Full Research Report

Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Race and Equality Centre
and
Manchester Metropolitan University
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1. Executive Summary

- The Schools Stand Up to Racism research project (SSU2R) was funded by the Big Lottery Research Fund and was a three-year project aimed at understanding the nature and extent of racism faced by young people in high schools in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington.

- The collaborators on this project were the Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Race and Equality Centre (CHAWREC) and Manchester Metropolitan University (Department of Interdisciplinary Studies). The lead applicant on the bid was CHAWREC.

- SSU2R also had a steering group who provided support in terms of guiding the research, supporting the processes of gaining access to schools and giving advice on areas such as school and local authority policy, practice, and other issues related to young people and racism.

- The project used a range of methods to find out about young people’s and teachers’ experiences of racism within high schools in the Cheshire, Warrington and Halton areas.

- The research topic evolved out of the collaborators’ increasing awareness from anecdotal evidence that suggested racism was being experienced by Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) pupils in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington high schools but that this was not always responded to in a satisfactory way, and often these experiences were repeated.

- This project was designed to fill the gap in knowledge about racism in Cheshire high schools by researching the issue with schools, teachers and pupils themselves.

- The methods used in the project were: an all-school survey (high schools) in the area; follow up interviews with designated teachers; surveys with two years in five selected schools; 10 focus groups with pupils about their experiences of racism within school; 4 ethnodramas with year 8 pupils (using short dramas written from the examples given in the pupil survey, followed by a group discussion) and interviews with pupils specifically from BME backgrounds.

- The methodology used began as Participatory Action Research (PAR) but changed towards being shaped and influenced by PAR, due to factors discussed in the methods section of this document. The main issues were about engagement of community co-researchers but the action for social change focus remained central to the focus and aim of the project.

- A literature review of academic and practitioner materials was undertaken at the start of the project. This showed that schools and teachers have historically tried to engage with the difficult and complex issue of racism with different levels of success. Many factors were identified as
characteristics of racism in schools including: setting; assessment; interpersonal relationships between pupils and pupils/teachers; teacher stereotyping, expectations and cultural competency and lower achievement of BME pupils. The literature review is contained in this report.

- There were issues engaging schools with the staff survey. The survey was sent to all 80 state-funded high schools in the area, both in email and hard copy format. Despite this, return rates were low and only 21 were returned.

- The forms returned back had large gaps in the data and it seemed that some staff had difficulty finding information about issues such as the numbers of BME pupils and how many of these pupils had been excluded. This meant that the returned questionnaires were unable to be analysed in any detail.

- The limited amount of analysis that was able to be done indicated that these schools had processes in place for dealing with racist incidents, although the numbers of recorded incidents were relatively low when compared with more ethnically diverse areas.

- Follow-up interviews with the staff who completed the survey were carried out in sixteen schools. In general, these staff were happy that racist incidents in their school were being dealt with satisfactorily, although acknowledging that they were unlikely to be aware of all incidents due to under-reporting.

- The school data and teachers’ interviews showed that the numbers of BME pupils in these schools were very low, as we expected. But this meant that data on GCSE grades for BME students could not be meaningfully analysed and compared to those of white British students.

- The teachers generally saw racism as being more of an issue for schools with more ethnically diverse student bodies. In other words, they found it hard to see the relevance of the issue of racism to their schools and the pupil demographic, which they believed to be primarily white British. Whilst a small number of teachers were able to articulate a clearer understanding about minority school populations, there was a broad lack of appreciation that racism does not only happen in settings where there are significant numbers of minority ethnic pupils.

- The interviews showed that race and racism issues were often perceived as forming part of a generic discourse about bullying, and the assumption was that training for anti-bullying necessarily covered racism too. The overall lack of focused training on race and equality issues was an issue many teachers identified (both as part of their initial teacher training and their experiences on in-service training).
The interviews also demonstrated (perhaps unsurprisingly) that teachers felt that the most common and prolific form of racist incident was the use of racist language. Other interactions between pupils, and between pupils and teachers, which might be seen to raise issues of racism were not considered as important. Likewise, explaining racism was something that happened when an issue occurred and this often focused on language. A more general approach of preventing racism before it happened was not visible in the teachers’ accounts.

Some teachers found it difficult to define ‘racism’ and ‘racist incidents’ and expressed confused connections between these incidents and subsequent actions and reporting procedures.

At times little distinction was made between racism, racist incidents and bullying per se. BME pupils could be seen as merely another ‘vulnerable group’ and the intricacies of broader institutional, everyday experiences associated with racism were not always appreciated by teachers.

Some teachers felt they did not feel authoritative on the subject of race and racism, and felt uncomfortable in discussing issues and incidents with pupils. Racism was sometimes downplayed and ‘excused’ to the research team, claiming that some incidents did not ‘count’ as racism or a racist incident.

The curriculum was seen to raise issues related to racism through areas like the study of the slave trade, the civil rights movement in the USA, the Holocaust and apartheid in South Africa. However, in many of these cases racism was studied from the perspective of racism being an issue from the past, existing in countries other than the UK and relying on BME people being seen as victims. There was little evidence of an integrated or thematic approach, in which race and racism were discussed as contemporary UK issues, Hence, the pupils’ experiences of daily life, culture and UK society were not reflected in their studies.

Perhaps as a result of this, the pupil focus group data showed evidence that pupils saw racism as less of an issue in the UK (in comparison to other countries) and less of an issue now (in comparison to other points in history). Their evidence in discussion suggested that race issues are taught as a historical and cultural phenomenon rather than a contemporary feature of modern society.

Five schools were selected for the pupil surveys. The schools were selected from those that had returned their staff surveys and demonstrated a willingness to be involved. The schools were chosen from different parts of the Cheshire, Halton and Warrington areas and represented a range of levels of reported racist incidents.
The pupil surveys were administered to all pupils in two years; year 8 and year 11. This gap was chosen so that we could have a sense of experiences across two very different points in the school pupil trajectory; recently entered school and just before leaving school.

Year 11 students were more likely than year 8 students to say they had experienced or knew about racism in their school.

The majority of pupils thought their teachers saw racism as important and that they would deal confidently with racist incidents. Despite this, only a quarter of students who had experienced or witnessed racism had reported these incidents. Furthermore, almost half of BME students thought that reported racist incidents had been dealt with ‘badly’ or ‘very badly’ by teachers.

BME pupils were more likely to indicate that they had experienced racism and were less likely to respond positively to questions about the effectiveness of anti-racist education within their schools. This suggests that anti-racist education may not be addressing the reality of these pupils’ experience.

Evidence from follow up focus groups suggested that pupils were concerned that some racist incidents were ‘merely banter’ that had been ‘misread’ by teachers and other pupils. They claimed that sometimes there was a kind of ‘hyper-sensitivity’ towards the use of racist terminology when no offence had been meant or taken. This suggests that (like their teachers) pupils expressed considerable confusion and disagreement about what constitutes a racist incident.

Both teachers and pupils were aware that pupil attitudes and beliefs could be shaped by their wider social and community networks. Parents, grandparents, siblings, family friends and general community members could be as influential as other sources of pupil experience such as Facebook, MSN, music videos etc. in creating and maintaining harmful stereotypes.

Some BME pupils were concerned about the tension between their desires to challenge racist ‘banter’ from friends and the desire to stay part of a friendship group. Their reluctance to openly challenge casual racism partly explains the reasons why teachers do not think there is a problem at all, and why some white pupils feel they are able to continue to use racist terms casually without consequence.

Some BME pupils in predominantly white settings feel that their cultural differences (real or perceived) make them hypervisible within the school population. This does not appear to be fully recognised or understood by some of the adults in these settings. Where recognition is present, it is
sometimes couched in the terms of ‘problem’ or is misguided in the way it informs taught sessions.

- There was a stated reticence amongst pupils to discuss race and racism in classroom contexts because they did not want to offend other pupils unwittingly and they were not always secure that their teachers were confident and knowledgeable in dealing with these issues.

- Pupils knew that some racist incidents had gone unreported and therefore teachers would be unaware of them. Many pupils felt that it was unlikely that issues would be resolved and were fearful that reporting it might make the situation worse. There was a broader feeling that the best strategy sometimes was not to report incidents at all and to resolve the situation through other means.

- Pupils did not see teachers as the root cause of problems related to racism or racist incidents. The ethnodramas were able to gather responses to show that pupils were aware that boundaries concerning racist ‘banter’ were difficult for both teachers and other pupils to recognise.

- Pupils enjoyed the opportunity to talk about what they would like in the curriculum. This would suggest that greater pupil engagement in curriculum design and organisation might be helpful to meet their needs for contemporary knowledge and understanding.

- Pupils had some very good ideas about bringing race and racism issues to life in school. One way that was mentioned was the need to create open and safe spaces to examine racist language and terminology. In particular, understanding the heritage and provenance of language was seen to provide a ‘way-in’ to complex contemporary debates.
2. Introduction

This project brought together professionals from the Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Race and Equality Centre (CHAWREC) and researchers from the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Manchester Metropolitan University (Cheshire). A co-written bid to the Big Lottery Fund was successful in winning funds for a project about the extent of racism and racist incidents in pupils’ lives in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington high schools. The idea for the research was borne out of anecdotal evidence and the experiences of both partners when meeting children and young people who said they had experienced racism at school. However, neither research partner had worked specifically with young people to find out about this. The Big Lottery Grant enabled research to take place to find out about the experiences of high schools and pupils. Consequently, the research was therefore designed to gather information specifically about racism in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington high schools which are in predominantly white British populated areas with both rural and semi-rural catchment areas. The research sought to explore the extent of racism faced by pupils, investigate the ways in which schools tackle racist incidents and teach race equality, and map examples of best practice and innovation in these areas.

The questions the SSU2R research project set out to examine were:

1. What is the extent of racism faced by young people in Cheshire Schools?

2. How are schools tackling incidents of racism?

3. What kind of strategies do pupils and teachers think could be employed to help deal with racism and racist incidents?

Having addressed these questions, the intention of the project was to look also at other areas of research and development that need to be carried out subsequently.
3. Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This literature review provides a research-informed backdrop to the project and identifies some key academic issues that are important to aid understanding in this complex area. One of the strengths of this project was that it employed a broad range of methods through which to engage with participants at all levels. The voices of pupils were paramount in the design of the project and, accordingly, the methodological positioning was designed to encourage authenticity and participation as far as possible. Another strength was the focus of the research, which offered clear evidence of the experiences of pupils in predominantly white high school settings, allowing insight into lived experience which is rarely captured by broader, more culturally diverse research projects.

There is a long history of attempts to challenge racism within education. Much education-based anti-racist activity has involved professionals working in education, engaging schools and teachers and then working to address the problem at the ‘chalk-face’. Education has become a main sphere of activity in which issues of race have been taken very seriously, as the race scholar, Paul Gilroy, noted in 1990:

*Crime has been displaced recently at the centre of race politics by another issue... now it is the classrooms and staffrooms of the inner city school which frame the same conflict and provide the most potent terms with which to make sense of racial difference* (Gilroy, 1990:76).

Research has demonstrated unequal experiences in the classroom and in the playground for Black and Minority Ethnic students for a number of years, and related to this, unequal outcomes in educational attainment (Oakes 1990, Gilborn and Gipps 1996, Modood 1997, Sewell, 1997, Connolly 1998; Bhatti 1999, Gillborn and Mirza 2000, Oakes et al. 2004, Heath and Brinbaum 2007 and Gillborn 2004a, 2004b, 2008). Consequently, this review serves to highlight the continuing importance of racism as an issue within schools that needs to be addressed. However, although there is information on the national picture and there have been numerous case studies examining the issues in particular geographical areas, the area of Cheshire, specifically, has not been studied. The particular issues that affect the Cheshire, Halton and Warrington areas, the levels of reported and unreported racism within schools there, or examples of good educational practice and intervention around racism are not known.

Schools Stand Up 2 Racism is a project that addresses many of these issues, by providing baseline information on racist incidents, highlighting challenging
issues, showcasing good practice, and providing resources to schools that they can use in the future. Although there is much work to be done, the education system does have the potential to challenge racism in ways that have a lasting impact on school students and their communities.

3.2 Defining Race and Ethnicity

This part of the literature review focuses upon the highly contested area of definitions of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’. It is argued here that both in historical and contemporary contexts these terms have been socially constructed by individuals and groups. In order to understand these concepts in schools, it is essential that we grasp the ways that the terms ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ are constructed and subsequently used in scholarly and practice areas.

3.2.1 Race

The concept of race has a long and contested history both in scholarly and professional discourse and analysis. The foundations of the term ‘race’ come from terminology used to distinguish between different groups of people who were portrayed to be genetically and biologically discrete, with some groups perceived to be superior to others (Delgado and Stefanic, 2006; Goldberg and Solomos, 2002; Leonardo, 2009; Garner 2010). With the onset of modernity and the growth of intellectual institutions and thought, especially within science and genetics, the idea of Social Darwinism developed which claimed inequalities in society were a reflection of natural selection and thus could be explained by the survival of the fittest (Jones 1980). Social Darwinism claimed that factors such as educability and intelligence were genetically inheritable and that those who achieved more in life did so because they were ‘naturally’ more capable. While such arguments alluding to the fixed genetic differences and inherent superiority of certain groups of people have long been widely discredited, race continues to mark social groups and does so as a socially constructed concept.

**By social construction** we mean that ‘race and races are products of social thought and relations’. They are not objective, inherent or fixed concepts and they do not correspond to any biological or genetic reality. ‘Race as a social construction’ means that races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or does away with when convenient’ (Delgado and Stefancic 2006:7).

Race scholars have discussed the way in which this works. For example, David Gillborn explains:

*Far from being a fixed natural system of genetic difference, ‘race’ operates as a system of socially constructed and enforced categories, constantly recreated and modified through human interaction.* (1995:3).
While race is something that has been invented by humankind as a way to differentiate between people and place, with some in a position of superiority in relation to others, its longstanding and entrenched history as a social marker means that it cannot simply be undone or de-constructed. In other words, tackling race as a deeply embedded way of categorising and conceptualising others is extremely complex. It is difficult to dismiss the legacy of race, as it is a concept that has been used by ruling elites to distinguish between people and govern them, since the sixteenth century (Goldberg 2002). It is also a tool that developed and became more sophisticated with the advance of Empire and European colonialism. For example, as developments in contemporary science revealed the commonality of human DNA, (thereby dismissing the idea that some people are biologically superior to others), substitutes such as ‘cultural difference’ have been used to present some groups as more socially advanced or developed than others. One of the major legacies of colonialism, for example, has been to showcase European cultures as being more ‘civilised’ compared with those of ex-colonial countries in Africa and South Asia. The argument was not that people in Africa, Asia (or Latin America) were biologically inferior but that they were ‘behind’; that nation states within these continents were less developed and less advanced culturally, socially and politically.

More recently, religion has often been substituted for race, and policy and political discourse has specifically targeted the Muslim communities (meaning both practicing Muslims and anyone perceived to be Muslim). In particular, stereotypes have been used to portray Muslims both in the media and in social discourse as engaging in certain cultural and religious practices that are described as being against ‘British values’ (Kundnani, 2007).

Race is a social construct which has both persisted over time and which continues to be re-constructed. Power becomes increasingly important to recognise as a characteristic of these constructions and reconstructions over time. Thus, ‘race’ has historically been used, alongside social class, as a way of structuring society and grading individuals based on the status ascribed to their ‘racial group’. It is not as simple as differentiating between ‘white’ and ‘Black’. Rather, like social class, we can see race as a spectrum, where ethnicity is often used to demarcate and rank groups accordingly. Hence, the notion of ‘constructing’ social categories using race becomes particularly important in educational contexts where stereotypes can be reinforced and life chances can be compromised.

### 3.2.2 Ethnicity

Ethnicity, like race, is a contested concept, and is generally used to differentiate groups through notions of cultural heritage, traditions and practices (Garner 2010:7). These are all clearly linked to individual and group
notions of identity, and subsequently there are implications when this is linked to educational settings:

*Ethnicity is a matter both of self-identity (‘we’ statements) and of categorisation (‘they’ statements). Moreover, identity and categorisation do not proceed entirely independently of one another. In most societies, some groups and individuals have a greater capacity than others to define the terms under which categorisations are made. As a consequence, self-identification takes place in contexts where others’ categorisations to some extent constrain the choices that can realistically be made. In other words, if others do not accept one’s identity choices it may be difficult, if not impossible, to act out the implications of those choices. (Payne, 2013:128)*

Rather than focusing on structure and structural constraints, approaches to ‘ethnic studies’ have often focused on issues of identity and the values or ‘norms’ of different social groups. However, a strong critique of this approach is that by emphasising culture, particular fixed ideas of cultural values are attached to different ethnic groups, which not only serve to stereotype people, but also detract from power relations and the role that the state plays in privileging some, while disempowering others. For example, some ethnic studies demonstrate how inequalities are explained away by the cultural choices of particular ethnic groups, where emphasis is placed on the actions of those with the least power in society. In other words, it is common to find ethnic groups blamed or held responsible for experiencing inequality and this is linked to (what is assumed and presumed to be) their own behaviour and choices. However, nuanced approaches to ethnicity have pointed to more fluid notions of ethnic identity, which reflect the complexity of ‘subjective identification process’, and not necessarily as a category as denoted from above (Hall, 1996). Others have more strongly challenged the idea that ethnicity should be co-terminus with a particular culture or identity (Gilroy, 1987). Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1993) take this approach and describe ethnicity as follows:

*Ethnicity at its most generous level involves belonging to a particular group and sharing its conditions of existence. This will include not only being regarded as having the right credentials for membership but also being able to muster ethnic resources which can be used for struggle, negotiation and the pursuit of political projects, both at the level of individuals making their way but also for the group as a whole in relation to other groups. Ethnic resources can be economic, territorial, cultural and linguistic, amongst others (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1993:8).*
Thus, ethnicity can be useful for thinking about the complexities of racialisation and also for pointing to the resources individuals and groups have that can assist them in combating racism.

### 3.2.3 Racism

This section outlines different approaches to understanding the notion of racism. It can be seen within research and practice, that there has been a move away from seeing racism as a personal attitude to a far more socially and institutionally constructed concept. Whilst studies mapping racist 'attitudes' can take us some way in examining the concept of racism in the school context, it is imperative to investigate the idea also as a systemic issue.

Historically, and most commonly, racism is often equated with prejudice, implying a position of ignorance, and an irrational hatred or fear of another person or group defined by racialised characteristics. However, scholarly work on race has pointed to a distinction between people’s attitudes and the power to act out those attitudes in social and political terms (Sivanand 1990); here it is explained that it is the material element linked to prejudice that makes it discrimination. A name or an attitude can be unpleasant, but it is its resonance with the lived reality of unequal chances in education, employment, health, housing, as well as higher odds of imprisonment, deportation and surveillance that makes it racism. Sivanandan (1990) argues:

> It is the acting out of racial prejudice not the prejudice itself that matters. The acting out of prejudice is discrimination, and when it becomes institutionalised in the power structure of this society then we are dealing not with attitudes but with power. Racism is about power not prejudice (Sivanandan, 1990:65).

With the growing support for civil rights and anti-discrimination legislation in the United States and Britain in the 1960s and 1970s the definition of racism expanded to include ‘equality of opportunity’. This approach removed intent from the equation and ‘meant actions and/or rules that disproportionately disadvantaged people of minority ethnic background may be judged racist in their consequences, whatever the conscious intent behind them’ (Gillborn 1995:28). This approach has been widely adopted in research on race and education in Britain. Nevertheless, disputes over the exact and real definition of racism continue.

Despite this, it is widely accepted that racism is an everyday occurrence and a major criticism of popular approaches to racism is that they often frame it as something exceptional, and is an issue closely or specifically connected with the far right and the British National Party. This means the actions of the
majority population, and the social structure itself, are often accepted as legitimate and pass without critique or restraint. The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry played a significant part in challenging these assumptions by stressing that racism was not just about individual intent. Subsequently, the resulting Macpherson Report was an important attempt to address deep-seated inequalities that are borne of ‘common-sense’ assumptions and actions, which work to disadvantage and discriminate against Black and Minority Ethnic communities. Thus, it is important to note that racism is more widespread and harder to identify than is often assumed, and does not relate solely to extreme and brutal incidents.

3.2.4 Institutional racism

The notion of institutional racism is commonly used, as a structural or objective practice, which is contrasted with individual racial prejudice or racial ideology (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1993). The concept of institutional racism was brought to the fore following the public inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, where for the first time a state institution, the Metropolitan Police, was charged with being institutionally racist. This was significant because it was the first time the state had acknowledged that racism was a feature of its governing institutions. In the Macpherson Report, institutional racism was defined as:

The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination though unwitting prejudice, ignorance and thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people (Macpherson, 1999:77).

Gillborn (2008) argues that this definition of racism relied on existing notions of institutional racism in two main respects:

1. It condemned the actions of both individuals and organisations/agencies whose ‘processes’ worked against certain groups. Thus, the inquiry rejected the common notion that racism is limited to the actions of a few extreme individuals and something that was uncommon and against the ‘norm’.

2. The approach moved away from endless debates about intent by explicitly focusing on the outcomes of actions. It was concerned with equality of outcome as much as equality of opportunity.

By finding racism ‘built in’ to the structures, norms, power relationships and protocols, this institutional approach was able to identify and challenge
perceptions that racism was merely the result of attitudes and behaviours of single 'bad apples'; an explanation which plagued many accounts of racism in services and organisations at the time.

3.2.5 New Racisms: Xeno-racism, crisis racism and newcomers to the UK

Whilst there are some constants within the understanding of racism (around such issues as power imbalances, discrimination, categorisation on the basis of race and so forth) the late twentieth century has been seen by scholars of race and ethnicity as a period of time in which there have been distinctive new types of racism emerging. As with most academic work, there is never complete consensus on the nature of these changes and features of modern life. However, there is an understanding that the nature of racism has changed and diversified and it is common to see the plural term 'racisms' used to emphasise and underscore those changes. The emergence of 'new racisms' and the forms that these take have a direct effect on the targeting of some groups of pupils in schools, especially recent migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, for racist bullying, harassment and race hate crimes.

The sociologist Barker (1981) first used the term 'new racism' to describe aspects of the ideology of neo-liberal Conservatives in the 1980s. In his conceptualisation, Barker linked the new racism to sociobiological accounts of race and difference. These sociobiological accounts were informed by discourses (or sets of knowledge) that emphasised ideas about 'the natural' and, in particular, what they positioned as the instinctive need to differentiate those around us into 'them' and us'. Barker argues that those supporting the 'need' to separate out 'other groups' in this way, tend to view inter-group conflict as something that is genetically programmed into human beings (in other words, as activities that are in some senses natural and normal). In viewing human society in this way, it has been argued that:

*Racism and nationalism are thus naturalised, that is, described as primal feelings that cannot be changed by social action. Worse still, from the social scientist’s perspective, the act of aggression that locates the danger in the out-groups is actually explained as an act of ‘kin altruism’. Racism is thus transformed from a form of hatred into merely a form of love for one’s own people* (Garner, 2010:130).

Garner (2010) goes on to note how the justification that racism is actually about caring for ‘one’s own people’ has been utilised by far right groups since the 1980’s and this is a call to allegiance that still has power and resonance within contemporary UK society (and, indeed, many other societies). From its beginnings as a description of neo-liberal ideology, the concept of ‘new racism’ has been broadened to be applied to understanding the types of
racism that have arisen concurrently with processes of rapid transition and social change in Europe since the 1980s. Some key groups that appear to have been the focus of new racisms are economic migrants, asylum seekers and refugees; groups whose presence in European societies has often coincided with other social and economic changes (Fekete, 2004). For instance, at present, the movement of such groups to western European societies is often discussed in lay terms as linked to recession.

New racisms have often presented themselves through a discourse of protecting particular dominant racial groups, suggesting that the basis of their culture and physical/geographical place is something to be defended. For instance, groups such as the English Defence League, and other far right groups in the UK, often maintain that they are not racist and that are merely defending the ‘right’ to be white British. Moreover, these groups often maintain that they have the compassionate aim for ‘other groups’ that they should be ‘allowed to go back to where they came from’ and that this is best for all groups in society. This kind of racist ideology masquerades as concern for all groups in relation to cultural and racial mixing. It positions itself as a form of altruism that just wants to make sure that people are in their right places; a kind of considerate and sensitive race and ethnic boundary maintenance. Garner notes that there is a sense of, ‘nostalgic and reactionary imagining of communities as pure and monolithic blocs that should not be spoiled by mixing’ (2010:130). An aspect of new racisms is its call to differential racist ideas, as it emphasises a focus on the right to be different and uses this against newcomers or those it constructs as ‘others’. Since the 1980’s the emphasis upon the right to be different has been picked up by far right groups, whereas in the past this way of thinking was often utilised by anti-racist supporters – asserting the right of Black and Minority Groups and migrants to be different within UK society. The re-working of this idea by far right groups demonstrates the way that racist ideology can be sophisticated in the way it presents itself. The idea that there is a need to protect particular racial or ethnic groups from others, encourages the notion that mixing between cultures is both wrong and dangerous, leading potentially to conflict and damaging social cohesion.

Another of the ‘new racisms’ takes the form of xeno-racism, which is a mixture of racism and xenophobia (or fear of strangers). This type of racism is also termed ‘crisis racism’ by some other scholars such as Balibar and Wallerstein (1991), as it is seen as a response to crisis conditions in society. These forms or aspects of new racisms are perhaps most easy to perceive and most familiar within the UK because the discourses around them have prominence in the media in modern society. For instance, it is quite common to see headlines and stories that overtly utilise notions of crisis and risk around migrants:
‘139,000 immigrants beat the jobs crunch: but numbers of Britons in work drops by 654,000’ The Daily Mail, 5th October 2010

‘Migrants get Brits’ pay slashed by 50%’ The Sun, 18th August 2006

‘Somali asylum seeker gets £2m house’ The Daily Mail, 10th July 2010

‘We must stop the Migrant Invasion’ The Daily Mail, 4th June 2013

The focus of these media concerns is the effect of migrants on the ‘us’, those who are considered different to the newcomers. The ‘others’ (the ‘them’) become linked to the social concerns of the time: problems over housing; benefits and welfare; availability of jobs and unemployment statistics. Xenoracism and crisis racism arise in conditions of social unrest and social change and hinge on the ability of the dominant ethnicity and culture to blame others for social problems. The groups most likely to feature as the causes of concern are migrant groups, who become the focus for scapegoating in terms of economic uncertainties and anxieties and disorder in society. However, other groups are also targeted for blame as the source of social problems and instability. For instance, the case of the repatriation of Roma communities in France during 2010 and the rapid French Government response to deal with this group as a ‘problem’ is perhaps illustrative of wider defensive crisis approaches visible across European societies. Such situations are rarely publicly expressed in terms of issues of xenoracism and race hatred but the drive to identify and then blame ‘them’ has been noted to have increased substantially during the economic recession. It has been argued that these types of racism are:

Not expressed in overtly racist terms or in the terms of neo-fascist discourse, for instance, by some notion of biological or racial superiority, white supremacism or skin colour... The repertoires of justification that are typically employed use social characteristics (for example, protecting jobs, concern about welfare benefits) or cultural incompatibilities or differences (migrants ‘lack cultural competencies’, ‘they do not want to integrate’, ‘they are not ‘tolerant’ (Delanty, Jones and Wodak, 2008:2).

