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Report brands schools institutionally racist

A Government report that brands schools as 'institutionally racist' has caused anger amongst teachers

The report, *Getting It. Getting It Right*, leaked to the *Independent on Sunday*, reveals 'systemic racial discrimination' in the country's education system, with three times more black children being excluded than whites.

Furthermore, black children were also five times less likely to be officially registered as 'gifted and talented'. The bias was 'largely unwitting' due to the negative stereotype of black people as threatening, the report noted.

But education unions said there was no evidence that teachers were racist and insisted pupils were simply thrown out for being badly behaved.

The report was initially ordered by the Government to find out why so many black pupils were being thrown out of school. Every year 1,000 black pupils are permanently expelled from school and 30,000 more are banned for a limited period.

The accusation that schools are 'institutionally racist' could have damaging consequences because schools and other public bodies are required by law to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination.

The report, written by Peter Wanless, director of school performance and reform at the Department for Education and Skills, states: 'The exclusions gap is caused by largely unwitting, but systematic racial discrimination in the application of disciplinary and exclusions policies.'

The report concludes: 'A compelling case can be made for the existence of "institutional racism" in schools.

'Even with the best efforts to improve provision for excluded pupils, the continued existence of the exclusion gap means that black pupils are disproportionately denied mainstream education and the life chances that go with it.'

The report said there was a 'comparatively weak basis' for arguing that street culture had a more persuasive influence on black young people than it has on other young people. It blamed the portrayal of black 'street culture' for 'encouraging school staff to expect black pupils to be worse behaved and to perceive a greater level of threat'.

But teachers' leaders said there was no justification for the report's findings.

Mick Brookes, General Secretary of the National Association of Headteachers, said: 'In my experience as a head teacher my colleagues have always shown absolute integrity in how all young people are treated.'

John Dunford, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said: 'I think schools are very racially tolerant places in comparison with what can happen in society outside their gates.'

Philip Parkin, General Secretary of the Professional Association of Teachers, said: 'Schools cannot be regarded as the panacea for all of society's failings.

'There is no justification for branding the education system institutionally racist when only a very small percentage of schools may be giving cause for concern.'

Chris Keates, General Secretary of the NASUWT, said: 'We don't believe that schools want to address behaviour problems on the basis of race of the pupil. Our evidence simply doesn't show that.'

John Bangs, head of education at the National Union of Teachers, said the evidence that black boys were five times less likely to be identified as gifted and talented was more of a class issue, adding: 'You could apply this statistic just as easily to white, working-class boys.'

Shadow Education Secretary David Willetts said: 'We do need to tackle this problem, but labelling our schools "institutionally racist" doesn't help.

'We should be focussing on raising educational standards and tackling truancy - not throwing around allegations of racism.'

Former Conservative Minister Edwina Currie told Sky News: 'If it were a racist issue then it would be affecting young Asians. Young Chinese do extremely well.'

A spokesman for the Commission for Racial Equality said: 'We have long said that there are differential outcomes for

different ethnic groups in terms of achievement, especially in the case of young black boys.

'However, the cultural outlook for this group is also a factor. The CRE believes black children need role models and, ideally, parents to play a more active role in their children's education.'

An Education Department spokesman said: 'In the light of this work, ministers concluded that it would be inaccurate and counterproductive to brand the school system as racist. However, there is more that schools, parents and the Government can do to ensure that every child fulfils their potential whatever their background.'

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