Towards an anti-racist Wales

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In March 2021, Professor Charlotte Williams highlighted the need for every teacher and school in Wales to be equipped with the knowledge and resources to confidently develop an anti-racist curriculum in her report to the Welsh Government (Williams, 2021). Her work has formed part of the Welsh Government's Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan. This report focuses on how education providers were developing provision to support the Welsh Government's aim to achieve a Wales that is anti-racist by 2030. It draws on evidence from a sample of inspection reports published during the academic year 2023-2024, Welsh Government and Estyn data and visits to a few selected schools. The sample of inspection reports included all sectors inspected during 2023-2024.

Sgwrs Podcast: Towards an Anti-Racist Wales

Listen to our podcast, Sgwrs, where we explore how education providers across Wales are working towards an anti-racist future. This episode includes practical insights from experts on how schools and local authorities are fostering an anti-racist culture and advice for educators and school leaders on taking meaningful action.

The panel includes Jassa Scott (Strategic Director, Estyn), Tony Bate (HMI, Estyn), Martine Booker-Southard (Learning Links Manager, Vale of Glamorgan Local Authority), Sian Dacey (Assistant Headteacher, Kitchener Road Primary School).

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Learners' experience of racism

In most sectors, inspection provides learners with the opportunity to give feedback across a range of topics through a learner questionnaire. In primary schools, this includes asking older pupils how safe they feel and if their school encourages them to treat others fairly. In secondary schools, questions are more specific and ask pupils directly about discrimination and racism. The most recent data available from the outcomes of questionnaires is for the academic year 2023-2024. During this period, primary school questionnaires show that many pupils feel safe all or most of the time. They reported that their school helped them to treat everyone fairly. During secondary school inspections, questionnaires ask pupils directly whether they feel they have received unfair treatment due to their ethnic background. In all secondary schools, there were examples of pupils reporting unfair treatment. Overall, schools with a higher percentage of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds showed a higher percentage of pupils reporting unfair treatment.

While we do not report on the prevalence of racist incidents directly, inspection evidence regularly includes references to instances of overt racism. In a minority of providers, staff, pupils or parents reported racist incidents such as name calling or discrimination. Racist incidents appeared to be the most prevalent in secondary schools, with these noted in around half of secondary school inspections.

It is important to note that, in a few schools, pupils told inspectors that they have not reported racist incidents they had experienced. This pattern matches the findings of the Children's Commissioner for Wales in her report on racism in schools. Research into staff and learners' experiences of racism in FE colleges identified that, although many learners and staff had experienced overt racism, more incidents related to covert racism and that staff and learners found it more challenging to identify and report these incidents.

Black, Asian and minority ethnic stories, histories and contributions

With the launch of Curriculum for Wales for pupils from the age of 3 to 16 years, the teaching of Black, Asian and minority ethnic histories and experiences as part of the history of Wales and wider world became mandatory. In response, many schools had begun to introduce the stories and contributions of prominent figures from ethnic minorities within the curriculum. This was increasingly evident in several sectors and particularly within primary and secondary schools. Pupils learnt about the achievements, challenges and experiences of key figures. However, the range of individuals represented was often limited to a few well-known role-models. Effective planning to positively and authentically represent ethnic minorities as a core part of the curriculum was beginning to take shape in about half of the schools.

Around half of all providers inspected (including further education institutions) had embraced awareness events to promote equality and begin to address racism. For example, they acknowledged Black History Month or Wear Red Day and used these as vehicles to promote and value diversity. In the best examples, events formed part of a broader programme and included opportunities to involve a wide audience in raising awareness and deepening pupils' understanding of racism. However, in most cases, events involved 'add on' activities, isolated from the rest of the curriculum. In a few instances, they were the provider's sole strategy to address racism.

It is important for all learners to see themselves, their culture, stories, histories and experiences represented positively, accurately and sensitively throughout the curriculum. To begin to address this at a local level, a minority of schools had involved pupils and parents in promoting an understanding of diversity across the school. For example, they formed pupil-led committees to lead assemblies or deliver PSE (personal and social education) lessons focusing on diversity for younger students. At its best, this work helped to raise all pupils' awareness and understanding of diverse histories, experiences and contributions of Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. However, this approach often involved one-off events that did not address issues relating to diversity beyond a superficial level. It could also place the responsibility on pupils from ethnic minority groups to educate their peers about their experiences and culture.

In a few cases, providers placed a sustained focus on involving families in contributing to the curriculum. At one independent school, staff provided pupils and parents with meaningful opportunities to share their culture with others on a regular basis. For example, they planned opportunities for pupils to model, perform or learn a variety of international traditional dances. This supported all pupils to feel a sense of belonging within the school's diverse and caring community.