It is precisely because new racisms utilise arguments and rhetoric around contemporary social issues that they can then become ‘invisible’ within casual racist discourses. By becoming commonplace and every day, these concerns may be expressed in a variety of settings without those expressing them having any recognition of the racist connotations of their stated views. This is compounded by a belief that they are unlikely to face challenge or public admonishment for ‘being racist’.
However, racism cannot be regarded as separate to intention; it is possible to be racist without meaning to be, but the outcome is still racism. These everyday assertions about migrants and ‘others’, their social characteristics and assumed ‘natures’ are themselves highly problematic and typically racist in nature and consequence.

3.2.6 ‘Everyday’ new racisms and the lived experience of racism

‘Everyday racism’ is a term created by Philomena Essed (2002) in her seminal work on the mundane and daily experience of racism. This term is perhaps the most useful in understanding ubiquitous and almost normalised racism which migrant groups and Black and Minority Ethnic Groups often experience on a day-to-day basis. Essed’s work used a micro, or small-scale, approach to examine the lived experience of racism, utilising in-depth interviewing with 2000 Black women in the USA and the Netherlands. In doing this, she was able to demonstrate how Black women experience what she terms ‘everyday inferiorization’:

*Everyday racism is not about extreme incidents. The crucial characteristic of everyday racism is that it concerns mundane practices. This does not make everyday racism a racism of a more humane kind* (Essed, 2002:204).

In other words, despite not necessarily involving dramatic critical incidents, everyday racism is not benign or without serious consequence. Indeed Essed (2002) notes that extensive research demonstrates that it is the cumulative effect of continual incidents of personal, social, cultural and structural discrimination that can have the most damaging effect on minority groups. Moreover, because of the ubiquitousness of everyday racism, it can be hard for those who experience it to identify in their lives and even to pin it down and describe it. Unsurprisingly, this has a consequential effect in terms of recognising and reporting, which is a relevant factor to institutions, such as schools. For instance, schools and local authorities may view putting in place reporting systems for ‘racist incidents’ as a way of measuring how many such situations occur per academic year. However, consideration may not have been given to the way the encountering of routine racism may be ‘normalised’ both by those who experience it, and by others around such as teachers and support workers. In many ways, Essed (2002) attempted to draw our attention to the ‘taken for granted’ assumptions that operate in everyday life and which act to disadvantage and discriminate against particular groups.

Similarly, Flam and Beauzamy develop the concept of ‘symbolic violence’ (originally identified and outlined by the French sociologist Bourdieu and also utilised within feminist theory) to help conceptualise the way that everyday
encounters between, what they term, ‘natives’ and ‘foreigners’ influence the way that migrants feel about themselves and their lives. They note:

...daily and routinely migrants confront different forms of rejection that can be intimidating, humiliating and incapacitating; repeated experience of such rejections causes feelings of fear, inferiority and reserve (Flam and Beauzamy 2008:221).

Flam and Beauzamy (2008) outline how public servants, people in the street, other community members and so forth, enact a form of violence on newcomers, often without ever touching them in a physical sense. In effect, such groups are given a message, through such methods as staring, ignoring, laughter and humiliation, verbal abuse and rejection, that they are not welcome. The authors note that, of course, there are incidences of physical violence, which are easy to identify as traumatic for individuals and groups. However, it is the invisibility and insidiousness of more symbolic forms of violence that dominate the lived experience of racism. Moreover, institutional systems may ‘process’ people, keep files on them and take away personhood in a way that downgrades the individual and the group (ibid 234). Therefore, the violence experienced may be physical but it may also involve a daily grind of symbolic downgrading; a process that Flam and Beauzamy note has real and negative consequences for the individual and group sense of identity, place and entitlement.

The concepts of everyday racism and symbolic violence are not just relevant to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers but demonstrate the ways that Black and Minority Ethnic groups may experience exclusion and discrimination at various levels and points in their daily lives. Whilst the focus of the work discussed above is about xeno-racism and the academic discussions around lived experiences of racism, there are intersections (or crossovers) between features of social difference in UK society. The next section outlines the American Concept of Critical Race Theory, which, like Essed’s (2002) work on ‘Everyday Racism’, has been widely adapted by education and race scholars in the UK.

3.2.7 Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theory of institutional racism developed by academics in the American legal system in the mid-1970s (Delgado and Stefancic 2006). It has since spread to other areas, in particular education, after a seminal paper by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995). David Gillborn (2005) has been key in promoting this perspective in the UK. Critical race theory, in common with other critical theories, interrogates the liberal foundations of the justice system, the education system and society itself.
Critical Race Theory is not only an academic theory but also has an activist dimension, which makes this perspective well-suited to the Action Research nature of the SSU2R research. CRT attempts to change perspectives on race and racism through the telling of autobiographical stories or counter-narratives (Delgado and Stefancic 2006). CRT rejects the possibility of an objective stance, along with Enlightenment rationalism, and takes the subjective experiences of individuals and groups as indicative of how race and power permeate society. Counter-narratives tell stories from minority perspectives and run counter to accepted, mainstream versions of events. They serve to show how different groups in society may experience the same event very differently and thus challenge the status quo (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). This can also be a very useful technique in schools and youth environments, where the medium of storytelling can help to create both closeness and, at other times, distance to difficult issues, enabling pupils to engage at a level and proximity that they are comfortable with.

A principal tenet of CRT is that racism is an everyday event; part of the fabric of society. This means that it often goes unnoticed and is consequently difficult to address. CRT also subscribes to the social construction thesis referred to above (Delgado and Stefancic 2006). Race is not an objective category but as a social construction of society, it can (and does) vary according to the needs of society so that at different times, different groups are 'raced' in different ways (Leonardo, 2009). For example, historically in the UK the Irish have been discriminated against but this has altered and changed across time in terms of the nature, focus and intensity of this discrimination.

Critical whiteness is a theoretical area, which is closely related to CRT and examines how whiteness is also a racial category, which has an impact on life chances. In her classic work on anti-racism, White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack, Peggy McIntosh (1988) epitomises the way in which the education system helps to reproduce white privilege:

_"I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work, which will allow “them” to be more like “us” (McIntosh, 1988:204)._"

An acceptance of whiteness as a neutral racial state, teaches those who are not ‘white’ (which will vary over time and is not premised solely on skin colour) that they need to work towards becoming ‘more like us’, in order to be fully moral members of society. This ‘teaching’ is not overt or deliberate but embedded within the structural framework of the curriculum, the examination
system, the uniform and so on (Gillborn, 1995). Adopting a ‘neo-race theory’
approach, focused on ‘the lives and consciousness of the white imaginary’, is
beneficial in developing an understanding of racism. This is particularly the
case in research on mainly white arenas (Leonardo, 2009:185), and thus is a
very useful concept within this research. The next section of the review, turns
to specific examples of racism within the British education system.

3.3 Social Policy, Race and Education

The issue of racism within schools has a long running discourse in Britain and
has been brought to public attention at a number of key moments. The Swann
Report (1985) emerged out of a working committee which was set up to
examine the education of children from Black and Minority Ethnic groups. The
main thrust of the Report was to emphasise a policy termed ‘Education For
All’. The committee questioned whether the term ‘multicultural education’ was
appropriate and noted that in ‘all-white’ areas many schools had assumed
multicultural issues were irrelevant to their students’ needs. In response, the
committee stressed the phrase, ‘education for all’ to symbolise the need for
universal change throughout the educational system. The Report identified
two major strands to this approach:

- The principles of a good education
- The need to challenge racism

A second major Report that has influenced social policy on education is the
Bangladeshi student who attended Burnage High School in Manchester,
generated one of the first documents in the country to consider seriously the
question of racism and schooling. Murder in the Playground: Report of the
Macdonald Inquiry into Racism and Racial Violence in Manchester Schools
was the outcome of a Judicial Inquiry, led by Justice Macdonald. This Report,
stretching to over five hundred pages, took evidence from a large number of
people. Given the local context of the death, the Report remains largely a
procedural document, which examines systemic failures and the role of
multicultural education in schools.

The Report drew attention to a series of incidents and processes that had
taken place before and after the murder, which highlighted the way in which
racism can play out in schools, and remain unidentified and invisible but which
are asserted through ‘common sense’ assumptions. The murder was carried
out by a pupil who had been a known bully in the school for some time and
who was known to support services, including the educational psychology
team and school welfare. However, the inquiry highlighted the lack of
communication between teachers and within the school, where management
decisions had ruled that incidents of bullying, harassment, and violent behaviour displayed by the boy, did not need to be shared across the staff group. The investigation pointed to the lack of anti-racism awareness amongst teachers within the school, and highlighted how teachers in dealing with students and parents made ‘common sense assumptions’. It also showed the ways in which racism had been dismissed by the Head Teacher and the failure to link bullying and racist behaviour. Following the incident, further bad practice ensued which highlighted the way in which institutional racism operates. The inquiry concluded that incidents leading up to and following the murder of Ahmed displayed insensitivity, ignorance and an array of racist practices by the school, Head Teachers and governors in their approach.

However, community activism played a significant part in the Inquiry and consequently Ahmed’s death has been used to promote anti-racist education in schools. The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust was created in 2001. It grew out of the work of the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre, founded in Manchester in 1999. The Trust aims to work with educators and schools to foster an anti-racist educational culture.

The next major racist tragedy, which influenced and continues to influence policy was the murder of Stephen Lawrence. This case brought many of the issues about race relations in the UK to the social, political and policy arenas again. Although the subsequent Report (The Macpherson Report, 1999) was mostly concerned with institutional racism within the Metropolitan Police Force, it recognised that similar practices were also apparent in other public institutions. The Report made a series of recommendations that required greater monitoring of racism and a much stronger approach to addressing processes of racism within institutions. Within it, duties were placed upon education establishments, which were:

- That changes should be made to the National Curriculum, aimed at valuing cultural diversity and preventing racism;
- That a higher profile of these issues in Ofsted inspections was needed;
- That it placed new duties on schools and LEA’s to address racism;
- That ‘racist incidents’ should be monitored and the publication of this data should occur annually, on a school-by-school basis.

However, in practice, the response by the Education Department to these recommendations was to equate racism with language, so that little was done to actually address the issue of institutional racism (Gillborn, 2008). The official response by the Department altered to suggest that most of the
recommendations were already in practice and so there was little need for any new approach. Where there was emphasis on addressing racism, it was largely through ‘citizenship education’, where students would learn how to treat one another as citizens (Department for Education and Employment, 1999). However, this way of dealing with racism relies on a weak understanding of what racism is and thus has limitations for addressing the issues in schools.

Nevertheless, an important outcome of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry was the development of legislation through the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The Act extended the existing race equality legislation to apply to more than 45,000 public bodies, including all state maintained schools and universities (Gillborn, 2008). This policy placed a duty on public bodies to work pro-actively towards the eradication of race discrimination and, specifically, required that every school should:

- Have a written policy on race equality;
- Monitor their activities for signs of bias (especially focusing on student achievement);
- Actively plan to eradicate race inequality.

While the duties are mandatory, evidence on their implementation has emerged which suggests there are inconsistencies between schools. For example, in a survey that was carried out for the Commission for Racial Equality in 2003, which looked at how effectively public institutions had implemented duties from the Act, the findings showed that more than half of the respondents in the education sector had not identified clear ‘goals’ or ‘targets’ for improvement. In relation to differences in attainment, which is especially prominent in the legislation, only one in three schools had set any clear goals for change. Furthermore, as Gillborn (2008) has discussed, only 65% of respondents in schools believed their race equality work had produced positive benefits, compared with 80% in further and higher education and 8% in central government. In addition, people working in education were the least likely to express a need for further guidance. Overall, the findings from the survey suggested that many schools were inactive on race equality issues.

### 3.3.1 The impact of the Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 aimed to modernise and simplify equality legislation and bring together all the various strands of legislation under one law. Although the aim was to simplify the previous legislation and not to erode existing levels of protection against discrimination, the requirement to produce equality schemes was removed. Public bodies are now only required to
publish one or more objectives they think they should achieve and these will therefore not encompass all the dimensions of inequality now under the Act. The Act recognises that public bodies ‘may not have the resources to tackle every area where action to address discrimination and disadvantage is needed’ since they have to balance ‘equality within the overall demands placed upon them’ (Department for Communities and Local Government 2007:88-9). Furthermore, any action taken needs to be only ‘proportionate to the size, nature and impact of the inequality identified… to take into account other competing considerations’ (DCLG, 2007:89). Additionally, the Department for Communities and Local Government stated that:

\[
\text{The duty is designed to help all public authorities to do what they do better, not stop them operating effectively or weigh them down with bureaucracy. The duty should not lead any public authority to feel it needs to take any action which might be disproportionate to the benefits the action would deliver (DCLG 2007:89).}
\]

The consequences of this change may have negative consequences for addressing racism in schools, as schools may choose to prioritise other areas and not recognise racism to be a priority. In particular, there is a fear that schools with few or no Black and Minority Ethnic pupils at all may assume anti-racist education is of little relevance. This stance would reproduce issues that were highlighted in the Swann Report back in 1985.

### 3.3.2 The material impact of racism in schools

Equitable educational attainment is an important factor that strongly influences quality of life and life chances (Machin and McNally, 2006), and influences inequalities in other areas of society, such as employment and health. In the inequalities literature it is well established that there is a discrepancy amongst ethnic groups, and between different ethnic groups and white British pupils, in: educational attainment (Modood 1997, Gillborn and Mirza 2000, Heath and Brinbaum 2007); school exclusion (Commission for Racial Equality 1997, Blair 2001); access to higher education (Shiner and Modood, 2002) and in graduation rates (Connor et al, 2004). While some ethnic groups are reported to do better than the white British groups, others report much worse educational achievement levels. However, it is important to think about processes of racialisation within the education system that present themselves at different stages of assessment, including tiering and setting procedures within schools. In this section, we discuss some of the main ways in which racism within schools is demonstrated and the way it disadvantages particular minority ethnic groups. This section also addresses the debates around the diversity of attainment between ethnic groups that has been used by some to suggest racism is not significant, as some minority ethnic groups,
such as Indian and Chinese pupils, appear to outperform white students in school.

Racism in schools and the way in which teachers racialise minority ethnic students, has been a major focus in the debates on inequalities in the education system. There has been extensive research highlighting how minority ethnic pupils are more likely to be over-represented in lower set teaching groups when schools ‘set by ability’. Moreover, this research tends to highlight how these processes are influenced significantly by differential teacher expectations, which tend to be markedly lower for these groups of pupils (Bhatti 1999, Connolly 1998; Gillborn 2004a, 2004b, Gillborn and Mirza 2000, Oakes 1990, and Oakes et al. 2004). Indeed, ethnographic work in schools has found evidence to support the different behavioural tendencies of teachers towards BME pupils, in comparison with white British students. This has found that Black pupils were more likely to be reprimanded and disciplined by teachers despite displaying similar behaviour to their white peers (Gillborn and Gipps 1996, Bhatti 1999). In addition, good behaviour, skills and talent often went unrecognised in BME pupils. Similarly, in a qualitative study of the school experience for Pakistani and Bangladeshi students and parents in the North East of England, Crozier and Davies (2008) found that for some teachers the sight of more than one or two South Asian students led to the perception of a gang formation. Moreover, Asian boys were perceived as ‘chauvinistic and arrogant’ (ibid 292) by teachers, while girls were seen as ‘devious’ (ibid 293) but also ‘submissive’ and ‘drudges in the home’ (ibid 294). These stereotypical and essentialised notions of South Asian culture led to claims by the teachers that these pupils did not want to mix with other students or integrate into the school.

Perceptions of pupils by teachers are influenced and shaped by general social constructions of particular groups. For instance, growing Islamophobic and anti-Muslim discourses, which have reached new heights because of the ‘War on Terror’, are not new but have a long history in Britain (Fekete, 2004). These discourses also translate into classrooms and influence teachers’ perceptions of different pupils. For example, research has shown how government and media discourses surrounding Muslims are also reflected in how teachers perceive and describe Muslim pupils. In a number of studies Muslim boys have been shown to be portrayed as being violent, aggressive and dismissive of women’s rights, while girls are seen as being submissive, quiet, and at times ‘self-segregating’ (Mirza 1999, Archer 2003, Youdell 2006, Mirza 2007, Crozier and Davies 2008). Similarly, Black boys are often racialised as being inherently ‘stupid’ and ‘problematic’ (Mama, 1995) due to being stereotyped as aggressive, criminal, highly sexed and poorly educated (Archer, 2003).
The normalisation of inequality in school has been discussed in detail by Gillborn (2006). He discusses how the impact of the process of tiering becomes particularly severe at GCSE stage. In a Report mapping educational inequality in relation to race, class and gender in London, Gillborn and Mirza (2000) noted there was a great deal of variation within ethnic groups and there was at least one Local Education Authority (LEA) in which each of the principal minority ethnic groups were the most likely to achieve five or more higher grade GCSE passes. They also noted that Black attainment fell relative to the LEA average, as the pupils moved through school. There were only six LEAs that had recorded the ethnicity of pupils from age 5, but for these the authors were able to track progress of pupils from starting school. In each case, the position of Black pupils relative to their white peers worsened between the start and end of their compulsory schooling. In one of the LEAs, reported as one of the largest authorities in the country, Black children were the highest achieving of all groups in the baseline assessments. At age 5, Black children scored 20 percentage points above the local average. However, by ‘age 16, the end of compulsory schooling, the inequality was so pronounced that Black children were the lowest performing of all the principal groups: 21 percentage points below the average’ (Gillborn 2006:327 emphasis in original).

3.4 Why do Black and Minority Ethnic Children Fare So Badly in the Educational System?

The statistics and findings presented above require us to question the procedures and activities that occur within schools that might explain why Black children are disproportionately more likely to be placed in the lower set tiers, and why in some Local Education Authorities the attainment of Black pupils falls relative to the average as they progress through the school system. A common explanation often presented is that cultural explanations are to blame. For example, African-Caribbean families are often stereotyped as being ‘dysfunctional’ and not valuing the role of education, in comparison with other ethnic groups (see Gillborn 2008). However, as well as relying on fixed and derogatory notions of minority ethnic cultures, such explanations do not tally with research evidence. As Gillborn and Mirza (2000) demonstrate, the attainment of Black pupils has been shown to fall as they progress through the school system when, in many cases, they start from a high achieving position.

One important explanation relates to the ways in which assessments are carried out. In the UK, for example, ‘setting by ability’ is the most common form of within-school selection where students are placed into separate hierarchical teaching groups for one or more subjects. However, research has consistently shown that when teachers are asked to judge the ‘potential’,
‘attitude’ and/or ‘motivation’ of their students they tend to place disproportionate numbers of Black students in low ranked groups (Sukhnandan and Lee 1998, Hallam 2002, Araujo 2007). This process is influenced by the way teachers ascribe particular identities to pupils, which not only serve as descriptions of individuals but become responsible for ‘creating students in these terms’ (Youdell 2006:12). Despite pupils’ attempts to move away from the negative and stereotyped identities that they are given, wider processes work to reassert the identifications with which they have been associated. Thus, when children are set in lower ability groups, the mere identification with being less able has a strong influence on how they will do in later tests. For example:

The ethnic groups that tend to achieve well in GCSE exams at age 16 (Indian and White) are generally more likely to feature in the top maths sets earlier in their school careers. Similarly, students in ethnic groups that tend to achieve less well in their GCSEs (Black Caribbean, Black African) are less likely to appear in the top set than their White peers of the same gender (Gillborn, 2008:94).

It has been shown that students placed in higher sets are much more likely to achieve higher final attainment than those students placed in lower sets (William and Bartholomew, 2004). This is related to the fact that the set a student is placed in tends to determine the tier of GCSE examination that they are entered for at age 16. As discussed above, this is an important decision, which places a ceiling on the grade that can be awarded, regardless of how well a student does in the exam.

More recently, there has been a revision of assessment procedures with the introduction of the ‘Foundation Stage Profile’ at age five that have replaced the baseline assessment that used to take place when children entered primary school. These tests are founded entirely on teachers’ judgements, and are relatively complex in terms of their coverage - they cover six areas of learning, sub-divided into thirteen different scales. Furthermore, little training was initially provided for the teacher assessments. When the first sets of results from these tests came through, an alternative picture of the educational attainment of Black pupils was presented than had been shown before. Whereas previously, when other forms of assessment were used, it had been noted that the educational attainment of Black students decreased as they progressed through the school system from a position of high achievement, the results from this new assessment procedure in 2004 showed Black children were among the lowest performers at age five (Gillborn 2006:329). The only thing that had changed was the way in which children were assessed. Significantly, though, this apparent change in ability in a very short space of time passed without political, policy or practitioner comment.
Similarly, in relation to educational attainment results, some ethnic groups are increasingly racialised as being ‘model minorities’, that is, they are portrayed as possessing some highly desirable traits that other ethnic groups ought to emulate. However, these too are forms of racialisation, which can be limiting and which do not necessarily benefit the ethnic groups involved.

### 3.4.1 Model minorities

*The performance of Indian, Chinese and other Asian pupils continues to outstrip those of white children. So why all the fuss?*  
(Bridges, The Times, 12 March 1999)

Evidence on educational achievement has consistently shown that Indian and Chinese students tend to do better at various key stages throughout school than their white British peers (DfES 2004) and this evidence has often been used to suggest that racism is irrelevant and is not supported by the facts, as is suggested in the comment above that was published in The Times. In essence, the model minority thesis suggests that it is the hard work, family stability and self-sacrifice of particular minority ethnic communities (in the British case, Indian and Chinese communities), which explains their high level of social mobility. However, this approach has generated much criticism (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Archer and Francis, 2007), mainly because it oversimplifies the experiences and achievements of ‘model minority’ groups by ignoring areas of inequality. Further, it operates to work against other racialised minority groups who are presented as being inadequate and inferior to these ‘model minorities’, and it also masks the experiences of racism and marginalisation that the ‘model minority’ groups themselves face.

One problem with suggesting that there cannot be racism in schools because some minority ethnic pupils do better than their white British peers, is that it is based on an assumption that racism operates only in open, direct and explicit forms, and that it can only be equated with race hatred of the most violent and one-dimensional kind (Gillborn, 2008). But this ignores the subtleties of racism that were highlighted in the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, which demonstrated how institutional racism arose out of processes, attitudes and behaviours within organisations that are often presented as ‘common sense’ views.
As was discussed earlier, the impact of teacher perceptions on assessment criteria is significant and their perceptions often change depending on which ethnic group they are dealing with (Gillborn, 2008). In the case of model minorities, by elevating some ethnic groups to be model pupils, it has the potential to further demonize students of other ethnic groups who become perceived as being ever more troublesome and difficult. That is, one of the key ways in which racism works is that it requires some groups to be elevated (often superficially) in order that other groups can be further marginalised and excluded.

Another point to consider is the complexity of racism, which means that a more holistic picture is required to really unpack the experiences of students who are perceived to do exceptionally well at school, and who are presented as ‘model minority pupils’. For example, people of Chinese and Black Caribbean backgrounds report similar levels of racial harassment (Modood, 1997). In the late 1990s, research revealed ‘a minimum of a quarter of a million racist incidents a year. Nearly a quarter of those who had been racially harassed had been victimised five or more times in the past year’ (Modood, 1997:353). Since 9/11 and 7/7 the number of racist incidents have increased, particularly against people of Asian background, and others perceived to be Muslim, and racist incidents often go under-reported, so the statistics are most likely under-estimates. Nevertheless, these daily-lived experiences of racism occur, despite their perceived educational ability within the classroom. Further, research has shown this more violent racist abuse also enters the classroom, and some pupils continue to experience explicit racist abuse as an
everyday reality, based on older essentialised constructions of bodily differences (Archer and Francis, 2007).

In addition to racial harassment and abuse, research has also consistently shown that educational achievement does not translate equally into the labour market. Although Indian and Chinese pupils may record higher levels of educational attainment on average compared with white British pupils and other ethnic groups, they are still less likely than their white British peers, who are similarly qualified, to find employment (Li and Heath, 2008).

3.5 Research on Racism in Mainly White Schools

An advantage of studying racism in mainly white British schools is that we have to study white racism rather than Black (Troyna, 1993:106). The focus is on how white people (including pupils, teachers, support staff, parents) ‘do racism’ rather than why Black pupils tend, for example, to be in the lower sets as here the numbers are often too small to be statistically significant. However, this does not make the issue any easier to address. An analogy might be querying whether sexism exists in an all-girl school; it does because patriarchy is a part of the functioning of our society and exists within the education system in the curriculum, the books and the teacher training, for example, as well as within the knowledge and attitudes the girls bring with them into school. In the same way, racism can disappear into the ‘normality’ of everyday life for many white people and perhaps also for some Black and minority ethnic people; the hegemony of white people is ‘normalized and taken for granted’ (Gillborn, 2005:486). The racist incidents recorded by most schools do not indicate the levels of this kind of ‘everyday’ racism, which is probably present in schools without any BME pupils where ‘racist incidents’ would be rare. It is, rather, the attitudes of the white British pupils, their parents, teachers and other support staff towards racism, which we need to examine (Gaine, 1995:2) and potentially change (Asare, 2009).

The majority of studies concerning race and racism have taken place in urban, multi-ethnic school settings. This focus is understandable, given that this is where racism is regarded to persist as a major issue. Yet it is also the case that such a focus works to neglect what is happening in the majority of the country, since DfES (2004) figures demonstrate that most UK schools are not urban and multiethnic, with two thirds being categorised as mainly white (i.e. the BME student population is less than five per cent).

The research which has taken place in these dominant ‘mainly white’ areas (e.g. areas like Cumbria, Scotland, Wiltshire and Cornwall, Arshad et al., 2005, Asare, 2009; Brown, 1990; Cline et al. 2002; Donald et al. 1995; Gaine, 1987, 1995, 2000, 2005; Knowles and Ridley, 2005) has found that racism exists in schools in these regions, but that it is far from being recognised as a
cause for concern. Chris Gaine, who has been at the forefront of research in mainly white schools for nearly three decades, sums up the key issues well; that the teachers in these schools report that there are ‘No problems Here’ (1987). His book title: ‘We’re All White Thanks’, is also a play on words, working to demonstrate the level of ignorance that exists in many of these settings (2005). The notion that the teachers in Gaine’s studies put forward is that racism doesn’t exist because there are no ethnic minority groups present.

This is a conclusion which has also been drawn by other scholars working in ‘mainly white’ areas. Asare (2009), for example, notes how the teachers she/he worked with were reluctant to identify racism in their schools. Asare links this directly back to the Macpherson report, suggesting that the definition of institutional racism used in the report might have led teachers to believe that racism can only operate in relation to direct contact with BME groups:

‘What the definition fails to encompass is the possibility that racist constructs can be present and have an effect on the culture and the assumptions of an organisation, even when no, or few, minority ethnic people are present. In this way, prejudice, ignorance and stereotyping towards minority ethnicities may reside in the way that the organisation operates, regardless of the presence of minority ethnic people within it.’ (Asare, 2009:8)

Asare also suggests that alongside this potentially problematic definition of institutional racism, is a related problem of racist incident reporting which, she suggests, can serve to further reinforce the idea that racism is only present in the psychology of individuals. Asare (2009) contends that in the mainly white areas she studied, racism is conceptualised as ‘occurring solely in the moment of a racist incident or in the personality of the pupil who is the perpetrator’ (Asare, 2009, p6) and not as part of any wider social context. As a result, schools see the way to deal with racism as being via responses to one-off incidents and the punishment of the perpetrators, thus further individualising the issue. Asare (2009) argues that it is more useful to consider racist incidents from a perspective that takes into account the structural, political, cultural and ideological background to an incident, but that schools are not currently required to do this, nor to tackle the more subtle manifestations of social inclusion that are not necessarily defined as racist incidents. In addition to this, the relatively low numbers of racist incidents recorded in mainly white areas, when compared with more ethnically diverse areas, serves to further strengthen the argument that it is the presence of ethnic minorities that causes racism to manifest (Asare, 2009; Donald et al., 1995; Gaine, 2005).

The idea that racism is not a problem in mainly white areas is not borne out by research into the lived experience of BME groups and individuals in these
communities though (Chakraborti and Garland, 2004; Collins and Begum, 2002; Gaine and Lamley, 2003; Kenny, 1997; Neal, 2002). These studies have demonstrated that racism and discrimination certainly are present in these groups’ everyday lives. As well as being present in its more pernicious forms, verbal and physical abuse, racism manifests in these areas more commonly in less blatant forms such as suspicion, avoidance or stereotypical assumptions. The same conclusions have been reached by those who have studied ethnic minority pupils in mainly white schools (Asare, 2009; Donald et al., 1995; DfES, 2004; Cline et al., 2002; Gaine, 1987, 1995, 2005; Troyna and Hatcher, 1992). Although in these studies pupils’ accounts did include examples of physical violence, the vast majority examples given were of students being called racist names, of being expected to tolerate ‘jokes’ that involve reference to their colour or cultural stereotypes, of their behaviour being essentialised as part of their ‘culture’ as a result of teacher prejudice, pressure to ‘assimilate’ into white British culture and countless other forms of racism that remain invisible to those who only see racism as evident in racist incidents committed by aberrant individuals. Furthermore, many of those who had experienced racism were reluctant to report it, due to fear of the consequences from fellow students, because they felt the teachers wouldn’t understand, or because they feared being branded as a trouble maker (Cline et al., 2002).

This invisibility of many forms of racism in mainly white areas is, argues Gaine (2005) part of the reason for racism being seen as less of a problem. In Gaine’s view, this invisibility results from the way in which racism operates in these areas primarily through normalised discourses, rather than via deliberate acts (Gaine, 2005). He states that ‘Racism is about material practices where BME people are present and discursive practices whether or not they are present’ (Gaine, 2005, p69). In other words, although racist incidents may be lower than in more multicultural areas, racist discourse is no less prevalent and, in fact, is the main way in which racism manifests itself. Asare (2009) terms racism a ‘common reference point’ that finds expression through insults or jokes, rather than something that only manifests in certain people and in racist incidents. Gillborn (1995) describes how such discourses are linked to the exercise of power and make it possible to construct topics in certain ways, whilst limiting alternative constructions.

Gaine (2000, 2005) also argues that the lack of significant numbers of ethnic minority students and community members in mainly white areas means that the types of prejudice and stereotypes that are created and recreated via these discursive practices are not challenged or modified by close contact with real people. Asare (2009) agrees, citing Hewitt (1989) who suggests that mainly white schools have an absence of ‘polyculture’, which prevents
essentialised ideas being reformulated through proximity and interaction, resulting in minority cultures and ethnicities being marginalised.

3.5.1 Teachers’ attitudes

Education is a political topic and both multi-culturalism and antiracist stances during the 1980s and early 1990s were often positions that criticised and mistrusted each other (Jones, 1999:9). Both positions have been heavily criticised (Troyina, 1993:42), and the introduction of the National Curriculum in the 1990s reducing the freedom teachers have to choose what to teach. The current coalition government, in freeing up schools to become academies and with the introduction of Free Schools, is allowing more freedom for schools to move the teaching agenda outside of the confines of the National Curriculum. This potentially allows more space to deal with social issues generally but would need the commitment of a staff who are confident and knowledgeable in race issues, which, unfortunately, is often lacking (Hick et al., 2011:13). Initial teacher training (ITE) does not tend to include much training around race, racism or discrimination (Wilkins, 2001; Soyei, n.d.). Moreover, there has been a drive over recent years to move teacher training into the classroom. This is problematic where there is little or no expertise regarding the social context of childhood in which race, class, gender and disability all play a part (Jones, 1999:2). Conventional university-based training for teachers has the potential to engage trainees with issues of diversity and social justice, contextualising learning and teaching experiences in the classroom. The clear danger in moving teacher training into a predominantly or exclusively white classroom context is that these are issues can then be seen as irrelevant (at worst) or tacit (at best) within the real thrust of the business of learning how to teach. The lack of teachers with BME heritage in all areas (not just the ‘white highlands’ as Jones, 1999:2 describes) also seems to ‘constrain both the understandings of students and the confidence of lecturers in engaging with race equality issues’ (Hick et al., 2011:12). This can lead to a fear, amongst trainees and Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) that they are ‘getting it wrong’ (Hick et al., 2011:15). If teachers cannot themselves engage with these issues, and trainees are wary of tackling them, there is little chance that the children in their care will be informed about and comfortable around issues of social and racial justice.

In terms of on-going teacher training, race is also low down the agenda. Some teachers feel that race should not be talked about, adopting a ‘colour blind’ approach (Soyei, n.d.:17) whereby Black and ethnic minority pupils become ‘white by proxy’ (Jones, 1999:45). Students themselves also then adopt this approach, at least in a ‘public’ arena. This attitude serves to deny BME students an important aspect of their identity (Jones, 1999:8). Not addressing
race or racism hides the perceived ‘problem’ of race behind a ‘spiral of silence’ (Noelle-Neumann, 1974).

One key concern is the way in which teachers manage language around race. Many teachers appear to be ‘uncomfortable’ in using and commenting on pupils’ use of racial terms (Soyei, n.d:5). There are also issues around how teachers understand and address racist incidents (ibid, p.6). Where teachers lack an understanding of ‘white privilege’ it is difficult for them to address these issues with pupils with the result that pupils are unprepared for life in a multi-ethnic society. This is sometimes evident in the parental influences some pupils bring with them into schools (ibid:21). Schools are not isolated from the rest of society and pupils and teachers engage with the local community, as well as the national and international arena. Where this engagement is mediated through the press, stereotypical images, often negative, of Black and minority ethnic people can impact on young people’s understandings and perceptions of difference (Leveson, 2012). Racist bullying can lead to trouble around the young person’s sense of identity and belonging (Cline et al, 2002:51). There are therefore three key issues highlighted in the current literature which this project needs to address: teachers’ understanding of and attitudes around race and racism; the impact on young people of parental beliefs around race and racism, together with those depicted in wider society; an understanding of the impact racist bullying can have on the victims. Each of these stems from an understanding of racism as part of the everyday context of living in Cheshire. It is, of course, unrealistic to expect schools and teachers to do much to alter the structures of racism within society, but teachers are an important influence on young people with a duty to address their moral as well as academic education (Jones, 1999:20).

3.5.2 Media impacts

Other crucial influences on young peoples’ lives and belief systems are their parents and the cultural environment in which they live, including all forms of media. Even primary age children are aware of media images even if they do not engage directly with national media themselves (Nayak, 1999). National media has been shown to be (still) racist (Asare, 2009; Leveson, 2012) affecting common perceptions of, for example, asylum seekers and Eastern European migrants. Where people are less likely to come into contact with these populations on a personal level it could be argued that they are, in fact, more likely to accept media images as truthful.

Furthermore, modern examples of racist terminology regularly appear unchallenged in music, film, literature and other forms of media regularly accessed by children and young people, making this an even more complex arena to observe, research and discuss. Similarly, the most racially aggressive and emotive language can be ‘normalised’ within friendship
groups, making challenges to the use of such terminology extremely problematic for both teachers and other pupils who are not members of that particular friendship group.

3.6 Addressing Racism through the ‘Schools Stand Up to Racism’ Project

Given the different forms and locations of racism, tackling it in schools (and studying it) is more complex that it might initially appear; it is not just a case of being ‘colour blind’ as this foregoes the legacy of the ways in which race structurally situates individuals and groups, resulting in unequal opportunities. The Schools Stand Up 2 Racism project methodology was informed by action research, which seeks not only to produce new knowledge, but to improve practice by ‘the development of a body of professional knowledge of ‘what works’ or of how values might be translated into practice – or come to be transformed by practice (Pring, 2000:133). Thus, the project’s main concern was to find ways in which the knowledge produced could be used to inform anti-racist practice specifically in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington high schools.
4. Methods and Methodology

4.1 Initial Design

The project was designed initially with four main tasks:

- Administration of a survey to all schools in the designated locality
- Follow-up interview data collection from teachers
- Survey of 1,565 pupils across 5 selected schools and 2 age cohorts (years 8 and 11)
- Focus group discussions with 8-12 pupils from years 8 and 11 within the 5 selected schools
- Use of ethnodrama as an additional data collection tool with groups of year 8 pupils in the 5 selected schools

In general, the research worked within the parameters set in the original bid submission, but some modifications were made as the project developed. These modifications were submitted to the Big Lottery funders and agreed, enabling the team to respond innovatively and flexibly to barriers that arose within the data collection process.

4.2 Methodology

The methodology in the project bid was based on Participatory Action Research (PAR), an approach that tries to integrate aspects of participation of the groups under study and aims to generate solutions with people experiencing the actual issues. The creator of PAR is usually seen as Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist who was interested in research in action, who was also influenced by similar approaches being developed at the UK’s Tavistock Institute during the 1940’s. Lewin envisaged a form of research that would be designed so that people who were directly affected by a problem or issue could benefit from it. PAR has since become the approach of choice for research with community groups and other social groups that come together to focus on finding solutions to particular problems. There is a nexus of individuals and groups involved in most modern PAR and this includes the groups of people that the work can directly benefit (the beneficiaries), others who may work with, provide services to, or represent the beneficiaries (stakeholders) and academics and researchers working on the project or in other similar areas. Whilst all the groups have different perspectives on the issues, this research process brings together all participants with the intention of seeking positive change. By using PAR, positive solutions and change are generated through a shared partnership approach to the problem; such an
approach allows people to feel engaged and that they have investment in that positive social change.

It is worth noting though that PAR is an approach but it is not a method: it is a set of principles and practices for originating, designing, conducting, analysing and acting on a piece of research. Therefore, it is possible to carry out a PAR project with a range of social science methods including, surveys, interviews, participant observation, diary or photography work, collection of literature, secondary analysis of datasets, art and drama work.

As this section will demonstrate, whilst being influenced by PAR approaches, the research has developed towards a more PAR informed approach, rather than adhering resolutely to all PAR principles. In particular, it was envisaged that more members of BME communities would volunteer and then stay with the project throughout the study period. However, this did not happen, in part because volunteers were often in-between other activities (such as looking for work) and therefore turnover and ‘moving on’ was high, and because interest dwindled in-between research tasks. Likewise, other PAR tools, such as a website that pupils and teachers could sign up and log into, did not work as foreseen. It is not clear why this particular innovation did not work but the researchers suspect that the kinds of ‘draws’ that young people, in particular, expect from a website were not built into ours. The costs for games, highly complex interactive tools were beyond the means of the project and would likely to be beyond many research and development projects. Therefore, the data presented within this report, whilst having some aspects of a PAR methodology, also has more traditional aspects to it, as described below.

4.2.1 Literature review

The literature review was undertaken early in the project and then continued to be updated throughout. The scope of the review covered academic journals, practitioner journals, grey literature and the inclusion of teacher training materials on the area of race in schools.

4.2.2 Semi-structured survey to schools

All state funded secondary schools in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington were invited to take part in the research. Half of the schools agreed to be involved and Head Teachers nominated one key member of staff to act as our contact. A survey was sent to the key contact in each of the participating schools, by email and by post. The survey covered the following areas:

- Background information about the school, including demographic data about teacher and pupil ethnicity.
• The number of racist incidents and incidences of bullying and harassment recorded in the school over the last year and last three years.

• Details about school policies on racist incidents and race equality.

• The interviewee’s perception of levels of confidence among staff with regards to dealing with racism and racist incidents.

• The types of training and support given to staff about race equality issues and, in particular, racist incidents.

• Data on achievements and exclusions, broken down by factors such as ethnicity.

• How, and where in the curriculum, the interviewees felt racism and anti-racism were taught within their school.

Twenty-one surveys were completed and returned by the designated staff. In general, these staff tended to be drawn from subject areas such as Religious Studies, Personal and Social and Health Education (PSHE) and be trained subject teachers, although in some cases they were support staff. It would be fair to say that these staff were often not high in the school hierarchy and some struggled to obtain data, such as exclusion rates, qualification rates by ethnicity and other information that we required for the project. This led to numerous ‘data gaps,’ which the volunteers and the project officer followed up by telephone and email. However, many of those gaps in the data remain and this is reflected in the analysis section’s discussion about the overall school data.

4.2.3 Staff interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff who had completed the initial survey as representatives of their schools. All of these interviews took place face to face. These interviews covered similar questions and issues to those raised by the survey, but were semi-structured by design to encourage the respondents to give much more detailed answers and to provide a sense of the culture of the school, in relation to race and ethnicity, from their own perspective. Sixteen interviews were completed and the data fully transcribed.

4.2.4 Student survey

From those schools who responded to the survey, five were selected for further participation within the study. The criteria for this selection was to include schools who:

• Indicated that they were happy to co-operate further with the student survey
• Had a range of either high or low numbers of identified BME group pupils
• Represented one of the four local authorities covered by the research (although one authority was represented by two participating schools)
• Had reported a range of relatively high or low numbers of racist incidents
• Represented a range of socio-economic catchment areas as far as this was possible

Within the five selected schools, all students in years 8 and 11 were invited to complete a survey and the surveys were administered in their form groups. The survey covered the following areas:

• Demographic information, including gender, age and ethnicity
• How often pupils felt that racism occurred within their school
• Their views on whether their school presented racism to the pupils as an important issue and how they felt their school dealt with racism
• Confidence of staff in dealing with racism
• Their views on whether they felt able to talk to teachers about racism or report a racist incident
• If they had reported a racist incident and, if so, how they evaluated the response from the school
• Whether they felt that they learned about racism and anti-racism at school
• The academic school subjects that dealt with issues such as racism and what they felt they had learned
• If they would report racist incidents that occurred outside of school to staff and what they felt the school’s response to this type of incident would be.

1565 surveys were completed by pupils and returned, providing a broad insight into their experiences of race and ethnicity issues within their schools, as well as, specifically, about racism at school.
4.2.5 Student focus groups

Focus groups were deployed to examine in more detail the daily experience of race and ethnicity issues in schools. This included understandings of what racism is and how this term is presented and explained within the school setting. It also included discussion around racist incidents and pupils’ experiences of the use of casual racist terminology. Ten focus groups were held in the five selected schools with 8-12 students from years 8 and 11. As with the teacher interviews, these covered similar questions to those in the student survey but again they were sufficiently flexible to encourage more detailed responses. The rationale for using these focus groups was to elicit more elaborate explanations of the daily and ‘lived’ experience of being a pupil and dealing with race and ethnicity issues. For instance, whilst the questionnaire data provided an idea of how many incidents of racism-related incidents pupils might have witnessed, the focus group interviews enabled an understanding of how pupils comprehend what a racism-related issue is. By further exploring the meaning of race and ethnicity for pupils through the focus groups, the research has been better able to understand the way that incidents may not be reported because they are not recognised. This process of recognition is often situated very strongly in context, in other words, some pupils felt that racism could be tolerated and even seen as perfectly acceptable within certain social situations, whereas in others, all forms of racism were seen as unacceptable. This ‘normalising’ of racism in some contexts and the disliking or challenging of it in others is discussed in more detail in the data chapters. In this way, by using focus groups to examine key themes, we were able to explore more fully the ‘everydayness’ of racism in schools.

4.2.6 Ethnodramas

In this phase of the research, four short ethnodramas were created as staged scenarios; these were written from examples given by pupils in the surveys and in the focus groups. They were presented by actors from the MMU Cheshire Community Arts degree programme, who worked to bring these scenarios to life. Each ethnodrama ran for about 5 minutes and groups of 6-8 students from year 8 formed the audience for each performance and then, immediately afterwards, discussed the issues raised. These were used as visual prompts to generate discussions on topics that may have been difficult to engage with through the focus group methods. It was found that pupils were prepared to engage more willingly and enthusiastically with the ethnodramas as they asked questions and initiated discussions. The ethnodramas focused on the key themes arising from the data, which included:
• The use of racist language
• Teacher response to, and influence upon racism within school
• Racist ‘banter’ within or outside the context of friendship
• Stereotypical attitudes, beliefs and behaviour
• The influence of parents on young people’s attitudes towards minority ethnic groups or individuals.

In total, the project was able to gather data through four complete runs of the ethnodramas, each at different schools.

4.2.7 Small group interviews

The interviews with BME students arose as a new and separate dataset that grew out of a realization (post-focus group data collection) that this group of pupils had a view on race and racism that differed significantly from the majority white perspective. Whilst there were some BME pupils involved in the general focus groups, it would be fair to say that majority white settings and groupings were unlikely to yield data relating to this group’s everyday experiences of racism. To redress this ‘gap’ we gained permission to carry out some focused interviews with BME pupils in the five selected schools. However, for school timetabling and logistical reasons we were unable to carry out the interviews in all the five schools as planned and only three took place. The data from these interviews are treated in this report as illustrative case studies (ICS) only, because they cannot be generalized to a broader range of situations and experiences of BME pupils within schools. The data from these ICS interviews are presented here as stand-alone, school-specific datasets where pupil voices and experiences can be foregrounded within the broader context of the study.

Factors to be taken into account in relation to reading the data gathered through the BME interviews include:

- Teachers found it difficult to recruit young people for the interviews. It can be speculated that this was because there were so few BME students in the schools’ demographic and/or because pupils felt uncomfortable in discussing issues about race and ethnicity. Specifically, there may have been feelings of ‘disloyalty’ to the school, area or friends and/or fears about the possible consequences of disclosure to the researchers.
- As there were so few BME interviews they need to be read as case studies, which are individually framed by their respective contexts, participants, and relationships.
• Whilst the researcher group was racially mixed in composition, it is worth acknowledging that some pupils felt more comfortable discussing race-related issues with adults who shared their ethnic background. This is supported by data collected that indicates some BME pupils felt they had to apologise for some (perfectly acceptable, but critical) views when talking to white researchers.

4.3 Learning Points

• Education is changing constantly and even relatively small changes in areas such as the curriculum, school priorities or funding can have meaningful impact on research processes over time. As the methodologies employed here were flexible and responsive to change in the different settings, this facilitated opportunities for innovation and to ensure that pupils’ voices formed a visible and significant part of the data collection process.

• This kind of research can result in outcomes that are not anticipated by the participants themselves. In this instance, the assumption was that the research would examine race-related issues in pupils’ school lives however, it became apparent that personal experience was only part of this ‘story’ and institutional practices, policies and procedures were also elements of pupils’ lived experience. PAR, as a research process, can be highly political in that it delivers knowledge about an area that can destabilise assumed norms, values and practices of main stakeholders, who may feel uncomfortable about results. This research would recognise this destabilising feature whilst at the same time acknowledging that this was an indication that the methodological positioning had achieved its aims and succeeded in gathering authentic and lived experience.

• The project found that keeping volunteers involved in the research across lengthy periods was difficult. Research tends to have particular ‘busy’ phases and in-between these, it is difficult to keep volunteers ‘in the loop’ and engaged in the process. The experience here suggests that in longer projects, volunteers might be best recruited separately for each phase. There was also an issue about building research capacity with volunteers, who arrived with various levels of ability in different areas. For example, one volunteer did not like working with computers and did not work well in interpersonal situations (such as interviewing). It was difficult to find a role for this volunteer and, even with training in research methods, she did not seem able to progress beyond her initial skills. The working capacity of volunteers is one of the perennial problems faced by third sector groups but in research projects such as this, it acts against being able to support community engagement through volunteering.
5. Teacher Survey and Interviews

5.1 Key Findings

- The numbers of BME pupils in these schools were very low, as expected
- These low numbers meant that the data on GCSE grades for BME students could not be analysed and compared to those of white British students
- The teachers generally saw racism as being more of an issue for schools with more ethnically diverse student bodies
- Some schools discussed how in the past few years a growing anti-Muslim sentiment had emerged amongst some pupils and within their local communities. In certain cases this was supported by parents, who requested that their children be removed from Religious Education lessons when Islam was being taught
- The use of racist language was the most common and prolific form of racist incident
- Some of the interviews discussed problematic behaviours or the lower attainment and achievement of mixed-race children of mixed Black/white background
- Some of the schools included in the research respond to racist incidents by a general raising of awareness of race issues
- Other schools tend to respond through an understanding of racism as a hate crime and discussed working in partnership with the community police
- Sometimes teachers were uncertain about how to best approach the issue of race with their class
- None of the teachers interviewed reported having received any specific training on race equality issues or dealing with racist incidents

Eighty schools across Cheshire were invited to take part in the school questionnaire; this excluded private schools but included schools providing education for students with special educational needs. Out of the schools contacted, there were twenty-one responses and, to try to increase this, school engagement with the questionnaire was supported by follow-up phone calls, emails and by letter, but this did not increase involvement. The usual engagement with questionnaires that are administered to people or organisations, stands at a quarter returns and, in this sense, the return rate was what one might have expected. Unfortunately, though this return rate did not allow for statistical analysis of the data, as the numbers were too low to
produce statistically significant findings. Despite this, the questionnaires did confirm that these schools have a very low number of BME pupils.

Following this, the staff who completed the questionnaire were asked to take part in an interview, either by phone or face to face. Again, response rates were quite low (n=16), reflecting, the team felt, a number of issues relating to time and organisational constraints, rather than a general lack of interest. Sixteen members of staff were interviewed, with the majority of them having responsibility for social science and humanity subject areas such as personal development, citizenship and/or religious studies. There was a lack of representation from other subject areas, such as the sciences, maths and sport. Other participants had responsibility for pastoral care in the schools, rather than being subject teachers.

5.2 Interviews

The second stage of data gathering for the project involved carrying out interviews with a staff representative from all high schools in the area. Once the school questionnaire had been returned, a meeting was arranged with the appointed teacher for a more in-depth interview covering similar topics to those in the original questionnaire and exploring them in more detail. Sixteen interviews were carried out in total. Schools interviewed were situated in a range of geographical areas covering Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Halton and Warrington, with some attracting students from more affluent catchment areas while others had more mixed cohorts and large numbers of children from more deprived backgrounds. The schools also ranged in terms of ethnic composition. Some schools had few or no Black and minority ethnic children in school, while others reported a relative ethnically diverse student body. One school (Allbury) reported 11% of BME students but the average across all the responses was 4.8% BME students, with Parkside reporting only 1.1% BME pupils, a reflection of the overall population in the geographies covered.

Interviews were carried out between April and July 2011 and usually lasted for about one hour. They were all carried out face to face in the schools where the staff were based. The interviewees were a diverse group, with a variety of job roles and generally were designated to undertake the interview by Head Teachers or already had responsibility at some level for equality issues in the schools. Some of the interviewees were senior managers, such as Deputy Head Teachers, others were teachers with responsibility for Humanities or Social subjects such as Religious Education (RE), Citizenship or Personal, Health and Social Education (PHSE), Sociology, and History, whilst some were non-teaching staff who had pastoral responsibilities for pupils.
The interviews covered a number of key themes, which are discussed in more detail below. The overall aim of the interviews was to gain an understanding of the schools’ approaches to, and understandings of, racism in their organisation. This was achieved through questioning and prompting on a number of areas, relating to day-to-day school events, ethos and procedures. Topics included the recording of pupils’ ethnicity and the use of this data, racist incidents, setting in different subjects and year groups, how anti-racist education is incorporated into the curriculum, teacher training and incidents outside school.

5.3 Ethnic Composition of Student Bodies and Recording of Ethnicity in Schools

Schools generally reported that they had very few minority ethnic students. One or two schools commented on the increase in Polish students over the past few years, reflecting the growth of the Eastern European community in the area, but most schools reported little change over the past few years. Nevertheless, amongst the small minority ethnic population there was a great diversity of ethnic identities including Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean, Black African, Black British, Fijian, Turkish, Afghanistani, Polish, other East Europeans and Roma. Schools reported that ethnicity was usually self-reported and selected from a list of options on enrolment forms. The forms usually include a space for ‘other’, so students could state their specific ethnicity if they wished.

We asked schools how they use the data on ethnicity. Some reported that data were used to monitor the attainment of students and as a way of checking that there were no significant differences in attainment based on ethnicity or underachieving groups:

Well we do specifically focus on students with different ethnic backgrounds and their attainment and progress, so we consider them a group that we monitor in school. Deputy Head Teacher

Other schools reported however, that they did little with the data on ethnicity at the time of interview, as there were new recording systems and databases in place that staff were learning to use. Other schools said the breakdown of subject attainment data by ethnicity was a recent introduction to allow staff to monitor differences between groups of students in their subject. Sometimes technical difficulties in using the systems were given as reasons for little analysis of the data. The special schools we spoke to were the least likely to monitor data on achievement by ethnicity, but they also had quite different ways of monitoring achievement and assessment from the mainstream schools.
It was reported by interviewees in all schools that they had a specific duty to monitor other vulnerable groups, which included ‘looked after children’, children with special educational needs, pupils considered ‘gifted and talented’ and children on free school meals. However, race and ethnic background were not always seen as causes of possible vulnerability, with these other categories being seen as at least, and sometimes more ‘risky’ in terms of their potential to affect students’ educational outcomes. This is interesting in terms of the possible overlaps between safeguarding issues (which are of central importance to schools presently) and racist incidents.

