



November 2024

Dear Prime Minister Keir Starmer

Racism is holding all young people back. It's time for the Government to #TakeRacismSeriously.

Schools and colleges across the country are failing at their legal duties to prevent and address racism and discrimination and advance equality for all. The legislative framework to support schools in adopting anti-racist practice in education is insufficient.

We are writing to you as a coalition of organisations representing the voices of young people across the mental health, youth work and education sectors, **to call for change in how we support young people impacted by racism, and to request a meeting with you to discuss this further.** There is longstanding evidence of the harmful outcomes caused by bias and a lack of racially inclusive practice, and we are calling for urgent action to address the impacts of this growing crisis, acknowledging the evidenced structural outcomes.

We welcome your government's focus on breaking down the barriers to opportunity and would like to offer our support to help you achieve this mission. Together we have more than a century of experience working with young people. We have seen far too many young people's lives held back by their experiences of racism, which not only affects their health and wellbeing, but also limits their opportunities for a happy, fulfilling and successful life.

Racism in schools is increasing; 11,619 pupils in England were suspended for racist abuse in the 2022/23 academic year, a 23 per cent increase from 2021/22 (DfE, 2024). Children and young people affected by racism face barriers to attending schools, with the rate of exclusions in the 2022/2023 academic year at 11.74 for Black Caribbean ethnicity students and 13.62 for mixed white and Black Caribbean students, compared with just 7.9 for white British ethnicity students (DfE 2024).

The curriculum also does not support anti-racist practice; 95% of respondents to The Black and British Survey in September 2023 believed the UK's curriculum neglects Black lives and experiences, while fewer than 2% think educational institutions take racism seriously. Of Black Britons, 41% said racism is the biggest barrier to young Black people's educational attainment.

Racism in schools not only harms the individuals who racist abuse is directed at, but negatively impacts the wider school community, undermining the sense of belonging and cohesion within the school environment. Racism is harming all 9.1 million young people in schools in the England.

We are calling for a whole-school approach to ensure racial discrimination does not hold young people back in the education and support systems:

1. For the review of the national curriculum to take an explicit anti-racism focus and to include Black history as a compulsory subject.
This review offers a crucial opportunity to evaluate the current curriculum and explore ways to embed diverse, anti-racist content to ensure young people receive a more well-rounded and inclusive education. The review should be informed by the organisations listed in this letter, who have expertise and/or lived experience in this area; and include the establishment of two expert groups - one to advise on compulsory Black history content, and another to monitor the anti-racist approach taken in the roll-out of the updated curriculum;
2. For the upcoming Race Equality Act to require schools to have an action plan for addressing race inequality alongside their enhanced collection and reporting of ethnicity and race data.
We support the Race Equality Act's intention to require public services to collect and report ethnicity and race data on outcomes, however this does not go far enough. The legislative framework is not fit for purpose. As a first step, we ask that this Act goes further to require schools to set out how they will improve race inequalities.
3. For racism to be recognised by the Department of Education as an explicit safeguarding issue and included in mandatory school staff training.
Many of the harms raised by racism in schools are systemic in nature. In order to address these harms racism needs to be addressed as a safeguarding issue through a coordinated cross-Government approach.
4. For anti-racism guidance to be published for schools and colleges, including how to respond to peer-to-peer racism, mental health effects of racism and racial trauma.
This will ensure that schools and colleges adopt a consistent, comprehensive approach to anti-racism throughout their entire institution. The guidance should be created in consultation with professionals supporting young people such as youth workers and teachers and health and social care practitioners, to draw on expertise from across communities and professions.

The young people we work with have asked us to share their lived experiences with you to show how important anti-racist practice in education is to them:

"When my older brother was in Year 9, one of his teachers asked him if his mother hits him with a slipper, due to his African heritage. No child should be exposed to micro aggressions from the people that they are meant to be able to trust and look up to. It is crucial for politicians in the education sector to advocate for anti-racist and cultural competence training in schools, to prevent children from having to come home to their families in tears as my brother did. Schools should be a safe space for all."

-Corinne, 22

"Racism in schools can really negatively impact kids' mental health and how they see themselves. I've seen how feeling excluded or targeted can make young people anxious or lower their confidence. It's so important that we tackle this, so every student feels safe, supported, and able to be their true selves."

-Kaslinne, 22

"I would like to learn about Black history in all forms. The good and the bad. The negative and positive. I would like to see Black history the same way that we white history. We should see it as it is."

- 6th form student, 17

"In year 7, I went to a predominantly white school. Next to my school, there was a more predominantly Black school. After PE, a teacher told us to stop acting like the kids from the

other school, when we were misbehaving. Many teachers would often speak of being scared of them too. In year 8, the headteacher of my school said the n-word multiple times whilst teaching about slavery. She also held a makeshift auction where she sold the only Black student in the class to the other white students. In year 9, a Black friend of mine was told that he was the type of student to end up in a gutter doing crack -cocaine, because he had forgotten his English folder at home.”

- Amar, 15

“I’d like to see more literature by people of colour or different cultures, particularly making sure the works are well respected and not just tick boxing.”

- Year 9 student, 13

“There is a severe lack of education on important topics that shouldn’t just be a “pop up event” e.g. Black history month. It should be embedded in the curriculum so that there is no excuse for discriminative discussions. People should be well-versed in certain topics around gender, race, sexuality etc. There needs to be understanding before there can be acceptance and this is the only way we can make society into a better and safer place for everyone.”

- Year 10 student, 14

“We were in school during a time where we felt racism wasn’t taken seriously, and unfortunately, very little has changed. Not So Micro want to see whole-school approaches to anti-racism seen as a necessity for the sake of young people who are experiencing the same things we experienced.”

- Not So Micro

We need you to take action to make a difference for young people across the country. We would like to offer support to you and to schools around the country to tackle racism.

We would greatly appreciate your support and the opportunity to collaborate on shared actions through a departmental roundtable event. Ahead of this, **we would value the opportunity to discuss these vital changes further and to introduce you to some of the young people advocating for change.**

Racism is holding all young people back. We urge you to #TakeRacismSeriously.

Yours sincerely,

The Diana Award
Everyday Racism
Centre for Mental Health
Not So Micro
The Black Curriculum
UK Youth
The African Caribbean Education Network



Registered Office: The Diana Award, 33 Queen St London, EC4R 1AP
Switchboard: 020 3934 2160 | E-mail: info@diana-award.org.uk | Website: www.diana-award.org.uk
The Diana Award is a charity registered in England and Wales, charity registration number: 1117288
The Diana Award is also a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales, registration number: 5739137