A few non-maintained settings invited parents to share their culture, beliefs and experiences with pupils and staff. For example, at one nursery, parents supported practitioners to share resources and information about Ramadan with children effectively. This approach enabled all children to see their homelife valued and reflected accurately within the curriculum, supporting them to feel a sense of belonging.

Teacher recruitment and Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

In September 2022 the Welsh Government introduced The Ethnic Minority ITE incentive scheme. The scheme supports the Welsh Government's ambition for an Anti-racist Wales and aims to increase the number of ethnic minority teachers so that learners in Wales have a more diverse and representative teaching workforce.

Over the past year, the number of teachers who identified their ethnic group as Mixed, Multiple Ethnic Groups, Asian, Asian British, Black, African, Caribbean, Black British or Other ethnic groups rose from 325 to 350 (Welsh Government, 2024). This represented a small percentage increase from 1.2% of all teachers to 1.4%, although just over 7% of support staff are from these groups. These figures demonstrated an underrepresentation of minority ethnic groups in the teaching profession as almost 10% of the population of Wales are from an ethnic minority (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

When looking at leadership positions in schools, representation of the diversity within Wales reduces further. The last four years of data show that on average just 0.4 % of headteachers are from minority ethnic groups (Welsh Government, 2024). The figures are similar or lower when looking at acting head teacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher posts.

While all ITE providers actively promote their courses to ethnic minority students, the most recent data shows the percentage of trainee teachers from ethnic minority groups to be between 4 and 5% (Welsh Government, 2023). This suggests that the recruitment of teachers from ethnic minority groups will remain a challenge into the future due to low numbers entering the profession.

There was a similar challenge in other education professions, for example with 3.9% of FE teachers being from Mixed or multiple ethnic groups, Asian, Asian British, Black, African, Caribbean or Black British or other ethnic groups in 2024.

Leadership and professional learning

In a few providers, leaders showed a strong drive to take an anti-racist approach to their practice and, in particular, their curriculum. They evaluated current provision and prioritised improvement and professional learning for staff effectively. In the best examples, leaders did not shy away from difficult topics and were both sensitive and pro-active in promoting positive change. As a result, staff were beginning to provide pupils with relevant experiences that gave them a direct insight into the impact of racism. For example, in one school, staff provided pupils with regular opportunities to interview prominent community figures and listen to their lived experiences. This gave pupils a deeper understanding of racism and strengthened their resolve to oppose and overcome it. A few schools encouraged pupils to use the arts as a medium for sharing their views and striving for change. For example, pupils presented their understanding of fairness through poetry or 'protest art' to promote anti-racism.

An increasing number of leaders across sectors were taking advantage of professional learning available to them about diversity and anti-racism. For example, they were working with external providers such as 'Diversity and Antiracist Professional Learning' (DARPL) and Show Racism the Red Card to deepen understanding amongst staff and improve provision. A few leaders had begun to evaluate their practice in relation to anti-racism effectively. For example, in one secondary school, leaders identified that the representation of people from ethnic minorities in the curriculum frequently covered negative aspects of history such as slavery. They recognised the need to review their

curriculum in order to represent wider contributions and histories and therefore present a more balanced picture.

Effective practice

Leaders in the Vale of Glamorgan local authority showed commitment to creating an anti-racist culture across the authority. For example, they involved 16 schools in a project through the 'Learning Links' Team. This included a range of professional learning for school staff about how to promote an anti-racist approach. They shared relevant research and highlighted the most effective practices. Officers established an action research project to help school leaders and staff consider how best to develop an anti-racist culture and to ensure that their curriculum is inclusive. Schools involved in the project had established helpful approaches to planning for a curriculum that celebrated diversity as well as educating the school community about how to be anti-racist.

As a result of their involvement in the project, many schools were beginning to strengthen their approach to anti racism. For example, leaders and staff at Victoria Primary School had deepened their understanding of an anti-racist approach and decolonising the curriculum. A pupil-led group was proactive in looking at resources across the school with a view to improving their inclusivity and how well they reflected the school community. Many pupils at the school enjoyed sharing their heritage, cultures and beliefs with their peers. As a result of this work, most pupils at the school were developing an increasing awareness of equality and diversity and the importance of treating everyone with respect.

Questions for reflection

- How well do leaders and practitioners understand anti-racism and how to approach the new mandatory elements when developing their curriculum?
- How sensitively and accurately do providers present the histories, stories and contributions of people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups?
- How accurately do providers record, report and evaluate data on racist incidents and the attendance and exclusions of ethnic minority learners? How is this information used?
- How effectively do providers respond to racist incidents?
- How well are providers evaluating the scope and impact of their work with partner agencies?

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