5.4 Teachers’ Ideas and Perceptions about Race and Racism

Teachers reported a mixture of views and ideas about what they thought racism to be, how they thought it operated and how significant and important an issue it was in their school. One of the most common ideas stated and which is shared with many other studies into mainly white schools, was that racism was not really a problem because of the low number of ethnic minority pupils (Gaine, 1987; Troyna, 1993; Gaine, 1995; Jones, 1999; Nayak, 1999). This was expressed by teachers in two ways; firstly, it was felt that less ethnic minority students meant fewer opportunities for racist incidents to happen and so they were a relatively rare occurrence. Secondly, for some, ethnic minority students were not present in large enough numbers for an ‘us’ and ‘them’ division to develop within the school, which was seen as an ‘inevitable’ outcome once BME student numbers reached a certain level. The teachers generally saw racism as being more of an issue for schools with more ethnically diverse student bodies; racism was presented as a problem they did not confront on a regular basis. For these reasons, the majority of teachers said that their school did not see the need to prioritise racism and race equality education (which has proved to be a consistent outcome of race research focused in white settings):

*And there is, you know, I’m being completely honest, there is always that assumption that ‘well if there are, there are not that many Black children in school so it’s not an issue’ you know and whilst people recognise it is, I think it’s just it’s not that much of an issue in terms of priority on our agenda of what we need to do.* Teacher

However, one or two teachers reported that racism was not just about the presence of minority ethnic students but about attitudes and behaviour that affected everyone. In this regard they thought racism was an important issue. In some of the towns covered by this research there is a high level of relatively recent East European migration which brings along with it negative images from the media:
Obviously because we’ve got a big percentage of Eastern European students within the school now and there are tensions and issues within the school that are, in the main, brought in from outside of the school and the parents or whoever it is, their opinion about the other community, that’s pushed it higher up the agenda. Quite a few of the incidents we’re dealing with at the moment, it’s not racism per se, if that makes sense, it’s the language that student might have said is clearly not their own, they’re using something they might have heard at home and then making a generalised stereotype style comment rather than actually bullying someone. Teacher

Some staff discussed how in the past few years a growing anti-Muslim sentiment had emerged amongst some pupils and within their local communities. In certain cases this was supported by parents, who requested that their children be removed from Religious Education lessons when Islam was being taught:

Now what we’ve found since I’ve come is that it’s very much an anti-Muslim sentiment within school and within this area as a whole. We’ve had three parents before I came try to have the students not be in RE because they didn’t want them to learn about Islam or any other religions so that’s quite common, I mean they do it. Teacher

Some of the interviews discussed perceived problematic behaviour or the lower attainment and achievement of mixed-race children of mixed Black/white background. In some cases, the interviewees felt uncertain about this was the case; at other times teachers suggested that the behaviour of some of these pupils was in part linked to their own cultural identity crises and difficulties:

I mean in terms of the ethnic mix and even at that minority level, mixed race is one I would note if there are gonna be kind of any problems with racism or under achievements, it’s more likely to be with a mixed-race background. Now that’s something that you just pause and note and there’s no real explanation as to why that it as of yet. Teacher

I mean that (incident) was partly because of the young man concerned as well, he’s quite volatile... He’s got his own issues with having, his mum’s Black and his dad’s white. Teacher

The prolific use of social media, and Facebook in particular, was cited by all schools as being a major issue in perpetuating racist incidents and bullying in general:
[T]hey say things to each other on the internet or whatever that they would never dream of saying to someone’s face, and it’s just so much open to interpretation as well isn’t it? You know if I said [whisper] you know I’m joking but when you write it on a screen, and they can keep going back to it, so it’s re-lived all the time. Teacher

The internet represented a new frontier for possible racism that schools had to engage with because pupils were so involved with it. Moreover, pupils often perpetrated violence and abuse on the Internet towards other pupils, and the abuse could transfer out of cyberspace and into school.

5.5 Dealing with Racist Incidents

Understanding amongst school staff of what constituted racist incidents and how these should be dealt with was variable. Macpherson’s definition of a racist incident was being used within schools, but in many cases was not fully understood or caused confusion:

I think I have a personal sort of philosophical issue with the way in which racist incidents are defined on the Cheshire form though, in that it says that it’s a racist incident if it’s perceived to be by the person who’s on the receiving end of it and I don’t think that stands any logical analysis to be honest. You know if I perceive that I’m the Pope, it doesn’t make it right does it you know, and I find that frustrating really. Teacher

This frustration with the definition appears to arise from a confusion regarding the intentions behind it. It was designed to ensure that all reported racist incidents should be taken seriously and investigated, not that they become categorised as racist from the outset and must remain that way even after investigation.

There were also accounts that suggested some teachers were not even aware of their duty to investigate a racist incident, regardless of their own interpretation of events. Teachers appeared in some cases to feel that, as adults, they were in a better position than students to interpret whether or not an incident was racist:

I’m not sure all teachers, I think it’s in their interpretation if you like, so ‘Well I don’t think that’s racist, so it isn’t’. Whereas maybe the pupil might have felt it was and I think that’s where the training needs to happen, to sort of raising awareness about what might be racist. Teacher
This sentiment was reported by a number of other interviewees, who said that they felt they or their colleagues had not had enough training on recording and responding to racist incidents.

Staff also overwhelmingly expressed the view that when racism did occur, it was confined to the attitudes and behaviours of aberrant individuals. In the majority of interviews, when staff gave examples of racist incidents they were described as ‘one-off’ incidents that came about as a result of the pathology of an individual student. They were keen to emphasise that few of these examples formed part of a wider trend within school and neither were they part of a long term victimisation of one particular individual by another:

_We do have challenging students, but there’s never a thing, they seem to realise that line when it’s gone too far and that’s why we don’t seem to have repeat incidents with the same individuals and same situations. But I mean, there is always the scope that it could happen on the way out as you leave school, I mean Facebook in particular is huge._

Teacher

This desire to present racist incidents as confined to one-off events was part of broader discourses that sought to downplay the seriousness or significance of incidents within school. There was a strong tendency to minimalise the incidents as unintentional, non-malicious and coming from a position of ignorance on the perpetrator’s part, rather than from a desire to racially abuse:

_Some of the incidents on the, you know, to start with look really serious. And then when you look into them it’s just kids who’ve just not had an understanding of what they’ve said and why and what it means… So, on the surface when you hear some of the comments that might have been made you think ‘Oh my goodness me, that’s pretty grim’, but then when you talk to them they haven’t got a clue what they meant._ Teacher

Other teachers gave similar accounts, characterising many racist incidents as simply being about students falling out and using a racist insult in the same way as they might pick on another characteristic of a person, such as their hair colour or weight. In this way, the teachers sought to position racism alongside other forms of bullying and therefore of no greater significance. There was little understanding of how the use of language in this way is linked to structural conditions, such that there was sometimes confusion over why racist name-calling was seen as more serious than other forms of name-calling:

_They pick on an, on some sort of characteristic of another child that they think will hurt them the most, so if you’ve got glasses or if you’re fat_
that’s what they’re going to say, and if they think that’s going to be the button that presses. Teacher

We’ll do exactly the same with all the bullying incidents and we’ve got a really good new policy for doing that, coz in many respects it is just bullying isn’t it and (the local authority) want us to report all of those. Teacher

This downplaying of racism was also evident in the way that interviewees talked about classifying racist incidents. Those that were seen as the most serious involved violence and were extremely rare. As one teacher put it, he was ‘relieved’ that that although they had to deal with racist language and discourse, that ‘We’re not talking about assaults or anything of that nature’. The second most serious were those that involved the use of racist language directly towards an ethnic minority student. The least serious may or may not involve racist language, but is not directed at an individual, rather used to negatively describe a whole ethnic group. These least serious incidents were described as being the most commonly occurring and were generally characterised as being down to ‘ignorance’. There were noticeable tensions here between the teachers’ desire to categorise ‘minor’ incidents alongside the recognition that the definitions supplied by the local authority and the subsequent duty to report all incidents implied that all incidents should be treated with equal significance. Alongside this, these teachers (understandably) had concerns that any such reporting of ‘minor’ incidents would lead to some pupils being branded as racist unnecessarily. Similarly, they were concerned about how the reporting of these incidents would impact on the reputation of the school.

However, making these classifications between incidents still remained a confusing area for many:

I would say the only area that could ever cause confusion in the school... is understanding the difference between indirect and direct racism... Quite often students will use a racist term or there will be a racist connotation to a conversation and... often the teachers will categorise an incident as racist when actually there’s been no direct intention to be racist and kind of recording that can be misleading in some ways... We could be teaching about Islam, but what they could do is, is that we find a situation where they go ‘Oh I’m not gonna learn about Muslims’ and it’s like, well is that direct racism because we have a Muslim in the room or is it indirect racism? Teacher

On occasions when racist incidents were referred to, the cultural practices of BME students in general were discussed, often in stereotypical terms, as
contributory factors to their own victimisation. There was usually no acknowledgement in these discussions of the complex and layered interactions underlying these incidents (Asare, 2009). A number of teachers claimed that some racist incidents were, at least in part, due to the behaviour of the victim themselves, either because they had ‘wound up’ a fellow student, who had responded with a racist jibe; because they were ‘volatile’ and prone to overreact to comments taken in the ‘wrong way’; because they made themselves too conspicuous as a result of their behaviour or culture and therefore in some ways left themselves open to being victimised; or because they were inconsistent in the way in which they responded to the use of racist language. A number of these issues are illustrated in the following account:

We’ve had a Russian young man in school and... he became known as ‘the Russian boy’. And it was really difficult then because his behaviour... there were other issues around him personally and his behaviour stood out. So whenever he was discussed ‘You know, the Russian boy’ and that’s how it became known then... but coz that’s how he stood out... But I think there’s a lack of understanding around the cultural background. I know when I’ve been dealing with this (racist abuse), like I’ve not understood the cultural, how they manage, how this man and how the family... previously have managed conflict before and it’s very different to how they would here. So there’s this mentality of ‘you do not tell’ and ‘you sort things out yourself’ and that came from his background... Which is quite alien in many ways, to how things are now in school... it’s actually making, they’re only making themselves more vulnerable. Teacher

This teacher gives an account of how the student was categorised as being ‘other’ because of his ethnic identity and responsible for making himself more visible as a result of his behaviour and ethnic origin. She also explains his failure to report racist abuse as being to do with his ‘culture’. Missing from her account is any consideration of what else might have prevented his from reporting, for example his relationship with his teachers or fear of reprisal from his fellow students.

Similar accounts were given by other staff, including a Pastoral Support Worker who thought that racist incidents were probably under-reported because ethnic minority students were sometimes selective in those that they chose to report:

A particular boy who I dealt with... he complained about somebody saying something to him and then... it came out that a number of his mates had said things to him but because they were his mates, he didn’t take as much offence to them... So it has happened in the past
but that had obviously gone unreported because, in his, his perception was ‘Oh they’re my mates and they’re just messing around’ and in a way it was sort of ‘Well you can’t have it both ways, you can’t sort of accuse one person of being racist towards you, when actually your mates are doing a similar thing and not accuse’, you know what I mean? Teacher

Again, it would seem that there was little consideration given to the circumstances that might cause a student to report in one instance but not in another; considerations around the maintenance of friendships, for example, or pressure to be seen to engage in ‘banter’.

The ways in which students were held to be at least partly responsible for the racism they experienced fits with the idea that racism is caused by the presence of ethnic minorities. It also moves away from any notion that racism has a permanent underlying presence, by stating that it often only occurs under ‘provocation’. Meanwhile, failure of a lack of consistency in reporting, or failing to report at all, places responsibility with the ethnic minority students themselves to be the ones who decide whether racism has occurred.

Perhaps this last point says something again about the ways in which the definition of a racist incident (as set out by Macpherson) is being interpreted by staff. Macpherson’s intention was for the victim or anyone witnessing the incident to be able to report racism and have their report investigated, regardless of the surrounding circumstances. However, in the above example, this has led to the assumption that there must be consistency in the victim’s interpretation, or else the incidents they do report become less valid.

5.5.1 Procedure, approaches to and reporting of racist incidents

There were a number of divergent approaches to dealing with racism and racist incidents in schools. Some did this via a general raising of awareness of race issues through whole-school assemblies or specific subjects, particularly citizenship and PHSE. There does not seem to be any particular evidence as to the success or otherwise of these approaches:

We do a lot of counselling, we have ‘worship’ Powerpoints that tackle racism and stuff like that. Teacher

Other schools tended to respond in what might be seen as a more heavy-handed way through an understanding of racism as a hate crime and discussed working in partnership with the community police, who talked to students about the seriousness of hate crimes:
But then like we said before, we’re also a hate crime reporting centre, so what we also do is once the kid has been told the policy, and told why it’s not in order and everything, regularly we will have erm, (community support officer) she will come in and speak to them in assemblies and say, and explain about tolerance for everything, it’s all homophobia and everything, you know. Teacher

Again there is no real indication of how well this works, although it can probably be argued that this is unlikely to address a lack of understanding of race and is more likely to follow the ‘everyone’s entitled to an opinion but keep your racist opinions to yourself’ line of reasoning:

*We always say ‘look, everyone’s entitled to their opinion’, however it’s got to be not offensive in the sense that you’re making sweeping statements about, you know, ‘Why are they coming and taking jobs?’ and so on.* Teacher

Some schools recognised the importance of taking an educational approach where dealing with racist incidents was not just about sanctioning the perpetrator(s) but also about talking with them and working through education programmes so they could understand why their behaviour was not acceptable:

*I suppose it depends really on how serious, but first of all we’d obviously interview that person, talk to them, talk to whoever’s supposedly done the either verbal or whatever had happened, abuse for want of a better word and we’d see if that was sort of, sometimes it is unintentional, you know, it’s down to a little bit of ignorance or a comment that’s been taken the wrong way that wasn’t actually meant that way and we’d try initially probably to do some restorative justice about explaining and getting them to understand how the person might feel in that situation, put yourself in the other person’s shoes. Obviously if it’s more malicious than that then there is, we would go through the, sort of, school sanctions.* Teacher

They also discussed working with the pupils who had experienced racism to look out for their health and well-being and ensure future incidents did not recur. Sometimes following a particular incident involving one or two pupils, schools would follow through with an education project that included the whole school, taking preventative measures against future incidents. This might be through a discussion in an assembly or though tackling the subject in the curriculum particularly in subjects such as English, Drama, History, Religious Education and Citizenship or PSHCE.
However, these initiatives tended to be piecemeal and, rather than encompassing broad race equality teaching across the curriculum, dealt only with whichever aspect of racism was seen to be causing particular issues:

*What we found was... we had quite a high percentage of racist incident forms that were filled in and... a high percentage of them were anti-Semitic... What we did within school was we moved up a lot of the Holocaust education... particularly within the RE subject. They started teaching modules on Judaism and since then I mean we haven’t had one recorded issue of any anti-Semitic kind... Now what we’ve found since is that it’s very much an anti-Muslim sentiment within school... We were talking the other day about how that’s decreased (anti-Semitism), but how a lot more, like, racism towards, you know, Black people and Asian has kind of crept up a little bit more as the, coz obviously there’s no anti-Semitic at all.*

Teacher

Whilst this example is positive, in so far as this school was monitoring racist incidents, noting trends and attempting to deal with them, their response does not seem to have had the overall effect of reducing racism. Rather, the expression of racist attitudes seems simply to have shifted away from Jewish people and towards other minority groups.

Most participants reported that their schools had a written policy for addressing racist incidents, though the understanding and confidence of teachers in carrying out the policy varied. However, in most cases it was reported that if teachers were unsure they would pass it on, or consult with a colleague who had more knowledge or experience of dealing with such incidents. Schools had a duty to report the number of racist incidents in school to their local authority and record incidents for this purpose at the time of the interviews. However, there was often uncertainty about what the local authority did with this information, or how things proceeded from there.

5.5.2 Incidents in class

In discussions of racist incidents, teachers often referred to particular incidents that had occurred in class. Sometimes these might arise from topics covered in books they were reading, or as part of the history curriculum, or in relation to newspaper articles that pupils were asked to bring in to class. Sometimes teachers were unprepared for the difficult questions from pupils, or were uncertain about how best to approach the issues:

*I’ve got an example of a newspaper, The Daily Star... a student brought it in in a lesson, and it was where they were burning the poppies, there was a group of extreme Muslims burning poppies and they brought it in and said ‘look what they’re doing’, and it was actually brought into an*
English lesson because within the English lesson they had to bring in a newspaper. So they brought that newspaper in from home and then had a discussion in the class. Now that’s obviously then thrown in a controversial issue that the member of staff is like ‘whoa!’, you know this is very… and then for me they brought it down and we had a discussion about it, but again if they don’t have that, there’s plenty of articles like that published every day. Teacher

Some teachers felt they had more confidence than others in dealing with this type of situation, although many of the examples given failed to get to the heart of the matter:

We’ve been doing Black Peoples of the Americas with year eights and we had Barack Obama and this lad said ‘Well he’s not really, he shouldn’t really be President Miss coz he’s half caste’, ‘That’s not a term that you can use’, ‘Well why not, what’s the matter? That’s what he is.’ ‘But that’s not a term, he’s mixed race, that’s the term that you need to use.’ ‘Well why do I need to use that term?’. So we had this conversation and I think well I think I’m reasonably sort of au fait with what it is, but he didn’t want to back down about that… But I think sometimes, you know, for other members of staff who perhaps haven’t, where do you draw the line between what is and isn’t racist? Teacher

Some schools had a specialist teacher who might go in and support their colleague if such a situation occurred. Other schools identified this as a gap that needed addressing. Bearing in mind that “race’ is a sensitive issue for white people to talk about. It is a modern taboo” (Byrne, 2006:72), schools need to find a way of normalising talk about racism, in order for teachers to feel comfortable in educating and addressing issues with pupils and in asking for more information and training for themselves.

5.5.3 Inter-agency partnership

Several schools work closely with the police or local community support officers, who are invited in to talk to pupils if a serious incident of racist or other bullying takes place. Schools will also, as a matter of course, inform parents when an incident happens that requires punishment of isolation, exclusion or after school detention, occasionally asking parents to visit the school to discuss the incident. The interviewees reported that teachers sometimes find parents to be as recalcitrant as their children over the use of racist language and terminology, and fail to engage with a broader understanding of the world generally:
Interviewer: Do you find attitudes come in from home as well?

Teacher 1: Sometimes, yeah. I mean the... was it Alf Garnett? You know, you almost shudder to think but some parents do still have that attitude. [To colleague] You dealt with somebody didn’t you? And it wasn’t that long ago, but when you rang up they said ‘Oh well, but we say that’.

Teacher 2: ‘We use that at home, we don’t mean it in a bad sort of way’... There’s been an incident in school actually... one girl had said something about her friend ‘Oh she’s half caste’ and that was a term that was used at home.

5.6 Teacher Training and anti-racist education in Schools

5.6.1 Induction and inset training

None of the teachers interviewed reported having received any specific training on race equality issues or dealing with racist incidents. The racist incident procedures were usually included in more general school policy documents on bullying or equality. Some training in relation to these policies was given during induction to new members of staff, though it was not clear whether this was any more than telling them to read the policies. At some schools, interviewees reported that teachers were encouraged to keep up-to-date with changes to school policies, but without specific training being provided. Racism was not seen overall as something that needed to be targeted separately from other equality or bullying issues:

I mean we’re going to have to do exactly the same with bullying, and we’ll do exactly the same with all the bullying incidents and we’ve got a really good new policy for doing that, coz in many respects it is just bullying isn’t it and want us to report all of those, but I think it’s only a collection exercise. Teacher

5.6.2 Confidence

Most of the teachers interviewed felt confident in their knowledge of the procedures to follow in the case of a racist incident, partly because that was generally part of the interviewees’ remits within the school. Some were uncertain regarding how confident other members of staff would be in dealing with such incidents. Many felt that more training devoted to racism would benefit them, as well as other members of staff. The general tone of the interviews was that whilst the teachers knew what to do in school policy and process terms, their overall level of confidence in approaching and tackling racism was low:
I would hope that any member of staff would tackle [racism] but unfortunately sometimes it can be a bit easy to pretend you haven’t heard things... and I think sometimes that quite possibly does happen. Some members of staff feel really uncomfortable about discussing many things that’s just not their subject... so I can imagine that some members of staff might well not hear, should I say. I hope things would be, you know, discussed and challenged, but I can’t say for definite it would be, obviously. Teacher

These ‘hit and miss’ pockets of racial awareness are, to some extent, both within and across schools, indicating that initial teacher training is a major obstacle in creating a race and racism-aware ethos in all schools. Race and ethnicity knowledge and skill deficiencies in teacher training have been addressed in other studies (Jones, 1999; Wilkins, 2001; Hick, Arshad, and Roberts, 2011). However tackling teacher training is a future-oriented solution and does not directly address the current, pressing need for schools to accept that racism is about attitudes and behaviour which affect everyone, and not only about the racist incidents that government and local government, and therefore school themselves, focus on.

5.7 Learning Points

- The teachers interviewed tended to be those who were responsible for dealing with racist and bullying incidents, and therefore were familiar with the policies and procedures. However, they could not guarantee that other teachers in these settings were equally aware of the ‘correct’ procedures to be followed. In addition, although these teachers were those most closely connected with bullying and race related issues, some of them still found it difficult to define ‘racism’ and ‘racist incidents’ and expressed confused connections between these incidents and subsequent actions and reporting procedures.

- It was noted that at times there was little if any distinction made between racism and other forms of bullying. BME pupils were seen as one group amongst other groups of ‘vulnerable’ young people and an understanding of the broader, institutional, everyday experiences associated with racism was not always appreciated by teachers.

- Some teachers felt a responsibility and duty to be able to demonstrate clearly defined guidelines on racism and racist incidents but felt also that they were not in a position to do this, recognising that pupils were looking to them for authoritative answers. Some teachers felt unable to move forward on the agreed procedures on racist incidents because their definitions and understandings were different to those held by their pupils. Subsequently, racism was sometimes downplayed and ‘excused’ to the
research team, claiming that some incidents were not specifically directed at another pupil (or were unintentional) and so did not ‘count’ as racism or a racist incident.

- There was a general observation amongst teachers that racism and racist incidents were handled mainly through disciplinary procedures and policies leading to punishment. This reinforces an understanding of racism as a singular, discreet event that is best handled through institutional procedures rather than a set of events and lived experiences that need to be addressed in ways that are not only about punishment.

- The overall lack of focused training on race and equality issues was an issue many teachers identified (both as part of their initial teacher training and their experiences on in-service training).

- There were comments on the relative absence of racism due to the small numbers of BME pupils, and there appeared to be no general understanding that in fact, as they were not represented as a significant and distinct cohort this may leave them feeling isolated and unable to speak out about the ‘everyday racism’ they encountered. Furthermore, whilst a small number of teachers were able to articulate a clearer understanding about minority school populations, there was a broad lack of appreciation that racism does not only happen in settings where there are significant numbers of minority ethnic pupils.

- At times, BME pupils themselves appeared to be blamed for some of their demonstrated behaviour which in turn ‘provoked’ racist incidents. The suggestion was that certain behaviours led to more volatile situations when racism was then more likely to take place. Because some pupils were constructed as culturally ‘different’, there was a sense again that they were somehow responsible for racist incidents because they ‘stood out’. There were some stereotypical beliefs that some pupils were expected to handle racist incidents individually because it was part of their cultural identity and upbringing, and teachers felt that this prevented successful intervention.

- Teachers were aware of a growing anti-Muslim sentiment that was connected to some parents and community members and some media sources. This was evidenced in requests for exclusion from taught sessions that explicitly dealt with cultural issues and teachers subsequently felt powerless to challenge the powerful social discourses their pupils picked up and brought to their classrooms.

- Where race issues had been included explicitly on the curriculum, there was evidence that this had rarely been done in a coordinated and coherent way, meaning that there was the potential for further confusion and contradiction. When race-related issues rose out of taught topics in
schools, some teachers did not feel confident in handling ‘difficult’ questions, were concerned about being accused of being racist themselves and generally expressed unease that their lack of training had left them unprepared and unable to demonstrate a sense of authority over these issues in front of their pupils.
6. Student Survey

6.1 Key Findings

- Most pupils thought that racism only happens ‘occasionally’ in their school, although more BME pupils than white British pupils thought racism has happened ‘often’ or ‘very often’.
- Year 11 pupils were more likely to have experienced or know about racism in their school than year 8 pupils. BME pupils were also more likely to have experienced or know about racism than white British pupils.
- The majority (75%) of pupils who said they had experienced or witnessed racism did not report the issue.
- Almost half of those BME pupils who had experienced racist abuse thought the school dealt with it ‘badly’ or ‘very badly’.
- A large majority of pupils (88%) think that teachers see racism as important and most would feel confident talking to teachers about it.
- The majority of pupils were not aware of a school policy dealing with racism and racist incidents.

Following the school survey and interviews with teachers, the second stage of the research focused on working with five schools in more depth. Within these five schools, all students in years 8 and 11 were asked to complete a survey.

1,565 surveys were completed; 761 from Year 8 and 804 from Year 11. Of these 1,376 or 87.9% described themselves as ‘White British’ and 162 or 10.4% as ‘BME’. The remaining 27 (1.7%) respondents did not answer this question.

6.2 Prevalence and Experiences of Racism

Pupils were asked about their experiences and perceptions of racism in their school. When asked ‘How often do you think racism happens in your school?’ the most common pupil response was that they felt it occurred ‘occasionally’. Figure 1 shows the responses of pupils in Year 8 compared with those of pupils in Year 11. The results show there was little difference between year groups, with 50% of Year 8 and 49% of Year 11 responding they thought racism only occurred occasionally. 12% of pupils in Year 8 and 14% of pupils in Year 11 thought that racism never happened in their school. The exact percentages are shown in Table 1.
When we look at responses to this question by ethnicity, the results show there are some differences in response between BME pupils and white British pupils. BME pupils were more likely to think that racism occurred ‘very often’ or ‘often’ when compared with white British students and less likely to think it only occurred ‘occasionally’. This indicates that BME pupils think that racism is a more common occurrence than white British pupils do. The results are displayed in Figure 2 and the exact percentages are shown in Table 2.
Figure 2: Responses to ‘How often do you think racism happens in your school?’, analysed by ethnic group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Very often</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1364</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>50.4%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BME</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>49.5%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Responses to ‘How often do you think racism happens in your school?’, analysed by ethnic group.

