

Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities: The Report

Introduction and background

The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, chaired by Dr Tony Sewell, was launched by the Government in July 2020 to conduct a detailed examination of inequality across the whole system and to set out an agenda for change. The Commission's report was due to be published in 2020 but was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since its publication it has attracted considerable controversy, particularly with its assertion that the claim the country is still institutionally racist is 'not borne out by the evidence'. The summary below focusses on the sections of the report pertaining to early years and schools.

Key findings

The journey of the child

- Patterns in educational and social attainment by ethnic groups vary throughout the phases of education.
- The White British group ranks joint 5th out of 18 ethnic groups alongside Mixed Other ethnic groups by the percentage of 4 to 5 year olds meeting expected development standards. A child who is doing less well at 5 years old is nearly twice as likely to end up being excluded by the end of primary school, even after adjusting for socio-economic status and other factors. The evidence on early years points to 3 major sources of disparity: family, geography, and poverty. Typically, the biggest gap between FSM (eligible for free school meals) and non-FSM pupils in early years within an ethnic group is among White Irish pupils (49% and 78%), with White British pupils close behind (53% and 76%).
- At key stage 2, the White British group ranks 10th. At GCSE, the White British group ranks 10th in terms of a strong pass at GCSE, slightly behind the Black African and Other ethnic groups.
- At A-level, the White British group ranks 8th in the percentage of 18 year-olds attaining at least 3 A grades with 11 per cent – considerably ahead of the Black African and Black Caribbean groups with 6.1 and 3.4 per cent, respectively.
- Attainment is highest for the Chinese and Indian ethnic groups up to and including A-levels.
- The evidence suggests that although school interventions may be easier to deliver than those targeted at home, the relative contribution of schools is smaller than that of parental, family, and student factors. The contribution of parents to supporting a child's learning is significant and a stable home provides a supportive context for children to

complete homework, ask for assistance and develop their confidence and wellbeing. There are many types of family units which can provide this type of support - stability and resilience are the key factors.

Differences in attainment at secondary level

- In 2019, the average GCSE Attainment 8 score for Black Caribbean (39.4) and Mixed White and Black Caribbean (41.0) pupils was over 5 points lower than the average for White British pupils (46.2), or over half a grade lower in each of the 8 subjects included. At the same time, the average scores for Indian, Bangladeshi, and Black African pupils were above the White British average. In terms of the percentage of students achieving a strong pass in Maths and English at GCSE, the White British group ranks 10th in attainment, closely following Black African and Other ethnic groups. These statistics illustrate the limitations of the term BAME and challenge the perception that pupils of different ethnicities are equally disadvantaged in the education system.
- Professor Steve Strand carried out analysis for the Commission of the Second Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE2). The analysis looked at a nationally representative sample of students who took their GCSE exams in 2015, exploring ethnic disparities in attainment once differences in socio-economic status are taken into account. Comparing groups by ethnicity and socio-economic status to the White British average of the same sex and socio-economic status, Strand found that, overall, pupils from ethnic minorities perform better than



White British pupils across all levels of socio-economic status.

- There are 2 exceptions to this rule: Black boys of high socio-economic status, and Pakistani girls of high socio-economic status. These groups have significantly lower achievement than White British pupils of the same socio-economic background and sex.
- Data shows that Black African pupils have higher attainment than Black Caribbean pupils. Strand's suggests that this may be due to the 'immigrant paradigm' theory (Kao and Thompson, 2003) according to which recent immigrants devote themselves more to education than the native population because they lack financial capital and see education as a way out of poverty.
- Pupil and parent aspirations vary across ethnic groups. A study by Strand and Joe Winston looking into the educational aspirations of 12 to 14 year olds in inner city comprehensive schools found that Black African, Asian Other and Pakistani children expressed higher aspirations than White British children. The authors believe that the lower educational aspirations of White British pupils are tied to a lack of academic self-belief and low educational aspirations in the home. The fact that White parents were less likely to have paid for private tuition for their children compared to Asian and Black parents would appear to support this view.
- Geography is also an important factor. In some parts of the country, poorer pupils are over 2 full years of education behind their peers by the time they take their GCSEs, including in almost exclusively White places like Blackpool (26.3 months), Knowsley (24.7 months) and Plymouth (24.5 months).
- It is very difficult to judge on a national level the extent to which racism could be a determining factor in educational outcomes. However, the fact that ethnic groups within the same system can have quite divergent educational outcomes, and that even within the major ethnic groups there are quite distinct trends, suggests that other factors may be more influential.

Closing the gap

- The Commission concurs with Ofsted that a strong core offer for all pupils is key to closing gaps in attainment – this includes high expectations for all, and a strong behaviour policy. The full report provides studies of schools which have experienced significant improvements in attainment for all pupils.
- Workforce diversity shows a positive trend, with the percentage of teachers from ethnic minorities increasing from 11 per cent in 2010 to 14 per cent in 2018. Minority ethnic representation on governing boards remains low, at 6 per cent.
- Having looked at the Timpson review of school exclusions (2019) and listened to communities and education practitioners, the Commission finds that the causes for ethnic disparities in the rates of exclusions and suspensions are complex and multifaceted and cannot be reduced to structural racism and individual teacher bias. For example, exclusion rates are much higher for Black Caribbean than Black African pupils: in 2018-19 Black Caribbean pupils had a permanent exclusion rate of 25 in 10,000, compared 7 in 10,000 for Black African pupils. To

Exclusively addressing racism will not, therefore, sufficiently meet the need of the ethnic groups who are experiencing higher rates of exclusion or create the best policy intervention.

- The Commission recommends that the Government review the provision and quality of alternative provision, so that excluded children can receive the support they need to engage in education and take positive next steps.
- Funding allocation should consider how to best meet the needs of the most disadvantaged, including White British, Black Caribbean, and Mixed White and Black Caribbean students from poor backgrounds who score substantially below the national average. It is important to consider the localities and schools where performance has been low over a period of time. New additional funding should be used for a range of purposes including: identifying disparities (ethnic, gender and socio-economic status) by regions or local authority areas; prioritising the recruitment, development, and retention of high quality staff in areas with high disparities; and expanding funding beyond schools to family hubs, education welfare officers, and mental health teams.
- The Commission acknowledges the importance social and cultural capital. It believes that additional time in school for extra tuition and for extra-curricular activities should be a core offer for all. The Commission recommends that the Secretary of State for Education, in collaboration with the government's education recovery commissioner, urgently considers phasing in an extended school day, initially prioritising the most disadvantaged areas and communities. The additional hours must provide all pupils with the opportunity to engage in physical and cultural activities, including working with local activity clubs. Additional funding will, however, be required to ensure that there is no additional burden on teaching staff.
- The children with the least social capital, whose parents have the weakest networks and wealth stand to gain the most from extending the school day. Exposure to more education is the best way to close the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students which has widened during the pandemic.

Curriculum

- The Commission believes that young people are entitled to a wider understanding of the UK as well as the Commonwealth and former colonies such as the West Indies, India, and Pakistan. These countries and local areas have played a role in defining 'Britishness' today.
- British history is not solely one of imperial imposition – Commonwealth history and literature reveals a more complex picture, in which ideas travelled in multiple directions and cultures mixed.
- The Commission recommends that DfE develops a well-sequenced set of teaching resources to tell the multiple, nuanced stories that have shaped our country. The resources should be embedded within subjects in the statutory curriculum. The DfE should also design a high-quality, online national library to complement and enhance the content and quality of lessons taught in all schools, so that all children can learn about the UK and the evolution of our society.

The full document can be downloaded from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-report-of-the-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities>