunities policy?
  - If so, please explain.
10. Do you feel you are consulted and involved in the decision making in the school? If so, how?

### Confidential questionnaire for staff

1. Do you feel that George Green's School is an anti-racist school?
2. In addressing racism what are the school's greatest strengths?
3. Can you identify good practice in terms of anti-racism within the school?  
For example:
  - dealing with racist incidents
  - dealing with racist graffiti
  - curriculum
  - signs & displays
  - staffing
  - exclusions
4. Staff development
  - Are opportunities for promotion seen to be open to all who are eligible, inside and outside the school?
  - Do the promoted posts reflect the balance of ethnic minority staff in the school?
  - Do all staff feel that they get appropriate professional development opportunities?
  - Do all staff feel encouraged to aim high?
5. Do you feel that staff act as positive role models in terms of anti-racism  
(avoiding racist and other forms of discriminatory remarks raising awareness, challenging racist attitudes/stereotypes, changing attitudes etc.)
6. Do you feel the school "includes" all members of the school community?
7. Have you personally experienced or witnessed racism in school?
  - Could you describe an example?
8. Do you understand what is meant by the term "institutional racism"? Are there any examples of IR in the school. (procedures, processes, practices, culture which impact negatively on Black and minority people)
- 9) Suggest 3 issues for you/your department/the school in taking anti-racism work further.