Pupils were also asked whether they had experienced or knew about any forms of racism happening in their school. In total 64% of the pupils surveyed said they did not know about and had not experienced any form of racism, but there were differences in responses between year groups. Year 11 pupils were more likely to answer yes to this question (42%) compared to pupils in year 8 (29%) (see Figure 3 and Table 3).
Figure 3: Responses to ‘Have you experienced or do you know about any forms of racism happening in your school?’, analysed by year group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Group</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 8</td>
<td>742</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>525</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>791</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>457</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1533</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>982</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>64.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the answers to this question are analysed by school, there is consistency in the finding that year 11 students are more likely to say that they have experienced or know about racism, with the exception of Parkside (see Figure 4 and Table 4).

This general consistency can be interpreted in a number of possible ways. It could be that racism occurs more often among year 11 pupils than among those in year 8, leading to it being experienced or witnessed more frequently. Alternatively, the frequency of incidents may remain constant, but the extent to which pupils become aware of these incidents increases with age. In addition, as pupils become more knowledgeable about racism as a result of their education, they might be better able to identify it, again increasing their awareness of incidents.
Figure 4: Students who said they had experienced or knew about forms of racism happening in their school, analysed by school and by year group.

Table 4: Students who said they had experienced or knew about forms of racism happening in their school, analysed by school and by year group.
When the results are analysed by ethnicity across all schools, as shown in Figure 5 and Table 5, it is perhaps unsurprising that BME pupils were more likely to say they had experienced or knew about racism, with 54% of these pupils answering ‘yes’ to this question, compared with 34% of white British pupils.

![Figure 5: Responses to ‘Have you experienced or do you know about any forms of racism happening in your school?’](image)

**Figure 5: Responses to ‘Have you experienced or do you know about any forms of racism happening in your school?’**, analysed by ethnic group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Have you experienced or do you know about any forms of racism happening in your school?</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White British</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
<td>66.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BME</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
<td>45.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td>64.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5: Figure 5: Responses to ‘Have you experienced or do you know about any forms of racism happening in your school?’**, analysed by ethnic group.
If pupils had experienced or knew about any forms of racism, we asked them whether they had reported the problem. The majority of these students in year 8 (69%) and in year 11 (80%) said they had not reported it (see Figure 6 and Table 6). It is interesting that more year 11 pupils said ‘no’ to this question, given that they are also the group who are more likely to have experienced or know about racism.

![Figure 6: Responses to ‘If you know about or experienced racism, did you report the problem?’ analysed by year group.](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Group</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 8</td>
<td></td>
<td>67</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Responses to ‘If you know about or experienced racism, did you report the problem?’ analysed by year group.

When analysed by ethnicity, 33% of BME pupils said they had reported the problem, compared with 22% of white British pupils. This could perhaps be because BME students are more likely to have been the recipients of racist abuse rather than merely knowing about it and therefore have a greater motivation to attempt to resolve the issue (see Figure 7 and Table 7).
Figure 7: Responses to ‘If you know about or experienced racism, did you report the problem?’, analysed by ethnic group.

![Bar chart showing responses to reporting racism by ethnic group.](chart.png)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>If you know about or experienced racism did you report the problem?</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White British</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>77.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BME</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>67.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>76.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Responses to ‘If you know about or experienced racism, did you report the problem?’, analysed by ethnic group.

If they did report the issue, pupils were asked how well they thought the problem was dealt with by their school. When analysed by ethnicity, as shown in Figure 8 and Table 8, only 27% of BME pupils thought the school dealt ‘very well’ or ‘well’ with the incident and almost half (45%) thought it had been dealt with ‘badly’ or ‘very badly’.
Pupils were asked a number of questions relating to their teachers, specifically whether they thought their teachers see racism as important, whether they would feel confident talking to their teachers about racist bullying and whether or not they thought their teachers were confident in dealing with racism.

The majority of pupils felt teachers saw racism as an important issue, although there were less year 11s that thought this (85%) than year 8s (92%) (see Figure 9 and Table 9).
When analysed by ethnicity, the majority were once again in agreement that teachers saw racism as important, although slightly less BME pupils thought this (81%) compared with white British pupils (89%) (see Figure 10 and Table 10).
Table 10: Responses to ‘Do teachers see racism as important?’, analysed by ethnic group.

Similarly, the majority of pupils said they felt confident talking to teachers about racism and there was little difference overall between year groups. Figure 11 and Table 11 show 75% of Year 8 pupils said they would feel confident talking to teachers compared with 80% of Year 11 pupils.
Figure 11: Responses to ‘Would you feel confident talking to teachers about racist bullying?’, analysed by year group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Group</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 8</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>74.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1546</td>
<td>1199</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>77.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Responses to ‘Would you feel confident talking to teachers about racist bullying?’, analysed by year group.

When we examine the response to this question by ethnicity, the results show that BME pupils are more likely to report that they would not feel confident talking to teachers about racism compared with white British pupils. Figure 12 and Table 12 show 36% of BME pupils answered ‘no’ to this question compared with 21% of white British pupils.
Figure 12: Responses to ‘Would you feel confident talking to teachers about racist bullying?’, analysed by ethnic group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would you feel confident talking to teachers about racist bullying?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White British Responses</td>
<td>1078</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>1360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BME Responses</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>64.2%</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Responses</td>
<td>1182</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>1522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>77.7%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: Responses to ‘Would you feel confident talking to teachers about racist bullying?’, analysed by ethnic group.

If pupils indicated that they would not feel confident talking to a teacher, we asked them to tell us who they would talk to instead, if anyone. Most said they would prefer to speak to a family member, such as their parents or siblings, or their friends. A few pupils said they would speak to their form tutor, their head of year or the police. A very small number said they would tell no one.

When asked why they would not speak to teachers, pupils said that they did not know or trust the teachers enough, that they did not feel confident enough or felt shy and embarrassed in talking to teachers, and that they did not think teachers would understand. They also said they feared getting bullied for ‘telling’ and being seen as a ‘snitch’ and occasionally said it was because they did not think teachers would do much about it, would not believe them or not take it seriously and easily dismiss the problem. Other comments made included that the topic was ‘hard to talk about’, and ‘because they [teachers] can’t make a change to the way people think about Black/Asian people’.
Pupils were also asked whether they think teachers feel confident in dealing with racism. In common with the teachers’ own answers to this question (see teacher interviews section) the majority said yes. However, this did vary by ethnicity as Figure 13 and Table 13 show. 31% of BME pupils did not think teachers were confident compared to 20% of white British pupils.

![Figure 13: Responses to ‘Do you think teachers are confident in dealing with racism?’; analysed by ethnic group.](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you think teachers are confident in dealing with racism?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White British Responses</td>
<td>1072</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>1332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BME Responses</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>69.5%</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Responses</td>
<td>1179</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>1486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 13: Responses to ‘Do you think teachers are confident in dealing with racism?’; analysed by ethnic group.*

### 6.4 Policy on Racism and Anti-Racism

We asked pupils whether they knew about any policy in school dealing with racism and racist incidents. The majority of pupils (69%) were not aware of such a policy and there was little difference in responses between year groups as Figure 14 and Table 14 show.
Figure 14: Responses to ‘Do you know about any policy in school dealing with racism and racist incidents?’, analysed by year group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 8</td>
<td></td>
<td>214</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td></td>
<td>267</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>66.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>481</td>
<td>1061</td>
<td>1542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: Responses to ‘Do you know about any policy in school dealing with racism and racist incidents?’, analysed by year group.

When we consider the responses of different ethnic groups to this question, the results show very little difference in awareness of a school policy dealing with racism and racist incidents between white British and BME pupils, as shown in Figure 15 and Table 15.
Do you know about any policy in school dealing with race and racism?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>White British</strong></td>
<td>425</td>
<td>932</td>
<td>1357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>68.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BME</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>475</td>
<td>1044</td>
<td>1519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>68.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15: Responses to ‘Do you know about any policy in school dealing with racism and racist incidents?’, analysed by ethnic group.

### 6.5 Anti-Racist Education

66% of pupils reported that they learned about racism and anti-racism in schools and 34% said they did not. There was a similar response from each of the year groups with 69% of Year 8 and 63% of Year 11 reporting that they learned about racism (see Figure 16 and Table 16). However, as Figure 17 and Table 17 show there were differences between schools, with pupils at Parkside and Stoneton much more likely to say they learned about racism and anti-racism than pupils at the other three schools.
Figure 16: Responses to ‘Do you learn about racism and anti-racism in school?’, analysed by year group.

Table 16: Responses to ‘Do you learn about racism and anti-racism in school?’, analysed by year group.
Figure 17: Responses to ‘Do you learn about racism and anti-racism in school?’, analysed by school.

Table 17: Responses to ‘Do you learn about racism and anti-racism in school?’, analysed by school.
26% of pupils said that they learnt about racism in PSHE and 30% said they learned about racism in religious studies. 5% mentioned English as a subject in which they learned about racism with 4% mentioning history; 9% mentioned Citizenship education. Assemblies, form time and ‘other subjects’ were also reported by a small number. Anti-racist education was seen as most beneficial by the white British pupils, 53% of whom feel they have learnt something. This contrasts with 47% of BME pupils feeling they have learnt from this education. However these figures drop for those who have experience of racism in school to only 40% of white British feeling they have learnt something from the anti-racist education and 35% of BME pupils who have experience of racism feeling they have learnt from the anti-racist education.

6.6 Learning Points

- Overall, the student survey produced some useful data both to feed back to the schools involved individually and as a basis on which to gather more detailed qualitative data in the student focus groups.

- Some of the small numbers involved, particularly with the BME student numbers, make it difficult to draw any firm conclusions from this data. However, there are some clear indicators of areas where improvements to the anti-racist education and practices in these schools could be made.

- Despite the majority of pupils thinking that their teachers saw racism as important and were confident in dealing with it, only a quarter of the incidents that pupils knew about and considered to be racist were reported. This could be an important factor to take into consideration when schools are evaluating themselves or being evaluated based on recorded ‘racist incidents’. Furthermore, almost half of the BME students who had reported racist incidents thought they had been dealt with ‘badly’ or ‘very badly’ by their school, suggesting perhaps that there is a difference between teachers taking racism seriously and being able to deal with it effectively.

- The survey has revealed no major issue with racism in any of the participating schools. However, it seems that all could improve their teaching on race and embed it more comprehensively across the curriculum.

- BME pupils were less positive about anti-racist education within their schools than white British students. Since BME pupils were also more likely to indicate they had experienced racism, this suggests that anti-racist education may not be addressing the reality of pupils’ experience. It

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1 We use this as a standard term for personal, social and health education in our analyses of all schools in the study but appreciate schools often use different terms for this subject.
would be worth schools considering using pupil reports of racism to inform the development of anti-racist teaching.

- The differences in some of the results between the BME and white British pupils may be of concern to some schools, although the small numbers involved in some cases mean that any percentage figures should be treated with caution.
This section outlines data from year 8 and year 11 focus groups, and year 8 ethnodrama groups which were carried out within the five selected high schools: Parkside, Stoneton, Riverford, Hallford and Allbury. As noted in the methodology section, focus groups are good for eliciting common and prevailing views from within a group. However, it can sometimes be difficult for individuals to speak up if they have a different view, and there needs to be awareness of the restrictions individuals might feel in a group context. At the same time, focus groups are relatively efficient means of gathering overall views and understandings. On occasion, group interviews actually produce contradictions, for example in our data where pupils feel that racism generally is decreasing in society but they then give apparently contradictory examples where there is a sense of racist language being used casually, without intent to offend.

Racism and race related issues remain a highly problematised feature in these young peoples’ lives. One of the key values of research such as this is to shed light on these contradictions and confused notions in order to better understand pupil experience and to determine effective outcomes for teachers, educators and legislators.
7.2 Students’ ideas and perceptions about race and racism

In common with their teachers, pupils generally did not see racism as a major issue within their schools. Most cited a lack of BME pupils as the reason for this, rather than any sense that anti-racism was deeply embedded within processes and structures. Many characterised racism as being a problem confined to racist individuals who, lacking many ‘victims’ in the form of BME pupils, did not have many opportunities to carry out racist bullying. This mirrored teachers’ understandings of racism as being confined to individual pathology:

It’s not a major issue because there’s not that many ethnic minorities... The opportunities for racist people to be racist are few and far between. So it’s not really such a major issue as much as it is in somewhere like London or Manchester where’s there’s a lot of different cultures all jumbled up into one place. Year 11 student

There’s nothing really to be racist about in this school. Year 8 student

Another common factor was to see racism as the product of generally not having respect for others; as a type of bullying that would be addressed through more respect generally for other people. By categorising racism as a form of bullying and a general human rights issue, the assumption was being made that racism is very similar to other situations where people are ‘picked on’, so reference was made to bullying of people with red hair, overweight people or people from Liverpool. In other words, there was some agreement that racism might be no different to mocking any other aspect of a person’s appearance or identity.

Students demonstrated considerable confusion about the concepts of race and ethnicity and found it difficult to define racism as anything other than what one person does to another. Many students also expressed uncertainty about what did and didn’t constitute racism. Other accounts suggested that racism and racist language were regular occurrences within school, but had become normalised within everyday discourse:

I think racist language does get used everyday... it’s just, like, everyday conversation... Nobody takes it personally coz it’s just the norm because it happens everywhere. Year 11 student

However, a few students did indicate that they were aware of the ways in which racism does operate in forms other than direct bullying:
There’s not racism where they go up to each other... and start calling them all these names. But there is a lot of racism where they’re just sat down and going ‘Oh yeah, I saw all these Pakis on TV’ and stuff like that... They always talk about it and if that’s racism, it’s racism all the time. Year 8 student

Other confusions were expressed around the actual language that was acceptable to use about BME groups and what was not. It was clear that pupils were finding it difficult to negotiate the world of language when there were multiple uncertainties around what should and should not be said:

Sometimes, I used to get confused about this, when you’re trying to describe somebody and they are, like, coloured, well you don’t really know what word to use coz you don’t know what they will feel is racist and what isn’t. Because I used to think that they got really offended if you called them, like, Black, so I used to, when I was trying to describe someone, not in a mean way, I used to say coloured. But then some people say... they prefer ‘Black’ but you don’t really know... so it’s hard to describe them in one way. Year 8 student

Such concerns were not helped by the use of offensive language in the media and in music and so forth, which did not provide clear and understandable messages about acceptability of terms. However, parents and wider family and friends could also be sources of confusion and contradictions.

Students were of the view that, generally, racism was less of an issue in UK society than it had been in the past and when compared to other countries. The overall attitude was that racism particularly ‘existed’ in the past and in other places globally:

Not many people (in the UK) are actually, like, discriminated. It’s just the one off few places where they still believe white people are more in charge. Year 11 student

As a result of what they saw as an improved situation for people from BME groups with regards to racism in the UK, there were some students who voiced resentment at what they viewed as ‘over sensitivity’ about racism from these groups. They felt that racism only remained on the national agenda because people were continually speaking about it and that it would disappear if this stopped happening. Some said they felt white people were now more discriminated against than Black people. Students also cited a number of myths about racism and anti-racism, often under the banner of political correctness. For example, one student said she did not understand why
children were no longer allowed to sing ‘Baa Baa Black Sheep’. Others felt some people take offence at racism too easily:

*I think today everything’s politically correct and people call everyone racist for things that are very little and insignificant. Some things are racist but you’ve gotta be able to notice when things are racist and when things are not and everyone calls people racist for no reason. It’s only certain things that are racist. Saying ‘Paki shop’ is not racist, people just think it is coz today everything’s politically correct. You’ve gotta say it in the right way or someone’ll get offended without even knowing the whole story.* Year 8 student

Some of the data collected suggested that pupils were often concerned that race and ethnicity could be ‘used against them’, particularly when they used comments or ideas ‘incorrectly’. This is perhaps linked to general social discourses that emphasise the idea of ‘political correctness gone mad’, as well as well-versed social fears about not knowing how to talk about race and ethnicity without causing offence. Tatum (1992) talks about such fears displayed by pupils in US schools and notes they are often emotionally charged and can be seen as key to pupil resistance to learning about race and ethnicity in class. It is therefore important to understand pupil concerns as potential obstacles to changing attitudes but, more positively, in challenging these obstacles as a means to enriching learning in the classroom.

When speaking about racist incidents that had happened elsewhere (in football for example) and had been reported in the media, some students felt that clear boundaries should be established and suitable consequences enacted if these boundaries were violated, although there was some disagreement about what constituted proportionate sanctions:

*Blake: They should just stop if someone’s racist at all, they should just take them out of football in general.*

*Miles: Mmmm, I agree with that.*

*Scott: They should leave it all on the pitch, to be honest.*

*Simone: Yeah.*

*Blake: Just take them out of football in general.*

*Amelia: He didn’t deserve an eight match ban really.*

*Scott: No, coz John Terry hasn’t been given a ban*

*Amelia: Exactly.*

…
Blake: It should be just, like, if you’re racist at all it should be that punishment and everyone should get the same.

Researcher: So you think they should be taken out of football altogether?

Blake: Yeah.

Amelia: Not altogether, though, coz it’s their life just from a little word innit?

Blake: Yeah but you shouldn’t be doing it in the first place.

Amelia: Yeah but sometimes, you get, they get dead angry on the pitch don’t they, like, they could’ve called them anything and then that’s just what was obvious to him.

Researcher: Do you think that’s OK then?

Amelia: No, I don’t think it’s OK but I don’t think calling him any name’s OK.

…

Jay: But if you give, like, a thing where if you’re racist they’re gonna take you out of football, it’ll probably stop them from being racist altogether.

Blake: Yeah, it might cause quite a lot of, like, trouble to start but then after a bit people will learn not to do it and then it’ll be gone altogether.

During the teacher interviews, an increase in anti-Muslim sentiment among students had been noted. There was evidence to support this from the focus groups, although some students were aware of the ways in which these responses conflicted with their understandings of how stereotypes work and with their desire not to be racist:

Anna: You know Bin Laden being killed? That was everywhere... and I know this is really awful... When you see people... who have that kind of... with the headscarves, dark coloured (skin), the beard... you just stereotype straight away... I’m not a racist person but you just see them and think ‘Oh just stay away’. And most of the time obviously they’re not going to be a terrorist... And it’s not trying to be mean, it’s just the way we see things.

Dean: Yeah, like (names an Indian restaurant)... when you go there they’re all like... sharpening knives going (adopts accent) ‘Ahhh, dinner!’
(laughter from group)... And you think they’re gonna, like... poison you or something.

Year 8 students

When pupils express concerns such as Anna’s stated desire to not ‘be mean’ or ‘stereotypical’, there needs to be opportunities for pupils to talk with teachers who can reassure them that they are not alone in these beliefs and who can discuss them from a position of confidence and authority.

7.3 Racist Incidents in School

Students were asked what racism meant within the context of school and how they might know whether racism was occurring in their school; in other words, what did a ‘racist’ incident or event look like to pupils? Again, most commonly pupils referred to bullying, sometimes overtly (for example, through discussing the role of anti-bullying champions) but more often, through using the term ‘racist bullying’. In general, pupils thought their schools were not places where ‘serious racism’ happened on a regular basis. In general, all pupils were aware of some incidents that had occurred in school, often in other years and which had a mythical aspect to them. For example, the names of perpetrators and victims were not known, but something had happened higher up in the school and the details of this were sketchy. This lack of detailed knowledge is unsurprising, given that the focus groups’ membership was heavily weighted towards white, non-BME group pupils, who may be less likely to remember and recall such events.

However, pupils did comment on the ubiquitous nature of everyday racism in the form of name calling and use of offensive words linked to race and ethnicity. These behaviours were described as being part of normal interactions between pupils in school:

*Kids have been arguing... then one of the children has said... ‘Get back to where you came from’... things like that.* Year 11 student

*It was only last week when this boy just went to this girl in his year ‘You’re Polish’... ‘Just go back to your own country’ for no reason.* Year 11 student

Like their teachers, though, students were often keen to downplay these incidents. They did this by dismissing them as just name calling, as ‘banter’ between friends or, in some cases, as a result of a BME student taking what was said ‘in the wrong way’:

*If it does happen it’s just, like, messing about.* Year 8 student
People say loads of things... they call each other gay, people call each other, like, niggers but they don’t mean it. Year 8 student

Mike: Yeah. I mean I’ve heard before people say, if someone says ‘Why has he done that?’ and someone else has said ‘It’s because he’s Black’ (laughter). Just, you know, and they might be messing around and mean it light hearted but it’s still, I still think they shouldn’t really be saying it when they do say it.

Researcher: Do you think it’s used as a, as an explanation for why somebody might do something then? Or sometimes is it

Mike: Yeah. But it’s not even linked to it. It’s like ‘Why’s he sat there?’ and someone else ‘Oh, it’s coz he’s Black’ (laughter) and then they laugh and it’s, they don’t mean to be racist, I just think it’s, I just think they’re trying to be funny but it doesn’t…

Helen: That’s what people refer to it as, banter.

Mike: Yeah, banter. It’s sort of tongue in cheek sort of thing, but.

Year 11 students

Here we reference a concept often seen in the educational literature of ‘banter’ (Nayak, 1997, 1999). One of the pupils identifies that there is a consequence to the target individual who might get ‘fed up’. However, in general the view from this group is that although this type of interaction is not funny it is every day and routine.

Many students felt that when it came to racism, there was a ‘line’ that shouldn’t be crossed. It was acceptable to use racist language under some circumstances, such as when ‘joking’ with a BME friend but not alright in others, for example if it was directed at someone you didn’t know. They felt it wasn’t always easy to know where this line was because some people were more ‘sensitive’ to racism than others. There was a clear sentiment that it was tolerable to use racist terms of express racist attitudes if you ‘didn’t mean it’ but, again, there was consternation that sometimes it got taken seriously by BME students even when you didn’t mean it:

It depends who you are... If you call it (a racist name) to your best friend they wouldn’t mind, but if you call it to someone you wouldn’t know... they’d take it seriously. Year 8 student

Some people are more, like, touchy about being called certain things compared to other people. So if you’re not, like, close to the person then they might take it in another way. Year 11 student
It’s hard to know who will be bothered by it and who won’t. Coz you have some who take it as a joke and are quite light hearted about it and others who might get really offended by it and I think some people don’t know where to draw the line with the people who get offended by it. Year 11 student

There was a clear theme in all the focus groups about pupil exposure to media that had content that could be construed as racist. It was clear that pupils did not have the ability to understand some of the irony within comedy but instead took away confusing messages about the words that could be used and so forth. Programmes like Little Britain, which often use race, and particularly colour, as part of the humour were mentioned by pupils as not properly understood. Likewise, music also provided confusing ideas about what were acceptable and unacceptable words, especially when BME minorities in the music business (especially rap) used terms that are generally considered offensive in everyday speech, such as ‘nigger’. Unsurprisingly, given these confusions, it was noted that racism at school often involved words that the perpetrators did not understand and/or used ‘without thought’ to possible consequences for the target:

People seem to say it without thinking about what they’re saying … Most of the time they don’t mean what they’re saying, just trying to look big in front of their friends. Year 8 student

The idea of racist comments happening in school ‘without thinking’, was discussed by the groups as illustrating that the comment had no malice was intended and therefore the incident was ‘not serious’:

Alison: but they could think ‘oh that’s racist’ but the other person could be joking, so they can blame it on that ...

Louise: It’s the, you can tell by their tone of voice, like, if they say something. If they are angry and they’re shouting and, like, they’re being aggressive towards them and they say something racist, you know automatically it’s meant to be in a mean way… whereas, if they’re just saying it in a joking way, the person might take it as a racist comment but they probably did not mean it that way.

Ellie: The situation that it’s in (is important), if you’re having an argument with someone and they happen to be coloured and you say something to them, that’s obviously meant in a bad way, but it was sort of heat of the moment and it depends what situations.

Year 8 Students
The idea that pupils had to judge seriousness by weighing up factors about the person using the racist comment, such as their tone of voice, whether they were joking and their intention, takes the focus away from how the target of the comment might feel and the consequences of such incidents for them. One factor in weighing up the nature and severity of racist comments for pupils was who made the comments. It was argued that if those comments came from people one knew as friends, then the target would ‘know’ that it was not meant seriously.

Only pupils who in their focus group disclosed having a BME heritage, said that they felt such comments could hurt, even from friends. However, asking someone to stop using offensive terms and language, especially through jokes, would be extremely difficult for the target. The desire, and indeed need, to belong is very important for school pupils, and complaining about racist language and/or behaviour could put them at risk of being labelled and potentially excluded from friendship groups.

Joking through using offensive comments about race and ethnicity were talked about as something that commonly occurred but that teachers were not necessarily aware of, as it often happened in spaces such as playgrounds, washrooms and on the way to and from school. It was clear that pupils felt that teachers did not know or understand the frequency of racialised language that happened outside the classroom.

During the focus groups, pupils often talked about racism as existing in places other than their year, or even, their school. When asked about where they felt racist language might most be used in the school, year 8 groups all stated that it happened more in older years. In contrast, the year 11 focus groups felt that this actually occurred more in younger years:

Harry: You sometimes hear, like, people of older years, like, say stuff … And, you know, they’d say something about being racist and then, like, racist comments to each other, like for a joke and that.

Researcher: Do you think it’s the older children who say it then?

(Agreement from several)

Daniel: Going back to, like, TV programmes and DVDs, when, I think when you get to that age, it seems at the moment that that age are watching a lot more TV and watching a lot more DVDs.

Year 8 students

It (racism) could be worse in maybe year 10 or down in lower school… Maybe in lower years they might not be as aware of what they may be
actually saying and how it affects the person that they’re saying it to.
Year 11 student

Racism was also viewed as being more of a problem in other schools. A typical suggestion was that pupils in other schools used more racist language and ideas than pupils in their own school. In discussion of situations outside of school it was ‘other young people’ who were identified as the perpetrators of racism. In some ways, this is perhaps not unexpected in that identifying yourself or your friendship group as using racist insults would be risky. However, the situating of racism with others seemed to indicate a process of ‘othering’ and placing the blame for racism away from both the responsibility and power of the pupils in the group.

