

Promoting race equality through peer support



Introduction

The Race Relations Amendment Act (RRAA), introduced in April 2001, has important implications for race equality issues in school. This paper gives guidance for schools on implementing specific duties set out in the Act. It also looks at the contribution that peer support can make to promoting racial equality and good race relations.

Summary of the Act

The RRAA includes general duties, which relate to all public authorities, and duties specifically for schools. As part of their specific duties, all schools are required to develop a race equality policy, and to monitor the impact of their policies to ensure that they do not disadvantage ethnic groups, particularly in relation to levels of attainment. Both general and specific duties are set out below.

General duties for schools:

- ◆ eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
- ◆ promote equality of opportunity;
- ◆ promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

Specific duties for schools:

- 1 before 31 May 2002:
 - a) prepare a written statement of its policy for promoting race equality;
 - b) have in place arrangements for fulfilling, as soon as is reasonably practical, its duties under paragraph 3.
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 - a) maintain a copy of the statement;
 - b) fulfil those duties in accordance with such arrangements.
3.
 - a) assess the impact of its policies, including its race policy, on pupils, staff and parents of different racial groups including, in particular, the impact on attainment levels of such pupils;
 - b) monitor, by reference to their impact on such pupils, staff and parents, the operation of such policies including, in particular, their impact on the attainment levels of such pupils.

From CRE – Statutory Code of Practice on the duty to promote race equality. A guide for schools

Key implications

Schools have a duty to promote good race relations, and are required to monitor the effect of their policies on pupils by ethnicity and race. The implications of this are significant. For instance, if a school finds that attainment levels for pupils of a certain ethnicity are markedly down on average attainments, then it needs to work on raising the levels of that group.

The effects of a school's practices on all ethnic groups also need to be monitored, with schools taking remedial action if a policy or practice is having a negative impact on specific sections of the community. In addition, schools are expected to monitor their workforce by race, and to target ethnicities and racial groups that are under-represented.

How peer support can help

Peer support is an effective tool for promoting racial equality with pupils and for supporting attainment levels within schools. For example, peer educators can facilitate in citizenship classes with younger pupils. Peer support also plays an important role in developing attitude and values as part of creating healthy, inclusive schools. It has been shown to be an effective method of working with young people on stigmatised or controversial issues such as drug use and mental health, and is a useful means of developing skills and capabilities in young people from 'hard to reach' groups. Because peer educators communicate in a similar language and belong to the same youth culture, pupils can identify with peer educators. The listening and mentoring skills that peer supporters gain as part of their training can also help to build trust and engage younger pupils in open discussion. Being a peer supporter also brings benefits to those carrying out the work, with the help that they provide giving meaning and responsibility to their lives. These positive changes can contribute to their own personal development and their understanding of and respect for others.

Who should be involved?

Because racial equality covers many different issues, an important first step for any school is identifying needs. Schools must then consider how best to meet those needs. Both processes need to be carried out through consultation exercises conducted with a wide range of stakeholders. So who is involved and how?

Promoting racial equality within schools can be achieved by a combination of 'top down' consultation involving schools governors, key staff and community leaders, and 'bottom up' consultation, involving pupils and parents. In order to understand the implications of the new legislation, staff should undergo training and discussions at staff meetings. Parents' evenings and open days provide an opportunity to raise awareness amongst parents about racial equality, and for parents to discuss any concerns. School councils and other gatherings provide useful forums for pupil discussion, and for highlighting potential issues and problems within the school in terms of race relations. It has been shown that whole school involvement is more effective in developing new strategies, especially if pupils see the effects of their discussions and decisions implemented. (If their decisions are not implemented, then a formal response should be given as to why.) Pupils also have another level of involvement in that they will be monitored by ethnicity in terms of attainment.

As part of the process of promoting racial equality, a race equality policy needs to be developed by governors, the head teacher and relevant staff. Parents should have input into the policy and be able to provide feedback. Pupils' involvement should also be sought in terms of highlighting problems and issues that need to be addressed. They should also understand the policy and what it means for them.