7.4 School responses to racist incidents

When asked about how their school responded to racist incidents, most students felt that their school always took these seriously:

*I think the teachers think that any upset of their pupils is important, like, no matter if it’s racism or not. Like, they always help with anything that happens.* Year 8 student

*I think it’s taken really seriously... If there’s a case they’ll get on it straight away.* Year 11 student

However, students were generally unclear about schools’ policies and procedures for dealing with such incidents. Whilst they could identify which staff it was most likely they would approach in the event of a racist incident, they had little understanding of what would happen next.

There was generally a sense that there were processes beyond their knowledge that would be enacted and this was often vaguely referred to as incidents going on a ‘racism log’ or as being reported to someone unknown. Some pupils discussed the police being brought in if something really serious happened but they were speculating about this as none gave any indication that they were aware of this from any known case. In terms of punishments that perpetrators might receive, being sent to the head of year or Head Teacher, detentions, parents being brought into schools to discuss incidents, being made to apologise and being suspended were posed as potential school responses but again, because they had little experience of how incidents were dealt with, pupils were essentially speculating upon this:

*Probably get suspended... or maybe expelled. I dunno, like, it depends what you’ve done I suppose but... your parents are supposed to come*
in for a meeting or whatever, but I don’t know whether that goes on or not. Year 11 student

Pupils were far more confident commenting upon responses to racism at the level of individual teachers and ‘on the ground’ within the classroom. But interestingly, teachers were not always seen as the right people to go to:

They’re quite unsure about telling other people coz they don’t know what’s gonna happen next ... and then things get worse for them but nobody knows about it so they can’t really help. Year 8 student

This same focus group then went onto provide a typical analysis of the problems of telling particular teachers:

May: Depends what teacher as well
Harvey: Yeah
Carla: Like, if you tell someone like Mrs Essex or Mrs Dorset, they’ll go straight away deal with it
May: Mrs Devon doesn’t
Carla: If you tell another teacher, they never deal with it ... they wait ... then it gets worse, it gets out of hand and then it goes around the school.

Year 8 students

There was also evidence that although students thought teachers would deal with racist incidents, they are not always able to solve the issue and often the perpetrator simply learnt not to repeat their behaviour within the earshot of a teacher:

I think they are (confident) but I don’t think they all... deal with it to be honest... I don’t think they’ll solve the situation. Year 8 student

I don’t think it’s really used in schools... People our age kind of use it outside school where there’s no-one really to, like, tell them to stop it. Year 8 student

I do think racism happens a lot more on Facebook because it’s not face to face and teachers can’t really see what you’re saying on Facebook. Year 8 student

In addition, many students felt that teachers don’t always get the opportunity to deal with racism because it largely goes unreported. Some also felt that
because of this, teachers don’t get many opportunities to tackle it and therefore might lack experience in this area:

I think teachers don’t really take action because they don’t know about it all... I think if a teacher did find (out about) an incident, obviously they’d sort it out straight away, but they don’t hear. Year 8 student

The teachers aren’t really made aware of it because it’s behind closed doors. Year 8 student

Most of the time they don’t know (how to deal with racism). It’s unusual to, like, deal with it so they’ve not had, like, much experience in dealing with it. Year 8 student

Generally, the consensus was that you would not tell teachers about racist incidents because they could not do much to stop it and it could lead to reprisals by perpetrators:

Researcher: Do teachers, do they know about these things?
(Several say no)

Lilly: It’s coz, like, if you get called, like, if you’re, like, if you get called something, like, racist, if you tell the teacher the other people or person will be like ‘Oh, you can’t deal with it yourself, you have to tell the teacher to be able to sort it out, oh, you little pussy’ and stuff like that.

Researcher: Yeah, so they think if I tell the teacher it might get worse?
Lilly: If you tell the teacher the other person will think, like, you can’t deal with it yourself so you’ve gotta get the teacher involved and the teacher can’t really, like, sort it out.

Year 8 students

Students felt that there were other more effective strategies that could be employed to deal with the issues and these included using older siblings as ‘protection’, fights to ‘sort it out’ and seeking the support of friends. This has clear policy implications for schools and teachers in terms of the need to develop routes that would encourage pupils to feel included and safe to report incidents. These policies must make clear how racist incidents are dealt with, how pupils are supported and what will be done to prevent such incidents in the future.
7.5 Race Equality on the Curriculum

A theme that was raised in the focus groups was the ways in which pupils felt that issues of racism entered the curriculum or were dealt with in the process of teaching. The subject areas which were most commonly cited as covering issues of racism were history, personal, social and health education (PSHE), citizenship, English and religious studies (RS). This tallied with the topics that the teacher interviews outlined as most relevant:

Emily: In History and English we’ve done a lot about slaves and how England used to take people from Africa and sell them. We’ve done a lot about that in those things and we’ve also done about racism in PD (Personal Development) … we did a lot about bullying.

Louise: Like, why people bully.

Denise: We’ve also, in Personal Development done a bit, like, where we’ve looked at relationships, we’ve looked at how they can affect you, like, what you say to people and what you say to your partner, how rude you are.

Researcher: OK, so you’ve done a bit about that. What other subjects have you done?

Scott: In PD, like, in year seven, we did about, like, immigrants and asylum seekers and refugees and Amnesty International.

Researcher: Oh you did about international type stuff. Anywhere else that you?

Denise: Like, what we said, we do it in English and History and in History we sort of get told that that was wrong and, but we get to have our own views on it but I think more could be done in schools to, like, teach people it’s wrong coz obviously if it’s still going on.

Year 8 students

The experience of studying subjects where race and racism were covered raised many questions for pupils that often there was not time to address in full. The issue of race was often mixed up in generic ideas about respect for others, good citizenship and so on, camouflaging wider issues of race inequality and the impact of racism on identity.

In some instances there was confusion about where racism was learned about on the curriculum and, in general, pupils did not feel that there was much coverage other than in history and sometimes English. In history classes, coverage of racism seems to engage pupils a great deal and they were able to provide a common patchy narrative of racism that they had
picked up from classes. Black African slavery in the Americas was a key focus of pupils' discussions, as was the Holocaust.

Racism was understood by students to have a specific history; mappable through key events across the western world and linking diverse time periods and cultures. Clearly, the issue of racism is more complex than this, but the message being given to pupils was that there was a very specific set of events and places, where racism was visible in history. Moreover, there was a clear sense of things getting better and moving in one direction of progress:

> You hear about the slave trade, so that’s sort of, I think that was the origin... Then as that went away with Abraham Lincoln and all the Americans... and then Nazi Germany sort of brought it back in and then it’s sort of on the way back out now. Year 11 student

> So if you look back there were really serious cases of it and now there are only... minor things. Year 11 student

However, contemporary discussion about racism in the UK was not so easy for students to identify within their classes. In one of the few instances where they were able to, they spoke about a reluctance to engage in discussion for fear of ‘offending’:

> Like when we had that ‘My England’ (a film about racism in England) nobody said anything and the teachers were like ‘You can feel comfortable saying anything’ but you don’t want to say anything just in case... there’s somebody who will get offended by it. Year 11 student

Students' reluctance to discuss race and racism was a common theme and was described as coming about through unfamiliarity with the subject, coupled with uncertainty about how to express themselves without 'appearing racist':

> If you just keep your mouth shut and don’t say any of it then you can’t really go wrong. Year 11 student

These feelings were shared by teachers and students had clearly picked up on this:

> I think most teachers wouldn’t talk about it unless they absolutely had to coz they wouldn’t want to offend. Year 8 student

Teachers’ reluctance to discuss these issues created an environment in which, when it was mentioned, racism was simply presented as something that was ‘wrong’, with little or no explanation of why this was or the ways in which racism impacts on the lives of BME individuals and groups. Students
often expressed frustration with this and expressed a desire to know more, particularly so that they would feel better equipped to engage in such discussions in the future.

### 7.6 How Should Race be Taught?

This area was interrogated within the focus groups through use of a question asking participants to imagine what they would include in a lesson on race and racism, if they were given the opportunity. Students were able to provide quite a few ideas about what they would put if they were to design their own curriculum. These included:

- Integration of contemporary sources of information about social ideas on race and ethnicity – music, documentaries and/or news stories – and examination of these in relation to broader ideas on respect for other people;
- BME teacher-led sessions to allow personal experience to become part of the dialogue;
- Peer-led sessions in which personal experience of pupils could be deployed, alongside more theoretical or academic understandings;
- More open discussion, in which misunderstandings and diverse ideas could be raised;
- Focused discussion on language and why some words were problematic, including explaining the heritage of particular words or terms;
- Outside speakers who could facilitate the above.

Pupils pointed to the lack of contemporary relevance of some of the materials used within the curriculum. Although it was not explicitly said, it was clear that historical discussion was only of use if it connected the past meaningfully with the present and with issues in the pupils’ own lives.

### 7.7 Ethnodramas

The four ethnodramas were designed to engage explicitly with concerns and ideas raised from the focus groups. The broad intention was to present a range of scenarios to pupils and provoke responses and discussion which would allow them to see the complexities within the ‘racism’ debates they had already generated. The responses provoked by these ethnodramas were useful to see how pupils articulated the boundaries they perceived regarding racist ‘banter’ and also to communicate just how complex their own views had become in terms of what was and was not ‘acceptable’. Pupils responded enthusiastically to the ethnodramas and were also able to explain the ways in which they recognised that teachers were also sometimes in difficult positions.
when it came to understanding where those boundaries might lie. To reiterate, it is our view that there should be clear guidelines regarding acceptability, and these should be communicated to and understood by all participants in the school community from the onset.

7.7.1 Discussion and Analysis of Ethnodramas

There were examples during the ethnodramas where BME students appeared to almost validate the views of some of the white British pupils, suggesting that certain types of racist 'banter' could be acceptable among friends. This was in marked contrast to views expressed by other BME students during the small group interviews, when no white British students were present and it was agreed that racist 'banter' was never something that was acceptable. Whilst one interpretation of this is that students in the ethnodrama sessions felt under pressure to be seen to ‘downplay’ racist terminology and be able to ‘take a joke’, another explanation lies in the idea of internalised racism and the notion that these pupils had instead learned to accept this as 'normalised' discourse and were untroubled by these incidents.

The use of the term ‘Paki’ in one of the ethnodramas was a clear example of confusion regarding ‘acceptable’ race-related terminology:

Anna: I think it’s ‘cos she didn’t really know her but when her mates said it (Paki), you know, like messing around but when the other person she didn’t know said it she took it quite offensively ‘cos she didn’t know she was messing around.

Billy: They probably still take it in offence but you kind of like accept it a bit ‘cos they’re mates.

One pupil elaborated by saying:

I have a friend that’s half Indian, I think, and like he doesn’t mind having a joke about because he’s Indian, if it’s his friend. But if it’s someone else he gets offended by it.

And another mixed-race pupil added:

To be completely honest with you when you’re like joking around with your friends and it’s like racist, it’s sometimes like humorous, when it’s towards you and you understand that’s your friend and you’re like having a joke about it, it’s quite funny sometimes. But if it’s someone you don’t know or don’t really talk to and they come and use it in an abusive way that’s when it becomes offensive.
There is clear evidence here that pupils recognise a discernible line between ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ use of racist language but that line seems to be a fine one that is not always seen by all participants or observers in the same way. Another pupil challenged this ‘grey area’ openly and said:

Well I thought that it doesn’t matter, when something’s racist, it’s racist, it doesn't matter if it’s your best friend that says it or not and if they were really your friend they wouldn’t actually say it. There’s no difference between, if they say something it doesn’t matter if your friend says it or someone else says it ‘cos they actually said it.

Some of the ethnodramas suggested that teachers ‘played down’ racist incidents and pupils were sympathetic with the reasons why a teacher might take this position whilst still looking to that teacher to provide a clear line on the disputed issue:

I think the teacher, like, knew it wasn’t, like, said in a malicious way but I think she should have made more of a point of saying ‘Well you don’t really say that to people, it can be taken in offence’.

The complex notion of what is ‘acceptable’ and what is ‘unacceptable’ language was frequently discussed as a context-bound event by pupils responding to the ethnodramas. It was seen to be the case that racist terminology could be used in some contexts but that it was inappropriate in others, particularly if teachers were involved because they did not really understand the difference sometimes. One pupil from Parkside explained:

She was, like, ‘You shouldn’t say that to a member of staff’ or ‘You can’t say this and you can’t say that’. But with the student she was like ‘Ah, she’s just messing around, you shouldn’t take it that way’. But because it was an adult for some reason she said, she was acting like it was worse. Researchers: Do you think that happens? (Several say yes)

This pupil did not articulate why when an adult is on the receiving end of the abuse it is seen as being more serious, but did identify that there was a difference in the way teachers were portrayed in dealing with the two incidents. Another Parkside pupil, felt there was a difference in intent which made the second incident more serious:

I think it was a lot more abusive towards the teacher, like confrontation. It wasn’t, like, as bad towards the student. I think, like, it was just kind of, she didn’t really mean it with the student.
The ethnodramas collectively suggested that because there was ‘grey area’ in relation to what was and what was not ‘acceptable’, pupils then looked to their teachers to be able to understand and resolve this situation and be an authority in regards to its resolution. Even when discussing this issue pupils could see the inherent difficulties with such expectations. Whilst the view that racist words should never be used was very much in the minority, it was both significant and interesting that the minority ethnic pupils in these focus groups tended to agree that racist words used amongst friends were acceptable, whereas in most of the small group interviews these words were seen as upsetting in any context. This may have been the effect of the mixed focus groups where the BME pupils may have felt less able to express their opinions openly for fear of causing offence or losing friends.

Overall, the audiences for these ethnodramas were very reluctant to criticise teachers. There was confusion at one point about a classroom teaching assistant who appeared to witness a racist incident but did not ‘step in’ to resolve anything but overall there was a noticeable expectation that teachers were the ‘arbiters of justice’ regardless of how complex the incidents might have been. It might be worth acknowledging that teachers were central to the selection of those taking part and it is likely that they chose pupils who are well integrated into the school community and unlikely to be overly critical of it. It is probably also difficult for these young people, twelve or thirteen years old, to identify with the actions and thoughts of an adult teacher. That said, there were instances where the ethnodramas deliberately portrayed teachers in situations which could have been read as demonstrating racist behaviours. Whilst these scenarios provoked responses where pupils acknowledged racism, the teachers seemed to be ‘excused’ because they read the racist behaviours as ‘unintentional’ or they excused these behaviours because they perceived ‘good intentions’ behind them:

*I don't think the teacher intended to be racist and kind of discriminate her, but I think she kind of wanted to stop her from being, like, embarrassed if she got it wrong. But obviously she was wrong because, and she should have given her the chance, because even if she did get it wrong she could have learnt from it. I don't think she intended to be.*

*I don't think they particularly do it on purpose, I think sometimes it might happen but just kind of to avoid an awkward situation.*

There were several comments relating to awkwardness and not wanting to cause embarrassment, but in fairness these were probably taken directly from what the actors themselves said in one particular scene. In this one scene, a Muslim girl does not directly criticise her teacher for being racist and the pupils probably took their cues from her and found it difficult to analyse the situation.
from a more objective standpoint. Pupils seemed more able to identify with her and empathise with her situation, saying that she would feel ‘left out’, ‘humiliated’ and ‘lonely’. A pupil from Hallford summed up the reactions:

*I thought she felt a bit, like, upset and just a bit, like, lonely and left out because really, like, other people, she should just get treated the same as everyone else. Just, don’t really matter about where she’s from or what language she speaks, she should be treated the same.*

So, whilst generally finding it difficult to label what they had witnessed in this scene as ‘racism’ the pupils were certainly able to understand how ‘unintentional’ racism had a direct and palpable impact on victims. In discussion, they could see that no pupil should be treated this way, but at the same time they appeared to hold the view that racist ‘banter’ did not create a similar climate of humiliation or isolation.

Whilst the ethnodramas were useful tools to provoke pupil responses on race-related issues it would be fair to say that they also exemplified just how complex these issues can be. Drama is a hugely valuable tool in a range of classroom contexts but it became noticeable that some discussions were problematic, and needed to be handled with some considerable skill, sensitivity and professional experience. It would be wrong to assume that teachers who are already fearful or wary of understanding the ‘boundaries’ identified by pupils are in a suitably strong position to clarify and challenge them through the medium of drama. It would, however, be an ideal source of development and training for teachers and an equally valuable way to engage with pupil misconceptions and stereotypes if handled by teams of people who are knowledgeable and experienced in managing these discussions. Teachers should not be afraid to use drama in their teaching but they need to be aware that explicitly race-related drama has the potential to create or consolidate existing stereotypes if not handled well.

The potential for this was evident when some pupils were discussing race-related stereotypes connected to sporting figures. At Riverford the stereotype of genetic prowess at sports, (which the teacher in the drama expressed), was taken to be true:

*It’s because when Black people were slaves they were transferred from Africa to America and only the strongest of the people who were Black survived. That’s why, apparently, Black people are better at sports ... I learnt about it in primary school.*

At Allbury, where there were several Black and mixed race pupils in the group, there was an understanding that assuming that Black people are fast runners is stereotypical, but this group took the line that this is actually true as
well, because one mixed race pupil at the school is a good athlete:

_It’s not all about being fast in football but to be honest it’s, it is in Black people’s genes to be fast. I don’t know why but I think there’s only one white 100 metre runner that’s ever broken the Olympic record or something, a French person, and the rest are all Black._

However, at Hallford a more balanced view was taken:

_Jonny: Yeah, I don’t know why anyone would think that, ‘Oh well Black people are faster than white people’, what difference does your skin colour make to how fast you run? It’s not got any sort of aerodynamics that makes you run faster or anything, it’s just a different coloured skin._

_Athony: It depends actually because, do you know long distance runners? Like, long distance runners are sometimes, the good ones are from Kenya and Ethiopia and all that. They, just because, where they are, they run at a high altitude so their breathing is better, so they can run more steps with breathing less. I think it’s better where they come from._

_Researcher: So if I took you to Kenya or Ethiopia_

_Athony: I’d become a better runner._

Examples such as this demonstrate that considerable care needs to be taken to ensure that stereotypes do not become reinforced through pupil discussion. These separate exchanges at the different schools perhaps show, again, how dominant voices in the different groups come to the fore and are able to represent their views sometimes to the exclusion of others. In the Allbury group, there was a Black student who was not particularly good at sports but he did not feel able to contradict the narrative, as this would have meant acknowledging his own lack of ability. All the groups understood that the scenario showed the teacher using stereotypes which they felt were, on the whole, wrong, but on the other hand, in many cases they wanted to back up the stereotypes with ‘facts’. This ‘slipperiness’ in the discussion data makes it difficult to analyse, but does show that these young people can be confused in taking their information from different sources such as teachers, the media and the adults in their home lives. When presented with different viewpoints they are not necessarily able to evaluate them. Again, these stereotypes need to be challenged from a well-trained, confident and experienced source of authority and not left to chance in open-ended discussions.

It became evident that the pupils were aware that several of the stereotypes they identified were initiated in home settings. The ethnodramas provoked several responses where pupils commented that they had witnessed similar
conversations and discussions in their own homes. Most agreed that young people are strongly influenced in their beliefs by those of their parents, as this exchange from Riverford High School exemplifies:

*Researcher:* Do you think parents have a big influence on whether people say things like that?

*Pupil:* Yes because when you’re a small child parents put ideas into your head, like your parents can tell you what religion to believe in, about all sorts of things.

Another inconsistency with the data from the ethnodramas was that it demonstrated that there was a prevalent view that racist opinions are only problematic when they are expressed out loud. Pupils could see that parental views could demonstrate and lead to racist attitudes when they had been part of conversations but were less likely to see racism in covert actions:

*Anna:* She could have said as well ‘If your mum has that opinion, she’s to keep it to herself but if you have that same opinion you have to keep it to yourself as well’.

*Researcher:* So do you think that’s alright, if you’ve got that opinion it’s alright to have that opinion as long as you don’t say anything about it?

*Gemma:* No, she’s got her own opinion but if she’s rude with what she’s saying it’s, it’s an opinion but you keep it to yourself. She’s turned it into a form of racial abuse.

The premise of the statement contained in the example above, seems to be that everyone is entitled to their opinion but expressing it can cause offence; it is not the holding of racist opinions that is problematic but the expression of them that can be.

### 7.8 Learning Points

- Pupils in both year 8 and year 11 were keen to state that racism was not part of their school experience and yet were able to offer clear examples of incidents they felt were racist by nature. Part of their explanation that racism did not really happen was because there were so few Black or minority ethnic pupils, and that when it did become evident it was merely ‘banter’ that had been ‘misread’ by observers. Sometimes they claimed that there was a lack of understanding of the implications of using racist language and that there was a kind of ‘hyper-sensitivity’ towards the use of racist terminology when no offence had been meant or taken. This suggests that there remains considerable confusion and disagreement about what constitutes a racist incident and how these incidents can be either ‘acceptable’ or ‘unacceptable’ in their eyes.
Both year 8 and year 11 pupils experience confusion around cultural myths about race and ethnicity, what terms should/should not be used and how to approach ‘thinking through’ and ‘talking through’ examples of racism in society.

Racism was often framed as a human rights issue (about rights and respect, predominately) or a bullying issue, and therefore part of a wider notion of anti-social behaviour towards individuals. In this sense, racism was often individualised and wider social and structural issues were not part of the pupils’ understandings.

There was considerable evidence to suggest that pupils see racism as less of an issue in the UK (in comparison to other countries) and less of an issue now (in comparison to other points in history). Their evidence in discussion suggests that race issues are taught as a historical phenomenon rather than a contemporary feature of modern society.

The focus groups revealed that pupils were aware that their attitudes and beliefs were shaped by their wider social and community networks. Parents, grandparents, siblings, family friends and general community members could be as influential as other sources of pupil experience such as Facebook, music videos etc.

There remained some considerable ‘displacement’ of racism as something carried out and experienced by ‘other’ people and ‘other’ groups in society. At the same time, these groups were able to identify racism and racist incidents that had been part of their everyday lived experience. This clearly indicates a continuing source of confusion and lack of understanding related to race related issues.

When discussing moments in modern society where pupils identified cases of clear prejudice and racism, most felt that there should be clear and universal guidelines for dealing with racist incidents (for example in sport). They understood the notion of appropriate penalties and punishment and argued that ‘after a bit, people will learn not to do it and then it'll be gone altogether’.

BME pupils were expected (by other pupils) to be consistent in their approach to the use of racist terminology but those same BME pupils explained that this was a difficult stance to maintain because they felt that unless they overlooked some of this terminology within their friendship groups then they would be placing their personal friendships in jeopardy.

Teachers were often unaware of racist incidents or the use of racist terminology because it happened out of earshot and/or it went unreported. Part of the reason why incidents were not reported was because pupils felt that it was unlikely that the issue would be resolved and were fearful that reporting it might make the situation worse. There was widespread
confusion about the procedures and policies regarding the reporting of racist incidents and this contributed to a broader feeling that the best strategy was not to report them at all. Some pupils suggested that there were more effective strategies for handling racist incidents and that they would prefer to rely on older siblings or friendship groups to resolve racist incidents.

- There was a noticeable and stated reticence to discuss race and racism in classroom contexts because they did not want to offend other pupils unwittingly and they were not always secure that their teachers were confident and knowledgeable in dealing with these issues.

- Drama and the use of ethnodramas can be particularly useful tools to provoke pupil participation and to encourage enthusiastic engagement with race issues but this approach needs to be designed and delivered sensitively by experienced and knowledgeable staff.

- The feedback forms indicated that pupils enjoyed taking part in these groups and often felt they had learnt something by engaging actively with the ethnodramas. Many prefer more interactive styles of learning and teaching to the usual ‘Powerpoint’ assemblies on bullying or racism.

- Pupils did not see teachers as the root cause of problems related to racism or racist incidents. The ethnodramas were able to gather responses to show that pupils were aware that boundaries concerning racist ‘banter’ were difficult for both teachers and other pupils to recognise.

- Pupils enjoyed the opportunity to talk about what they would like in the curriculum. This would suggest that greater pupil engagement in curriculum design and organisation might be helpful to meet their needs for contemporary knowledge and understanding.
8. Small Group Interviews

8.1 Key Findings

- Learners and teachers have different experiences and understandings related to race issues and these do not always converge in ways that are beneficial to all participants.
- Some BME pupils feel compromised in the way they are expected to respond to race-related incidents and/or racist ‘banter’. They look to the school to establish clear guidelines and boundaries that would support and protect them.
- Some BME students are leaving highly supportive multicultural primary settings and seeking placements in predominantly white high schools that are perceived as prestigious. There are implications for these choices.
- Some pupils feel that their cultural differences (real or perceived) make them hypervisible within the school population.
- Some school policies take insufficient account of cultural differences and leave some pupils doubly disadvantaged.
- Teaching that has explicit race-related content is not always planned or delivered with sensitivity.

8.2 Interview Context

Three interviews were carried out with BME pupils from years 8 to 10. One of these was with a single student, the other two with groups of three pupils. The schools were asked to approach BME students to ask if they were willing to take part in the research. These students were then asked to recruit up to three friends who would also take part in the interview with them. The intention behind this method was that, unlike in the focus groups, BME students would hopefully feel more comfortable conversing with friends about their experiences and their shared experiences without any sense of intimation or fear of reprisals.

However, it must be noted that this approach does have some drawbacks; firstly, the students were being asked by someone in a position of power (a teacher) whether they would like to take part and under these circumstances it can be difficult for pupils to refuse to participate, the notion of ‘true’ voluntary participation therefore becomes questionable. Secondly, teachers may be more likely to select students who they know will give a favourable impression of the school with regards to race equality. Thirdly, asking these students to then recruit their friends to participate in a conversation about a subject as sensitive as race and racism could potentially be an uncomfortable situation.
for them and their friend(s). Finally, when relying on the teachers to carry out the recruitment process, there is the added dimension of a participant working in a context that might be significantly different to the design of the rest of the project. Despite all these reservations, it was worth attempting to gain this data, and it proved to be particularly successful in two out of the three cases.

The method proved to be effective in one of the interviews at Allbury School where three pupils from the same year took part. Two lived in Black and mixed race communities, the third had a Nigerian background. In the interview at Riverford School the young man did not have any BME friends willing to take part, so this was a more traditional style research interview. In the third group at Halford School, the three pupils involved, one of whom was white British, did not know each other very well and this seemed to restrict the conversation. This came about as a result of these students being ‘selected’ by a teacher to take part, rather than being recruited via the intended method.

Despite the drawbacks of this method, the data did provide useful case studies that informed our understanding of the experiences of BME pupils in ways that were more informative and revealing than it was possible to gain (more conventionally) from the focus groups.

8.3 Allbury School

When we spoke to them, Simon, Alistair and Femi were all in year 10 at Allbury School, which has a BME population of 5%. Simon identified himself as of Black Caribbean heritage, Femi as Black African and Alistair as dual heritage; Black Caribbean and white British.

The interview began with some general questions about the students. They all said they travelled to Allbury from the Manchester area, Simon and Femi had done this since they began high school and Alistair had moved to Allbury in year 9. They gave their reasons for going to a school outside of the area in which they lived:

*Alistair: I only moved here last year.*

*Interviewer: OK and what made you move?*

*Alistair: Just everything, from little things like the work and, to big things like really I wasn’t learning anything.*

*Interviewer: What about you guys?*

*Simon: Yeah we started in year 7... It was really good coz I think it’s easier in a way when you’ve been here from the beginning. But I had many schools, I’ve got, like, in Manchester there’s lots of schools to chose from but I didn’t really like them and the grammar school I got*
into I didn’t like either and this one was just, like, better. I don’t know, it just felt better to be here. Even though it’s like, I know, can I say, like?

Interviewer: Of course you can, just say whatever you want.

Simon: It’s different in, you know (pauses and laughs) in, you know, different, there’s not as much different.

Interviewer: Mainly white?

Simon: Yeah, do you know what I mean?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

(Laughter)

Simon: When I first came I only knew, like, two people and it was very strange for me to see not other type of cultures, because my old school was a community school and we were brought up with different cultures around us.

Interviewer: Yes? What sort of difference does it make with it being mainly white?

Simon: Well, there’s (pause) I wouldn’t say expectation, there’s things you might say and then people might think ‘How comes he said that?’ or ‘Why’s he said that?’ and you’ll be like ‘Well, it’s normal’ or there might be, I don’t know, just different things really, but I can’t really explain, like, what they are.

Interviewer: When you say there are things you might say, what sort of things do you mean?

Simon: I don’t know, coz (pause) it’s just harder. I’m not sure coz it’s just a difference between when I was at primary school, there was more of an understanding in the different cultures. Whereas here there’s, like, not much of an understanding, so it’s a lot more to explain if that makes sense?

Interviewer: Right, OK, yes. And do you (Femi), you came to this school as well straight from primary school. And what made you chose to come here? Or did your parents?

Femi: No, it’s just this is where we wanna go, but my friends came here so I (unclear).

Interviewer: Oh OK, yes.

Femi: And I liked it coz it sounded posh, so.

Simon: We got told, I remember, I think it was in year 8 or year 9, not year 8, year 7 or year 8, that having Allbury School on your, I forgot what it was, on some sort of form, makes it look really good coz it’s in Cheshire.
There was a clear belief on the part of the pupils that Allbury was in some ways a better choice when compared with other schools in their local area. They subscribed to popular discourses that better prospects will come from having attended a school within this white middle class area, rather than in inner city Manchester (Harries, 2012).

They went on to speak about the difficulties associated with making the transition from a multicultural to monocultural environment and adjustments they felt it had been necessary to make:

Alistair: Generally it’s good. It’s, like, much better than (previous school). The teachers in (previous school) couldn’t control a class, never mind a school full of mad people. Yeah, but here it’s, like, it was hard when I first moved coz I had to kind of change everything, the way I act to the way I look.

Interviewer: Really?

Alistair: Yeah, coz

Simon: There’s like a bigger expectation.

Femi: Yeah.

Alistair: Yeah, quite a big expectation here. Like at (previous school), big fat tie, buttons undone, hair, big patterns in it.

Simon: I did that when I first came here. I got isolation straight away. I didn't realise.

Interviewer: For what, your hair?

Simon: Because basically, like, that’s what the style I used to have my hair like. So basically I used to have, like, these little lines in the side of my hair.

Alistair: Tramlines.

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

Simon: You know, if I didn’t have it, like, just normally cut. And then I remember coming into school and I got told off straight away and got isolation... So it was kind of like a big shock, I mean I was kind of, I mean my mum had to, like, say, like, ‘Well this is the type of culture he’s been brought up in’ and blah, blah, blah, blah and ‘This is where he lives’ and whatever, going on, giving like a very big letter. Because in fact, coz we got, like, a sheet saying if you dress like this we’re going to call you a hooligan and then it was kind of like a, kind of like a debate now between my parents and the school and then it went down and it’s OK...
Femi: Well like recently I had my hair in massive plaits and they went down to here. And it was part of my culture coz I went to Africa my grandma did it for me and my sister got it done too. But then when I was here they told me to take it out because it wasn't, like, legit and everything. But it was black, so it wasn't any other colour that they weren't allowed, but.

Interviewer: Yes.
Alistair: I had a line once, do you remember my little line? It was right there. I don't know about culture, but...
Simon: They told you off for that.
Alistair: Yeah, they well told me off for that.
Simon: I remember seeing, I remember once, coz in the debate as well in year 7 there was another lad who got his hair done like that, but he was in the year above and I was thinking well, how comes he’s allowed to do that? And then, so then that didn’t really get, you know, that was left and then my mum started saying things like a lot of the white boys, for example, their hair, there was like this new style, having your hair really, really long and in your face.
Interviewer: Oh you mean like One Direction type?
Simon: Yeah. So it was very messy and my mum was trying to say ‘Well look, Simon’s hair’s very neat and you know, tidy and it’s only one line so why couldn’t we have that?’ And it’s just, it’s just a bit strange, going back to Femi’s hair, you know, it’s fine, it wasn’t messy it was actually really neat, it was just long and different.
Femi: Coz no-one else in the school had it I don’t think.
Interviewer: Right, so is there set guidelines of how you’re allowed to have your hair or do they just tell you if you can or can’t have it?
Alistair: On the rules it says no extreme haircuts, but I don’t think a line’s very extreme.
Interviewer: No, not really.
Simon: In your planner it does say no extreme haircuts and it’ll say things like no dying and things like that. However, people...
Alistair: Dye it anyway.
Simon: ...dye their hair extreme colours and get away with it. And I’m just thinking, I’m not being rude again.
Interviewer: No, please feel free to say what you want.
Simon: They were white people as well and I don’t really see any Black people getting their hair dyed, I know it’s not really likely but, I could see then getting told off straight away.

Femi: Yeah.

Simon: If I did that I would get told off straight away.

Alistair: Me too.

Interviewer: Really?

Alistair: Yeah.

Simon: Definitely, because like, everyone’s looking at what I’m doing and, you know.

Alistair: When I first came, on the six week’s holiday before then my hair was blonde, bright blonde, all over. Well, no, it was blonde at the top and then, coz I cut it on the side it was...

Interviewer: So like peroxide blonde?

Alistair: It was like this on the side and then this length at the top but blonde. And then when I came back I had, like, tips, just faint little tips of blonde and then I got picked up straight on that.

Interviewer: Did you?

Alistair: Yeah, but even though I could have just said that’s my hair, but it wasn’t anyway. They still, you know, picked up on it. But again, like, please don’t think I’m being rude, if that was, I think, a white person, I think they would have, you know, gone ‘Right, OK’, do you know what I mean?

These students clearly felt that their appearance is more closely scrutinised than the white students, perhaps because the way in which they styled their hair did not conform to perceived white norms. These accounts tally with those given by some teachers about the ways in which minority ethnic students became hypervisible because they were ‘different’.

These reflections led on to a discussion about interactions with fellow students:

Interviewer: So, you know, it’s interesting what you’re saying about you feel that you might be picked up on things like that more. What about in terms of your relationships with other students and that sort of thing, do you feel that your colour, does it get mentioned, does it get?

Simon: Yeah.

Alistair: Yeah, yeah! (Laughs) Wow!
Simon: You might say something, like today it actually happened, I said, I can’t remember what the conversation was but I mentioned Black and straight away someone turned round and said ‘Ahhh! You’re being racist’. But no, that’s what we call ourselves! (Laughter) It might sound a bit strange coz we’re not exactly Black, but however you’re not exactly white... I’m still friends with them though, it’s just their, again, lack of understanding...

Alistair: Well. My lot (laughs). I think, again, with the understanding about feelings in a way, like, they think, for example if I was talking about Black people again, like Simon said, ‘You’re being racist’, but, like, it can come to the, like, to the point where they go a bit too far and, like, they say words that you don’t really wanna hear.

Interviewer: Right.

Alistair: For example, I’m trying to make a, like a, an example (pause). Like I’ve got a friend in sixth form who, he’s stereotypical on purpose to try and make me laugh, but sometimes he goes too far, so ‘Oh, you’re Black, don’t shoot me’, you know what I mean? That’s one, or.

Interviewer: So he thinks he’s being funny but…

Alistair: Yeah, but it’s not.

Interviewer: It’s not.

Alistair: It can be, but when he goes too far it’s not.

M: Yeah. Does anyone ever use language that you’re not...

Simon: Yeah, ‘nigger’. Like, they’ll say ‘Oh, you’re fine with that aren’t you?’ and it’s like ‘no, it’s actually really, really bad’. But again, going back to my point, they have a lack of understanding so, again, it’s really, really hard, but.

Interviewer: Do you, and you were saying, you know, sometimes they’ll say things that you feel are a bit over the top. Do you ever say anything, or not?

Alistair: Naa, coz I feel rude.

Simon: It’s harder isn’t it?

Alistair: Like, in my own area I’d be quite cross, but here...

Simon: I mean you couldn’t say it anyway could you? That’s just rude.

Alistair: Yeah, I couldn’t. I’d be cross but I wouldn’t say it still. But here I’ve kinda just gotta deal with it and carry on. Like ‘Ha, ha, OK’, but inside I’m like (grimaces). You know (laughs).

Simon: It’s like more, I dunno what it is, if you say something it’ll get told to someone else and someone else...
Alistair: Yeah and then it’s spreading.

Simon: Spreading, like someone, so and so said this and blah, blah and then they will attack at you and then it’s...

Alistair: Yeah and then you’ve got the whole year hating you for, like, four months.

It is worth emphasising that these pupils all experienced multicultural settings at primary school and were highly aware of the differences they experienced in a predominantly white high school. Their comments and reflections during the discussion were significant in several ways. Firstly, in relation to cultural references and hairstyles it was clear that felt there were ‘rules’ which were not devised or applied evenly across the pupil population. The rules about ‘extreme’ haircuts appeared to be particularly difficult to defend in the light of their comments and concerns. These pupils also expressed measured concerns about the degree to which some of their peer groups genuinely understood cultural differences and the experiences of BME pupils in predominantly white settings. They remained supportive of their friendship groups and did not ‘blame’ them for these misunderstandings but at the same time, they were deeply felt and shared as common experiences. They spoke about a ‘lack of understanding’ on the part of the white students as resulting in ‘unintentional’ racism. However, despite feeling this, they remained uncomfortable with challenging these misconceptions due to the potential negative consequences for them and their friendships.

Students were asked about where anti-racism is included on the curriculum but they responded by saying they had experienced this at primary school but this was less evident in high school:

Interviewer: Are there any, do you ever get any kind of anti-racist education?

Alistair: Nope!

Simon: We don’t do anything to do with different, not just Black it could be any ethnic minority, anything that’s different.

Alistair: No, Indian, Pakistani or...

Simon: The only thing that comes up is religion, which is RS. But I suppose… in our primary schools in Manchester there’s more of a different culture. We learnt things about Black History Month and things like that.

Femi: Yeah, they don’t do that here.

Interviewer: They don’t do that here?
Alistair: No, here they did, [teacher’s name] did, but it was Black History Day (laughs).

Simon: Yeah, it was one day.

Alistair: But he just, he didn’t say why you shouldn’t be racist, he just said what the word nigger means and, again, that’s dead embarrassing, well not embarrassing, it’s awkward for you.

Simon: Coz that’s not the whole meaning of Black History Month is it? Or Black History Day in this case! (Laughs)

Alistair: In [previous school], on Black History Month we had a month with own clothes once, it was like an American high school and literally, for two hours a day you just learnt about Black people. And because there’s more Black people there than white people, it was more interesting because they told you why, well not why not to be racist but why to, you know, what it means and why to respect Black people equally to white people, if you know what I mean? But here they don’t do that because there isn’t really any Black people.

M: Is that the sorts of things you think they could do with?

Femi: Yeah.

Alistair: Yeah, definitely.

Simon: Yeah, that’d be really good if they could do that. I suppose it’s be awkward at first, but if it carried on, let’s say if it carried on for

Alistair: A couple of years.

Even when there was a focus on Black history, the teacher was ‘talking about the KKK, so mainly again about the white people’ (Alistair). As with all the schools in our research what little explicit teaching there was on race tended to focus on Black people as victims in a historical context. It is significant here that the pupil articulates a situation that does not seem to be recognised or acknowledged by the teachers in the high school. The students spoke about an opportunity to discuss race in English Literature when reading ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’, but explained how a lack of preparation by teachers instead resulted in very uncomfortable situations, which potentially did more harm than good:

Alistair: It’s like, when we were in English, did you do To Kill a Mockingbird in English?

Simon: Yeah, that was a bit awkward.

Femi: Yeah, they were all looking at you like...

Alistair: Yeah, how awkward that makes us feel when they say the word ‘nigger’ everyone looks at you...
Simon: They all go [makes whooshing sound].

Alistair: And they don’t understand how it makes you feel. They’re kinda looking at you as in ‘That relates to you mate’, you know what I mean? So you’re there like, trying to just bury your head in the book like.

Interviewer: So before you began the book did the teacher say anything about...

Alistair: No.

Simon: No. Coz I read the book, like, twice, like, two years ago, but. And while we were reading it I was thinking ‘Oh no, how awkward is this going to be when we do it in class?’

Alistair: Yeah and it was.

Simon: I remember the day when he told us, I was thinking ‘Mmmm’ and every time he asked me to read I was like ‘I don’t really want to read, I’m OK thanks’, you know.

Alistair: No I read, I just, when it said ‘nigger’ I didn’t say it.

Simon: And it was strange and I remember when the teacher said it, he would quiet down just a tiny bit and I’d be thinking ‘It’s a book, just leave it, it’s fine!’, you know, it’s in there for a reason.

Interviewer: Is there anything that would have made that less awkward?

Alistair: I think if... well, no, not really, I don’t know actually. Do you know what I mean?

Simon: I think if the class...

Alistair: If the class understood us as people more, then yeah.

Simon: If they were told, like, say, words like ‘Black’...

Alistair: Wasn’t racist.

Simon: It isn’t racist. Saying ‘coloured’ is racist because we’re not colours, we’re not blue, red, yellow, we’re brown. And brown is not a colour as well and neither is the skin of the white people. That’s, if they would have that told, like, that isn’t racist there would be, like, more of a, they would have more of an understanding and there wouldn’t be that kind of argument, that kind of debate between people. Unless it got really, you know.

Femi: I thought it was a bit awkward as well. Coz, like, when she, when my teacher was reading it and she went on to palm oil or something and about how, I can’t remember her name, was doing something with palm oil and making plantain or something and Miss went straight to me and said ‘Have you ever had plantain?’ and I was like ‘Errrr’.

The use of literature and source material such as ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ has enormous potential to explore issues related to race and prejudice, but the account given by both Simon and Alistair is a clear indication that resources need to be handled sensitively by teachers. Both pupils were already aware of the text and were already anticipating the discomfort of particular
passages. To then be selected to be the pupil who read those passages out loud (without any preparation or indication that this might be in any way problematic) is an indication that there needs to be some explicit training and discussion related to preparation and planning at school level.

Femi felt similarly uncomfortable with being singled out in the classroom, partly perhaps based on the essentialised assumption that because she was Black she would have eaten plantain, but also because it was something that she was not prepared for. Alistair recounted an experience in which he was also singled out because of his race and used as an ‘example’ in class. It is worth noting at this stage that Alistair was born and raised in Manchester and has a Mancunian accent:

\textit{Alistair:} I remember last year in English, when we were doing that dialect and all that, I forgot about it but (laughs). He used me as the example, coz I was the only Black person in our set, and he used me as the example, like ‘Alistair for instance uses a much different language to us because he’s Black’.

\textit{Interviewer:} Is that what he said?
\textit{Alistair:} Yeah. He didn’t mean it in a, you know...
\textit{Simon:} In an offensive way.
\textit{Alistair:} ...offensive way but he doesn’t understand how I feel. I feel, not embarrassed, but a bit, like, please don’t do that.
\textit{Simon:} It’s awkward but it’s just
\textit{Alistair:} Yeah, it’s just dead awkward.
\textit{Simon:} You don’t know how to react to it. If you react…
\textit{Alistair:} If you act, react in a...
\textit{Simon:} In a big way.
\textit{Alistair:} ...in a big way, everyone’s like ‘Ohhh, isn’t he a bit of a ‘beep’”.
\textit{Simon:} They’d be like ‘Calm down, calm down, why are you acting like that?’ and you’d get in trouble as well, whereas...
\textit{Alistair:} But if you, and then if you acted in, like, a laughing way...
\textit{Femi:} Then they’ll think it’s OK.
\textit{Alistair:} Then they think it’s OK, so you kinda like...
\textit{Simon:} Then you think that point’s not been put across to you has it? If you laugh it’s not been, you’ve not, like, told, coz you can’t exactly tell them, you can’t say that...
Alistair: It's like you've gotta just try and pretend you didn't hear it, like 'What?'

Interviewer: Right, yeah. And in that instant you've got to decide how you're going to react haven't you? When it's suddenly thrust at you.

Alistair: I think, like, being here I've sort of learnt how to react. And I think that's just turning around saying 'Sorry, what did you say then?' They don't normally say it again.

Simon: Mmm. They say it once and...

Alistair: Go 'What?', do you know what I mean? But some people don't understand that badly, they'll say it again and you're like 'Oh, OK', do you know what I mean. And, like, yeah, I think it's just all down to understanding really. Unless you're just racist, but (laughs), that's just down to understanding.

Again, the students speak about their reluctance to challenge racist language or assumptions, despite the fact that they are uncomfortable with it being used. It is worth remembering that these incidents are classroom-based and within the control of the teachers. These experiences are in contrast to the assertions made by white British students in the focus groups, that the reason these incidents go unchallenged is because the BME students recognise them as ‘banter’ and don’t mind the use of such language in this context. It also serves to answer some of the teachers’ questions about why BME students may not challenge their friends about racist language, but will do so with someone outside of their friendship group.

8.4 Riverford School

Daniel and his family came to England from a country in Africa when he was six. When we spoke to him, he was a year 10 student attending Riverford School, which has a BME population of 4%. The interview began with Daniel recounting an incident he had just witnessed in the corridor:

Daniel: I think, someone was shouting at the hall and they... used the n-word and they were shouting it out. And that, well I felt, of course any use of the n-word is horrible, it's like, especially to me, it's disgusting I feel. It's like using the m-word for disabled people or using the f-word for gay people. It's a word that really in today's society shouldn't be used. I feel that, especially in schools, especially with the younger male population it's starting to (be) used a lot more. Which I can understand, especially when it comes to music stars and celebrities and they're starting to use that word more, much more horrible words for... groups of people...
He went on to speak about his feelings towards this word:

Daniel: A lot of people are using it, Black or white. I don’t think they themselves are inherently racist but they’re using racist vocabulary and they don’t understand that at that moment they are being racist regardless of like, how they feel at that time. If you commit a crime regardless of your intentions you still get put in prison for it and I feel you still have to be judged, if you’re using words like that, as a racist. And I’ve talked about this before with groups of friends and what I felt was like since they don’t think that they themselves are racist they feel it’s ok to use words like that which honestly it isn’t. First of all it’s like it’s just too offensive to really put into how it makes people feel, to how it makes me feel though what I found is, unfortunately, anyone, regardless of race, uses racist words, it’s quite horrible... I don’t understand why, what’s the compulsion to use them? It’s horrible and when anyone says that, even not directed to me, it just makes, it’s like, when someone calls me the n-word regardless of how they mean it, it strips away who I am as a person, it makes me feel really confined, with just this one identity being an ethnic minority. It feels altogether bad and it stays in my mind for quite a bit.

Daniel felt that this word was being used more frequently by students in recent years, despite the efforts of the school to dissuade them from doing so:

Daniel: When this applies to school I feel it’s starting to, through the years it’s starting to really become more evident that the words are being more used but what, the unfortunate trend I’m seeing is that, as I get older, and I know every student goes through the same lessons I do, treat one another as the same way you should be treated, don’t use offensive language, things like that. It’s just that when I talk to school children and interact with them they don’t seem to, they went to the same thing but they don’t seem to understand what it actually means which is quite annoying. I guess since they don’t really have much respect for the subject, how it makes other people feel, since it’s hard to empathise with people if you’ve never felt that way before. Which I guess is sad, because I would love for a way to like if there was like a special lecture or anything to proper make people understand words or statements shouldn’t be used regardless of their intent really, and racial identity, even though it’s my identity, I understand it, it’s not something I want other people to be shouting about, if you know what I mean.

Daniel suggests that there is more the school could do help students to understand why certain language is offensive, rather than simply telling them they shouldn’t use it. This also reflects what was said by white British
students in the focus groups. Daniel went on to speak about how racism is never a joke and took a much stronger position about this than other students at Allbury (in the previous case study). However, like them, what he says challenges white British students’ and teachers’ notions that there is such a thing as harmless racist ‘banter’:

Daniel: Just because someone says the n-word, regardless of who they are, that doesn’t reflect my feelings about it at all. And I feel, when I see rappers and singers, yeah sure you have artistic license, you can say whatever you want, I guess, but it’s, it’s just sad to see it become such a norm, society’s become so desensitised to some words... A phrase that really annoys me nowadays used is ‘casual racism’. Like how d’you mean casual? It’s only a joke, stuff like that? It annoys me because you’re not in a position, you can never be in an ethnic minorities’ position, so you can’t say it as a joke, you don’t know how it feels so you can’t. It’s a bit annoying, yes. I don’t think just because the media says something means it’s ok to say it now. Because they’re the media ok. There are many films on violence and things like that but that doesn’t mean violence is ok in the real world. Media and the real world really shouldn’t interact and I don’t think it’s right for people to take examples from there.

He makes a pertinent point about how the use of offensive terms within films and the music industry are often seen as a way of legitimising its use in everyday discourse, yet the same excuses are not made about (for example) media violence. He also picks up on the fact that the ‘reclaiming’ of the n-word by some Black people is not universally accepted as positive by everyone who is Black and it should therefore not be assumed that Black people are now ‘ok’ with this term, as some of his friends appear to assume:

Daniel: I mean my friends are now trying to say those words like, but I feel like I’m really uncomfortable with that word in general. If you’re my friend you would understand that, so I don’t think you can say well just because I’m your friend I can use the n-word. I think that because you’re my friend, you, of all people, shouldn’t use the word, ‘cos you’re my friend you should know my sensibilities.

Interviewer: Yeah so would you object to your friend?
Daniel: It’s so much harder to say to your friend because they’re your, the most people you interact with so it’s much harder like to tell them to stop because you don’t want them to stop being your friend or offend them.
Interviewer: But you’re quite happy to stand, you’re obviously, as I said you’re very articulate, you know your own mind and you’ve got views and things and you’re happy to stand up to your friends.

Daniel: Exactly. ‘Coz regardless of who calls me, it’s a word that I feel shouldn’t be used and it would be, I think it’d reflect bad on me as a person if I let certain cases that word being used because I’m compromising my own morals. (But) obviously I get into an argument and it becomes this sort of tension between us, it’s, being Black and interacting with other people it’s always this undercurrent of tension which really I don’t like this racial tension which is sad to feel sometimes because you feel there’s a boundary between a person. I can’t really get to know someone.

Daniel clearly articulates the difficulties he faces when challenging friends about their use of racist language, echoing some of what was said at Allbury. Despite this, though, he is clear that he would always challenge examples of this, but that this can lead to ongoing tension between him and his friends, which is exactly the sort of consequence the students at Allbury were seeking to avoid by not challenging. The ‘boundary’ that Daniel identifies is problematic because it means he is placed in an impossible position where he either has to challenge it openly and risk losing friendships or ignore it completely and live ‘silently’ with the consequences.

Like the students at Allbury, Daniel travelled to Riverford from Manchester in order to receive what he and his family considered to be a ‘better’ education. He hoped that when he left Riverford and went into further or higher education that the racism might ‘stop’ but in the meantime he was willing to endure it for the sake of his education:

Interviewer: Yeah, do you have older siblings or cousins?

Daniel: I have an older sibling but he’s off doing college, university and stuff.

Interviewer: But you don’t know if he experiences the same things?

Daniel: No. I guess he doesn’t actually, maybe, hopefully as I get to college or university people will stop.

Interviewer: So would you stay on at this school (sixth form) or do you think once you finish next year I want to go somewhere else, I want to try to go somewhere else and meet new people?

Daniel: Well my education I’ve decided, regardless of what happens to me personally I need my (education). It’s something I’m really adamant (about) so if this is the best school available education wise I think regardless of, like, I would still go.
Daniel said he felt confident that the teachers at Riverford took racism seriously and were keen to deal with reported incidents. However, as was the case in the focus groups, he was less sure that this would lead to any meaningful conclusions:

Daniel: Yeah, what I love about the teachers here is that I feel they really care about the issue. But I feel that sometimes, because I’ve raised some issues before, it’s just fizzled to nothing, if you know what I mean. There’s no, it goes to a certain extent and we both talk and then nothing happens after that... But I guess there’s only limitations as to how far you can go but I feel the teachers really do care.

8.5 Hallford School

At Hallford School we spoke to Clare, who identified herself as white British, Anya, who identified herself as British with Indian heritage and Juliet who identified herself as coming from white British and Black Caribbean heritage. They were in years 8 and 9. Whilst this interview was less successful in some ways, there were some valuable exchanges that are worth discussing here.

The students were asked whether racist language was used within their friendship groups:

Clare: Not in my friendship groups, but in my friends and other friendship groups they throw, like, names around but to their friends and they’re all fine with it. But I haven’t called anything and I don’t think I, my friendship we don’t, we don’t say that but there are a lot of people who do say, like, ‘nigger’.

Interviewer: How do the people who are being called those names respond?

Clare: The ones I know, they don’t really mind as much because they’re like all friends.

Interviewer: [to Juliet] How do you feel about that? Are you in the same friendship groups?

Juliet: Yeah.

Interviewer: So how do you feel if someone uses the word ‘nigger’?

Juliet: Well if they don’t mean it in like an offensive way it don’t really bother me but if it was offensive then I’d take it to heart.

Interviewer: OK. So you really don’t mind if people use that word around you? You don’t take it personally?

Juliet: Not if it’s not directly at me, then I don’t mind.
Interviewer: What about you Anya?

Anya: The same, if it was not directed directly at me I wouldn’t really bother but if it was to me I would take some offence from it.