Identifying best practice in race equality work in schools

Examples of best practice tend to use a whole-school approach.

Lyons Park Infants' School in Brent has developed an emotional well-being package as part of its Healthy Schools work. Although the project focuses on emotional well-being, similar projects could be developed around race issues. Specialist organisations working in Lyons Park Infants' School, such as The Place 2 B, offer support for pupils and staff

both individually and privately. The Place 2 B co-ordinator works with individual classes and takes circle time once a week. This increases contact between the Place 2 B and the pupils and increases their awareness of the service and the fact that they can refer themselves. This whole-school approach allows the school to create a process where issues of emotional well-being are discussed more openly. Another key component of the project is that all school staff, and new staff joining the school, attend training on emotional well-being which focuses on personal perspectives before discussing pupils' needs. This allows for a shared experience of understanding what the school is implementing. Teachers reported feeling more connected with other staff members and better communication pathways developed.

Other models of good practice show that race equality is best tackled by enabling individuals to become more in touch with, and expressive of, their own internal worlds. Building on respect for others and their perspectives is also important. Training packages for assertiveness and self-esteem can be helpful for those who need extra support in their personal and emotional development. These sorts of initiatives should be coupled with a school philosophy which celebrates diversity, promotes tolerance and actively draws out good role models from all communities.

Recommendations

These recommendations are based on the experiences of professionals involved in training school staff on promoting racial equality. Race training is a potentially challenging area, with strongly held beliefs often causing disagreement among participants. However, it is possible to look at the issues in a non-confrontational manner and to provide training which school staff will find useful in their professional and personal lives.

- 1 Provide training for school staff carried out by skilled facilitators who are able to explore individuals' values and beliefs, as well as building on skills and capabilities.
- 2 Provide training on race awareness and equality for all those involved in schools. A focus on 'being white' is also helpful in looking at race equality from a different viewpoint, and enabling the issues to be discussed from the majority perspective.
- 3 Provide training for teachers on related issues,

for example, on using approaches which focus on emotional literacy and the development of the individual's inner as well as their outer world. This would have a positive effect on relationships with pupils and would create a positive learning experience within schools.

- 4 Develop consultation strategies with all stake holders in schools. Parents and pupils need to be consulted on the school strategy to promote racial equality. School councils and parent forums are useful for generating formal structures of feedback for schools. Further communication pathways can be developed depending on the identified needs of the school in thinking about race issues.
- 5 The Forum could support schools by providing guidance on how schools can promote racial equality through peer support. Forum members could perhaps highlight their own examples of good practice, which could then be disseminated through workshops and by placing examples on the website.
- 6 Schools and teachers have made it clear that they would like training from reputable sources that are financially accessible. The Forum could develop its own lists of trainers who are skilled and approved to carry out this work. It could also consider applying for funding to subsidise training in schools particularly on how race equality can be promoted through peer support. The training could then be expanded to include other topics where peer support is effective, such as bullying, learning support etc.
- 7 The Forum needs to consider its own commitment to racial equality and produce a statement of its commitment. Through a statement of intent, and through its ethos, racial equality can be highlighted as a core value in work undertaken.

Summary

There is little information currently available about how the RRAA will change the way that schools operate. This is mainly because the legislation is still very new, with the specific duties only coming into force in May 2002. However, the Act provides an opportunity to work with schools on promoting racial equality, and on promoting other skills and values which peer support covers, such as creating a culture of care amongst pupils.

With the advent of this new legislation, the Forum can promote peer support, in its various forms, as a means of tackling racial inequality. Once examples of good practice have been gathered from Forum members, it can start to engage schools through the website and further training days.

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Guide for schools on promoting race equality
Available from the Commission for Racial Equality
Head Office Elliot House 10-12 Allington Street
SW1E 5EH
020 8728 7022

Being White video
Federation of Community Work Training Groups
0114 273 9391 / info@fcwtg.demon.co.uk

The Stephen Lawrence Enquiry - Implications For Racial Equality
CRE

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