Interviewer: Ok. So do you think people should be using words like that?

Clare: No because it’s not really like, it’s not necessary to use words like that because they’re racist and they’re not very nice words.

Interestingly, Claire reflected the views of the white British students in the focus groups, who felt that BME students wouldn’t mind ‘nigger’ being used by their friends, even when directed at them. Julia and Anya, though, were clear that they would be offended if this term was directed at them, even by friends.

The students also spoke about examples of race equality teaching in their school:

Interviewer: What about in English literature?

Clare: We are reading ‘Noughts and Crosses’.

Interviewer: Oh ok, yeah

Clare: And we learnt about Stephen Lawrence, ‘cos that’s what Malorie Blackman wrote the book after. And we’re learning about groups and gangs and how we treat them, but because we’ve been reading the book we haven’t done a lot of speaking about it yet.

Interviewer: How do you find that book?

Clare: I think it’s a good book. In our world whites have been higher than Blacks in the book Blacks are higher than whites. I think that’s clever because usually you do assume whites are ‘better’, although they’re not.

In contrast to the use of ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ in the earlier case studies, this was an encouraging account of how contemporary race issues can be introduced and discussed through literature, encompassing ideas about the structural nature of racism rather than a simplistic focus on Black characters as victims. Clare recognised this through her discussion of the way that ‘Noughts and Crosses’ challenged conventional race-related structures of superiority and inferiority.

Finally, the students were asked how well they thought their teachers dealt with racism in school and said they thought some teachers were better able to deal with it than others, in line with the focus group findings. However, Juliet also said the following:
Interviewer: You said you’d be happier going to some teachers than others, does that mean there’s some teachers you think are not very good?

Juliet: No I think it’s just that like you wouldn’t expect people to make racist remarks so I don’t think that they really like bother because they don’t think that people would say stuff like that.

The implication here is that whilst many teachers remain firmly of the opinion that there is ‘no problem here’, some of the pupils feel that there is little value in reporting incidents where racist language is used because teachers are likely to deny that this is the case in their settings. Thus, teachers can remain in the position where they do not see a ‘problem’ because those who experience the problem do not feel it would be recognised as such.

8.6 Learning Points

- One of the most significant findings to rise out of this data relates to the mismatch of experiences between learners and teachers. Teachers are largely convinced that their settings do not have a ‘problem’ and that racism and racist incidents are minor occurrences. BME pupils, on the other hand, are able to articulate a very different account of their experiences, suggesting that they are compromised in the ways they are expected to respond to racist incidents and to casual racism in their everyday lives at school. At times they are unsure whether any challenge would be seen as an ‘over reaction’ but also feel that to do nothing gives legitimacy to the incident. Their reluctance to openly challenge casual racism partly explains the reasons why teachers do not think there is a problem at all, and why some white pupils feel they are able to continue to use racist terms casually without consequence.

- BME pupils are seeing Cheshire schools as highly desirable locations where they are most likely to receive high quality education and the grades that will provide the foundation for their desired further study and employment. However, in so doing, they are leaving supportive multicultural settings and sometimes entering unfamiliar, monocultural environments where they can feel compromised and under pressure to accept classroom and corridor experiences which are both new and challenging for them. Some BME pupils in predominantly white settings feel that their cultural differences (real or perceived) make them hypervisible within the school population. This does not appear to be fully recognised or understood by some of the adults in these settings. Where recognition is present, it is sometimes couched in the terms of ‘problem’ or is misguided in the way it informs taught sessions.
• School policies need to take account of equality issues, for example concerning appearance, in line with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Blanket rules concerning, for example, hairstyles have cultural implications that are not always recognised and can negatively and disproportionately impact upon the experiences of BME students. If these students are penalised for having broken those rules, they are doubly disadvantaged. There is a responsibility for senior management teams to ensure that decisions regarding rules are very carefully thought out, to ensure that they are evenly applied to all pupils and that they are regularly reviewed in the light of pupil experience and changing pupil populations.

• There was an appreciation among BME students that some of the casual racism they experienced came about as a result of a lack of understanding and sensitivity towards the impact of discussing race issues in general and the use of unintentional race related ‘banter’ in particular. This echoes earlier findings from teachers and white pupils, who also felt that there was a general lack of understanding and confidence in discussing and handling race related issues.

• Literature is a rich and common resource through which race issues are introduced and discussed, but this is not always achieved with the necessary sensitivity that would be expected. As a result, some BME pupils are placed in uncomfortable and often highly visible positions, which leave them vulnerable. Particular care needs to be taken with the selection of resource materials, planning and preparation to ensure that all pupils are supported, but also that the issues raised within the literature are handled appropriately. No pupil should be left at the end of a lesson feeling as though they need to defend themselves.

• The BME pupils had all experienced explicit race related learning and teaching in their primary settings. None of them felt that the same emphases had applied to their experiences in their secondary settings. Where there was evidence of explicit race related teaching, it appeared to be both historically dated and culturally and geographically distant. There was an expectation that their settings should address race related issues in a more contemporary and informative manner that would provide clear messages for all pupils and enable a deeper and more consistent understanding of equality and diversity.

• BME pupils like Daniel are looking for clear and consistent lines to be drawn by the adults in power that will support him. He is clearly able to articulate the negative impact of some of the everyday experiences in his setting and he is looking to the adults in control to be equally aware and proactive in preventing these incidents. They would be reassured to see that reported incidents had visible outcomes, where they felt they had been believed and supported.
9. Discussion

The purpose of this section is to return to the original research questions, to bring together the project findings with key literature, to highlight the most pertinent findings and make suggestions about ways to develop this research further. The questions the research proposal set out to answer were:

1. What is the extent of racism faced by young people in Cheshire Schools?
2. How are schools tackling incidents of racism?
3. What kind of strategies do pupils and teachers think could be employed to help deal with racism and racist incidents?

Added to this, the research has generated some further action points that, although not in the original research questions, seem so central to the findings of the project that they will be discussed here. These are:

- How might schools improve their ways of dealing with racism: in particular, what strategies did young people themselves raise as a potential means of dealing with the difficult but very important issue of racism in their lives at school?
- How might the findings help governmental and regulatory bodies to think about racism as one of the equality strands?
- What other areas of research and development need to be carried out?

9.1 Research Question 1: What is the extent of racism faced by young people in Cheshire schools?

Assessing the extent of any social phenomenon is always problematic. In the case of examining racism in schools, there are many issues to be taken into account that frame the way incidents are perceived, reported and measured by the various parties involved (pupils, teachers, schools, external stakeholders etc.). The literature review provided an overview of previous research about racism in schools and demonstrated that this issue is multi-faceted, demanding a broad approach to studying and engaging with it. In particular, scholars such as Gillborn argue that racism is experienced by young people in schools in their interactions with peers, teachers and other school staff. However, he notes that there is also racism built into institutional structures and protocols, which radically influence and shape young people’s educational experiences, opportunities and achievement. These institutional factors include how pupil streaming and ‘setting’ is organised, the content of the curriculum and which qualifications pupils are encouraged (or made) to take. The project found that teachers and pupils were largely unaware of
these structural factors and, even when a teacher might be able to describe possible sources of structural and institutional racism, they were unable to explain what might need to be done to address such problems. As there was very little awareness of institutional racism within the research participant groups, this section will focus on the sources of racism that teachers and pupils were able to identify and felt some control over. However, we should not lose sight of the structural factors and this section returns to this point later on.

What will be discussed in this section finds resonance in Essed’s (2002) concept of ‘everyday racism’. This concept recognised that perhaps the most influential form of racism is often overlooked or regarded as unimportant; it is the daily experience of racist language and behaviour which becomes normalised, such that it remains ‘invisible’. Incidents become difficult to report because they are often seen as part of the everyday order of life. The targets of ‘everyday racism’ recognise and acknowledge this happening but feel powerless to do anything that is likely to effect change, hence it remains largely unreported. This ‘normalisation’ of racism means that identification and discernment of racism are crucial to the issue of reporting, and therefore prevalence rates. Moreover, asking schools to monitor racism is unhelpful without guidance making absolutely clear what exactly fits into the category of a racist incident.

The research found that measuring the extent of racism faced by young people was difficult in this project because:

- Reporting protocol varies across high schools in the Cheshire, Halton and Warrington area, as in other areas of the UK, and these often depend upon the perception and recognition of racism and racist incidents by designated teachers.
- Other teachers may also not report racist incidents to designated teachers or through reporting structures because they do not perceive incidents to be racist.
- Racist events and incidents may not be reported by pupils in school because they may not perceive certain incidents as racist or they may be concerned about the consequences of doing so.
- As a result, the statistics provided to local authorities and others are shaped by these experiences and approaches alongside fears about potential implications following authorities being informed about racist incidents.

The data show that both teachers and pupils struggle with comprehending the concept of racism but, perhaps more importantly, have difficulty in understanding its manifestation within the school environment. In other words,
whilst sometimes pupils and teachers are able to discuss racism as a concept from the past, in other countries or even in relation to UK social policy (such as the Equality Act) or human rights issues, it remained difficult for all concerned to think about how these issues might also be elements of contemporary school life. For example, in the interviews, designated teachers were usually able to explain a general idea of what racism involves and show knowledge of reporting processes and so forth, but it was harder for them to explain the nature or even existence of racist incidents in their own schools.

Generally, teachers reported that the extent of racism in their schools was not significant but they acknowledged they may not be aware of all instances. Primarily, their accounts focused on derogatory racist language as representing the main issue addressed through school reporting systems and teacher/pupil discussions. However, it became apparent that teachers doubted that they knew about the extent of racism within their schools and whether, when there were reports, they were able to deal with them effectively. That said, teachers did not feel that schools attempted to fill this knowledge gap through focused training and support, nor did they provide clear focus for staff to understand racism in their schools. Indeed, one of the reasons why staff were so interested in the project and keen to take part was because they felt the research project itself would foreground these issues in their workplaces.

Data gathered from pupils suggested there were many inconsistencies and tensions in their understandings about racism and racist incidents. No-one admitted to being racist, not liking migrants or people who look different, although some expressed fears about other cultural groups. Some discussed views expressed by grandparents, parents or others who made comments about migrants but pupils felt these views were dated and unacceptable. Whilst there were difficulties in explaining clearly what constituted racism, it was clear that pupils did not understand that racism can be unintentional and that it is not only about overt discrimination, violence or hate crimes.

The vast majority of pupils felt that racism in UK society was not as bad today as in the past. Moreover, they generally felt that racism was not a problem in their schools. However, in discussion they were able to cite explicit examples of the use of racist language as a regular occurrence. For both year 8 and year 11 pupils in the focus groups (as was the case for the teachers), their discussion of the everyday experience of racism focused on the use of unacceptable language by pupils towards and about each other. The bewildering nature of race, ethnicity and racism for pupils was demonstrated in focus group discussions around whether it was acceptable for racist terminology to be used within friendship groups. There were stated confusions about why some terms were offensive and not others (and why this was
offensive to some people and not to others). Furthermore, contemporary experiences of popular culture, such as music, film, television and comedy, increased levels of doubt in pupils about how race issues should be approached.

The ethnodramas developed some of these themes and enabled pupils to examine these confusions and inconsistencies in more depth, especially with regards to friendship and racism. The BME interviews, though few in number, exemplified these tensions particularly well, and facilitated focused discussion about the nature of friendship groups and casual ‘banter’. It is worth noting that BME pupils talked about schools as places where racism should not occur, but then they continued by discussing racist events they had experienced.

9.2 Research Question 2: How are schools tackling incidents of racism?

Schools collect a range of statistical and demographic information, which is provided to local authorities and used in reports to OFSTED inspectors. Until 2012, there was a duty on schools to collect data about the ethnicity of their pupils and to record racist incidents, but the government has now dropped the requirement on all local authorities to report such incidents, arguing the exercise is bureaucratic and that schools are best placed to decide how to tackle racism. Instead, ‘prejudice based bullying’ was be the category to be recorded from 2013, which collapsed all equality strand-related incidents together. This research raises serious questions about the effectiveness of mapping progress around racism in schools and whether the issue will be taken seriously without policy support that recognises it as an individual area of concern.

Beyond keeping records of incidents, we asked in the teacher interviews about the processes and tactics that schools used to deal with racism. From the teachers' perspectives, dealing with racism involved a number of strategies beyond reporting. Talking to the pupils involved was a first step but conventional school punishments were also used, such as detentions and suspensions. Utilising community support police officers or other police service staff to visit schools and discuss issues such as hate crime and the possible consequences of racism for perpetrators, were also identified by teachers as possible resources to help emphasise to pupils the seriousness of racism. Finally, many teachers reported speaking with parents, either at home or on school premises, to explain school policy on racism and to ascertain parental influence on young people’s behaviour at school. Many teachers noted the problem of parental attitudes being transferred from home to school by pupils and used against peers. Although they noted that some subjects
touched upon racism in their normal curriculum, none of the teachers talked about changing the curriculum at particular times in direct response to incidents that had occurred.

There was little evidence that young people’s voices were being invited or heard in tackling incidents of racism in schools. This is of particular concern in relation to the case of BME pupils, who often have personal experiences and perspectives to contribute to developments in this area. However, it is clear that greater dialogue with all pupils around racism was not something that was being encouraged within the schools beyond sporadic events, the inclusion of material that was part of the curriculum anyway (normal curricular activities) or, very occasionally, a teacher of BME heritage discussing their own experiences within normal curricular activities.

In summary, schools are following good practice in collecting statistics but are not necessarily reflexive in their approaches to addressing racism in schools. UK education policy drivers are also likely now to be making their responses less attentive specifically to racism, as schools are channelled towards a broader generic equality strand perspective, focusing primarily upon bullying across all strands. Many teachers feel that they are under qualified or insufficiently experienced to handle racism and racist incidents whilst pupils continue to demonstrate confusion and inconsistencies about their own understandings of these issues.

9.3 Research Question 3: What kind of strategies do pupils and teachers think could be deployed to help deal with racism and racist incidents?

The project was keen to ensure that strategies for dealing with racism and racist incidents could emerge from listening to participants’ voices and self-generated strategies for positive change. The teachers who answered the questionnaire, in general (and whilst recognising that these might not pick up all cases of racism within their schools), were happy with the structures and protocols in place for reporting racism. For instance, teachers felt that most staff in their schools understood what to do when witnessing a racist incident and felt able to provide guidance to them about processes. It is unsurprising that teachers were not very critical about the ways their schools dealt with racism because they also noted that training around race and racism was not readily available to them. They therefore may have had problems thinking reflexively about how to respond in innovative and new ways to these issues within their schools. For time-poor teachers in a busy school, thinking in new ways about such issues is problematic and challenging. However, at the same time as not having a sense of how to change practice at school, the teachers noted the likelihood that other incidents were not being captured.
The detailed qualitative work with pupils explored their ideas about what might be usefully done to deal with racism and racist incidents. A key topic mentioned was the need to create open and safe spaces to examine racist language and terminology. In particular, understanding the heritage and provenance of language was seen to provide a ‘way-in’ to complex contemporary debates. Use of cultural contexts, such as music, films and comedy, were ways of bringing into the open sources of confusion and dispute. Such an area was the use of the word ‘nigger’ by some music artists; which was something that was felt to jar with the blanket school approach that this word should not be used. By explaining how terms are sometimes re-appropriated in specific settings by groups who experience race oppression, it might be possible to spark debate about history, appropriateness and context of language. Pupils wanted to talk openly about (and have discussions about) race and racism but wanted to be equipped with the tools and terminology to enable this to take place in a safe environment without fear of offending or being accused of racism. They also spoke about how they felt it was important for white British students to understand the context of race and racism and the impact on individuals and communities.

9.4 Action points arising from the research

a. How might schools improve their ways of dealing with racism: in particular, what strategies did young people themselves raise as a potential means of dealing with the difficult but very important issue of racism in their lives at school?

Whilst the teachers interviewed for the project recognised that race was an issue for which their schools had procedures in place, they also noted a lack of training. The scarcity of appropriately planned and school-relevant training is highly important in thinking about how schools might move forward in dealing with racism and racist incidents. Because racism can become normalised into structures and practices, taking on the invisibility that Essed (and some BME pupils) identified, it is important that training directly addresses this normalisation process. One of the key ways that schools might begin the process of addressing racism is to re-evaluate the kinds of environments that their young people will move into after school and the skills-sets this will require. In other words, in preparing young people for life in a globalised world, it is not enough to think about their current environment as being their destination. This needs to be addressed through appropriate training, which gives space for consideration of the teacher’s experience, knowledge base and beliefs about race and ethnicity. Moreover, such training could usefully emphasise the importance of ensuring that contemporary
issues about race and ethnicity are not completely overshadowed by historical examples, insensitive use of cross-cultural exemplars or assumptions about BME pupils (often intended to include them). For example, illustrations given by pupils of when teachers had put someone on the spot in class showed the problem of the use of assumptions about pupil ethnicity and race, with questions such as, “have you ever eaten plantain?”. Well-meaning attempts at inclusivity, which can have the reverse effect of reinforcing stereotypes of ethnic identities, need to be discussed in terms of the assumptions about race and ethnicity that teachers use within class. This requires institutional openness and the reflexive, sensitive, training of teachers.

There is a need to move away from the concept of racism as being primarily grounded in occasional acts carried out by aberrant individuals. Teacher groups need to think about racism differently. Training will be key in supporting developments that provide space for teachers to examine race and ethnicity in their own lives and in their professional practice. In particular, racism is not something that is ‘out there’, a simple classification, a single way of behaving, a coherent set of beliefs. Racism, as it is ‘done’ by these young people, and their teachers, is fluid and contextual. Most of the racism discussed in this research is found in what is said.

The use of racist terminology such as ‘nigger’ and ‘Paki’ in ‘jokes’ and ‘banter’ is part of a way of acting, as some pupils pointed out; a way to be seen as being ‘cool’. This is why explaining the meanings of words to pupils does not necessarily help. The use of these words is part of a wider ‘performed’ set of behaviours that generate internal acceptance within friendship groups that remains at odds with the rules and blanket bans offered by school approaches to racist terminology. The pupils themselves need to understand the inappropriateness of using racist terminology rather than having it either explained in detail or banned outright. For this to happen, there needs to be explicit, targeted, sensitive training that will help teachers support the choices that pupils need to make.

This last point about what schools can do to improve practice (around racism) connects with the pupil data about their views on how to teach issues around racism. For pupils, whilst there was a need to cover historical topics, the big gap in their knowledge was around contemporary experiences, news stories and popular culture. As one pupil argued, there was a need to, ‘Show how racism’s changed over the years. Show different types of it’. Pupils had an understanding that the ways that racism ‘happened’ today might be different in some senses than the past, but school was not a place where this was explored in any meaningful way. For example, to blame racism in today’s society on the history of slavery is to make the incorrect assumption that historical circumstances ‘caused’ the current state of play. However, the
construction of social issues is not created once in the past but is in a constant state of production and reproduction based on current conditions. In other words, racism is not a ‘thing’ that is ‘out there’, or a coherent set of beliefs, but it is fluid and contextual. In this sense, the past is useful as an illustrative example but contemporary circumstances need to be located in the here and now. Schools need support and teachers need training to take this message on board and integrate it into practice.

Important pupil-identified ways of bringing racism debates up to date and increasing their relevancy to pupils were: making learning interactive, with online learning tools, videos and ‘talking heads’ (filmed vox pops) and the use of contemporary cultural features, such as music and comedy.

b. How might the findings of the SSU2R project help governmental and regulatory bodies to think about racism as one of the equality strands?

Monitoring and evaluating schools has been an important driver in debates around raising educational standards for more than two decades. The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (OFSTED) regularly inspects and regulates services, which care for children and young people, and those providing education and skills for learners of all ages. At the same time they are supposed to work with inadequate and unsatisfactory providers, to promote their improvement, monitor their progress and share with them best practice. However, OFSTED’s concern with diversity and equality has waned over time. This is unsurprising given changing educational policy frameworks, which have recently essentially retreated from recognising racism as a central concern in the regulation of schools. For instance, in 1999, in its official response to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, the Department for Education said that it ‘expected’ all schools to record racist incidents. Also, parents and school governors should be informed of the nature of any incident and the action taken to deal with it, and school governing bodies would inform local authorities, on an annual basis, of the pattern, nature and incidence of racist events in schools. In February 2009, the Department reported that ‘there is widespread compliance with these expectations’ (Home Office 2009). Those expectations grew stronger in the following two years (Insted 2011), but since then concern has turned to amalgamating all ‘prejudice-related bullying’ in a generic grouping. It could be argued that this marginalises racism as another form of bullying and artificially collapses the difference between racism and bullying in general. However, racism, which is deeply embedded institutionally, socially and culturally in society, could be said to raise specific concerns that require individual attention. Moreover, when teachers know so little about racism and have a lack of confidence in dealing with situations involving race, there is an argument that this needs special attention to redress deficits in knowledge and cultural competence.
In thinking about race and racism and the place of these in relation to the equality strands, it is therefore essential that regulators, schools and teachers within them, be given adequate space to reflect upon the similarities and differences between, for instance, issues around areas like homophobia and racism. These might usefully be considered in terms of such areas as, young biographical experiences of discrimination (what kinds of experiences of discrimination young people and their families might have had at primary level and even earlier), identity issues, structural inequalities and life chances, to bring into focus the need for specific responses to some equality strands. This is not to say that any of the equality strands are not important, only that they raise different issues that are not necessarily being addressed through the current generic frameworks. If race and racism are prominent issues within this debate then there needs to be a requirement that schools allocate funding appropriately to address the concerns raised by this report, provide appropriate training and staff support / development, and that this process is monitored fully.

c. What other areas of research and development need to be carried out?

The Schools Stand Up 2 Racism Research Project has been an innovative endeavour, which grew and developed across three years. The range of data gathered, the depth (especially of the qualitative material) and testing out of novel methods, resulted in the gathering of much more data than was envisaged initially. However, much is left to be done. There is still a need to:

- Think about other contexts in which young people can be given a voice and utilise these as research sites. In particular youth groups, situated outside school, may be good places to encourage discussion away from the constraints of school settings.
- Explore the perspectives of parents of BME pupils with respect to their children’s experiences of school and the factors which enable or limit their ability as parents to engage with and influence school policy and procedures.
- Extend the examination of racism as it pertains to rural, semi-rural and predominately white locales by carrying out further research in these settings.
- Examine community co-researcher support across lengthy projects which represent considerable challenges that are not as easily surmountable as in the case of shorter PAR informed work. In particular, the issue of collecting data with BME communities needs a level of commitment from co-researchers that is difficult to ask for across a three-year project. Explicit and focused research is needed into models of co-researcher engagement and support, in order to
examine how to integrate community members into this work more effectively in future.

Approaches to researching racism with young people in schools represent considerable challenges but also high rewards. Researching in this field is always going to be contentious and not always welcomed but it is imperative that studies continue to provide a clear insight into the factors that influence and shape the issue of racism in UK high schools.
10. Schools Stand Up 2 Racism Recommendations

- High schools in the Cheshire, Halton and Warrington areas should be congratulated for their efforts so far in trying to deal with a highly complex issue with very little support and insufficient relevant training available. However, the project findings show that there is still a way to go in ensuring that racism is addressed fully in schools in the area.

- Contrary to some expectations, schools in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington, which are areas with low BME populations, do need support in dealing with the issues of race and racism. In particular, young people leaving school have to be able to understand these issues as they pertain to the UK today. Moreover, schools should promote this as part of good general citizenship to recognise difference, respect people and to know why certain speech, behaviour and action can negatively affect others in society.

- A focus on the presence of BME pupils as the catalyst for racism should be switched to a focus on the ways in which racist discourses are present at all times regardless of the presence (or otherwise) of BME groups and individuals. Schools need to become aware of how BME pupils in mainly white areas can become ‘hyper-visible’ and their behaviour scrutinised. This conspicuousness should instead be directed towards the often ‘invisible’ forms of racism these students experience.

- Schools’ desire to take racism seriously should be capitalised upon. However, they must address racism in all its forms, including institutional and ‘everyday’ racism and not just those isolated ‘racist incidents’ which are formally reported. This can best be achieved through a whole-school approach to race equality and it is important that school leaders publicly signal their commitment to this.

- A whole-school approach to race equality is not only beneficial to BME students but the student body as a whole, since they will be better prepared for their future lives in a diverse and globalised society. These benefits must be made clear to schools.

- Schools should view their responses to racist incidents as only one of the ways in which racism can be tackled rather than the principle way. Responses to racist incidents should be viewed as opportunities for measures to be put in place that go beyond restoring the status quo, and towards transformative actions that involve the whole-school community. They should be given support to develop a wider range of strategies to succeed in these endeavours.
Not all schools were entirely clear about the numbers of BME pupils they had on roll. There is a possibility that numbers are under-estimated due to some groups being less likely to self-identify, such as pupils from Traveller, Gypsy and Roma communities. Moreover, some of the newer economic migrant pupils may not see themselves as part of BME groups because of conflation of ethnicity with race and, specifically, colour. Schools need to develop more sensitive ways of supporting and encouraging pupils to self-identify their race or ethnic background.

The recording and reporting of racist incidents may be used as one measure of racism but schools should be made aware of the problems with using this as their main measure. They should instead be supported to develop alternatives that do not imply there is guilt or culpability; but instead demonstrate that the school has taken measures to broaden their understanding of racism and racist incidents.

Staff and pupils were understandably concerned about labelling each other as ‘racist’ when attempting to challenge racism. Schools should seek to create climates where all members of the school community are given the knowledge and skills to challenge discriminatory attitudes and behaviours rather than individuals.

Staff need support in reconceptualising their understanding of race and racism towards an appreciation of how it operates in structural and systemic ways rather than just through individual acts or extreme groups. They should be encouraged to resist attempts to downplay racist discourses and to understand that lack of intent is not a defence.

Training for teachers would usefully examine the potential impact of racism on young people, in terms of identities, personal development and life chances. Equally, there is specific need for explicit race-related content on pre-service initial teacher training (and this was an issue also acknowledged by the teacher participants in the research). This is particularly important with the rise of in-school initial teacher training programmes (particularly in predominately white areas of the country) and the potential employment of unlicensed teachers.

Staff should actively seek out opportunities to address race equality through the curriculum and across all subject areas using a coordinated and consistent approach to planning and delivery.

Ideally, schools should develop joint learning initiatives around race and racism. Goals and learning objectives should be set by consensus with pupils, guided by teachers, and sharing practical experience with peers is encouraged and facilitated. This approach enables both teachers and pupils to develop confidence in discussing these subjects within a safe environment.
11. Bibliography


Gaine, C (2005) *We’re All White Thanks* Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books


