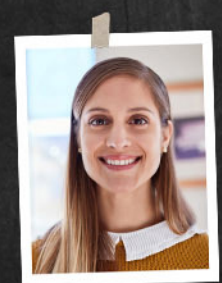
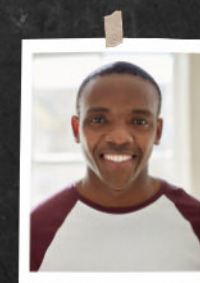
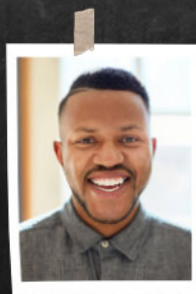
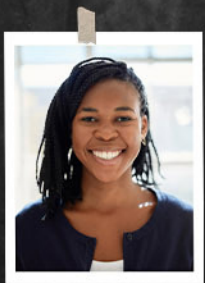




Supporting the retention of minority ethnic teachers

A research and practice based guide for school leaders



Introduction

There are well-documented challenges with teacher retention in England, and studies also find that minority ethnic teachers leave the workforce at higher rates than their White British counterparts. While the reasons for this are complex, research highlights the racialised experiences of minority ethnic teachers who have to contend with essentialism (i.e. the idea that people are inherently different due to their 'race'), ideologies of racial and linguistic inferiority or deficiency, racial microaggressions (i.e. every-day brief, subtle acts of discrimination or insults) and tokenism (i.e. being used as a one-off solution to lack of diversity).

Furthermore, the systems and structures of schools are not set up to motivate, support, develop or encourage the existing 15% of minority ethnic classroom teachers to be aspirational and indeed be successful school leaders. The figures from the School Workforce Census reflect a stark reality. In 2019, White people made up 96.3% of headteachers and 93.8% of deputy or assistant headteachers. Out of around 22,400 headteachers in state schools,

there were only 100 Black Caribbean and just over 200 South Asian heritage female headteachers. Data for other headteachers of colour are usually withheld to protect anonymity because there are so few of them.

We believe that the racial literacy of all school leaders and their commitment to racial equity are important for creating a supportive organisational culture for minority ethnic teacher retention and progression into leadership. Racial literacy is not just about developing the vocabulary of anti-racism. Crucially, it is about developing anti-racist language in tandem with the critical consciousness, deeper and broader knowledge, general dispositions and confidence necessary to identify, explain, grapple with and confront the ways in which race and racism function to limit the careers of minority ethnic teachers and, ultimately, prevent greater racial diversity in the teaching workforce.

About this project

Educators from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds are vital to the school workforce and retention policies and interventions should be informed by their perspectives and concerns. This guide is the result of a co-production project between researchers and practitioners. The project facilitated three workshops, involving a team of UCL researchers and school leaders in the Association for School and College Leaders (ASCL) Ethnic Diversity Network. The school leaders discussed what good support to retain teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds means to them. This document is structured according to the themes which emerged from these workshops, the overview of broader research evidence base, and the UCL researchers' own recent study on the employment and retention of minority ethnic teachers in England (see Further Reading).

Overview

This brief guide is intended to draw a greater attention to the racial climate in schools and to encourage both new and experienced school leaders to reflect on the teacher retention practice within their schools in relation to the experiences of minority ethnic teachers. The guide is organised around three interrelated principles which can help school leaders from all backgrounds develop confidence and dispositions to increase levels of racial literacy and anti-racist practice. Each of the key principles is divided into themes, with suggestions from the Ethnic Diversity Network on how to put them into practice.

1. Be deliberate and proactive in enabling dialogue around race, diversity and equity in school

This section suggests that improving schools' capacity to sustain open dialogue around issues of diversity, antiracism, and social justice, as well as affirming and developing the potential of minority ethnic teachers to act as cross-cultural mentors for their colleagues, may positively impact on their retention.

2. Be mindful of how teachers are deployed and promoted in your school

This section unpacks seemingly neutral practices with respect to development, promotion and recruitment of minority ethnic teachers. It suggests a racial analysis of recruitment practices, evaluating the racial composition of leadership teams and mentors, and considering the diverse demographics in succession planning.

3. Be willing to recognise and tackle 'whiteness' as a cultural norm in schools

This section suggests that without any effort to reframe the culture of 'whiteness' in schools, as manifested in curriculum content and disregard for alternative cultural experiences and ways of knowing, the position of minority ethnic teachers will remain marginalised.

1. Be deliberate and proactive in enabling dialogue around race, diversity and equity in school

What is the problem?

While many schools have committed to and made progress in recruitment efforts, they continue to struggle with the retention of their ethnically diverse staff due to lack of structures to support and sustain their work. Research has shown that although minority ethnic teachers prefer to work in ethnically diverse schools, they may leave such schools even when they are not the direct or intended target of racism but for reasons including low expectations or negative attitudes about minority ethnic students, lack of support for culturally relevant or socially just teaching, and limited dialogue about race, diversity and equity in the school. This is particularly off-putting for those teachers who are committed to working towards educational equity. Their sense of professional efficacy may be undermined if they feel that they have to avoid or ignore issues related to race, racism and privilege.

What did teachers say in our research?

“At lunch time I’ll have a lot of the kids who are not just brown or black, I have a lot of kids who came from Romania or from other countries, and they will come and sit in my classroom and they will tell me the things that they say they don’t feel they can talk to the other teachers about, and it’s all related to racism. I think representation is so important for these kids.”

“The other thing that’s also very upsetting is the labelling and the casual racism that’s happening in schools. I mean my headteacher, she will talk about children in quite a derogatory way in front of other children, believing that they don’t understand. How do I pull that up if she’s the headteacher? How do I prove that she said that? It’s very, very tricky.”

Reflections on your practice

- What projects, systems or programmes, if any, are in place to promote equity in your school? For staff? For students? Write down and discuss an inventory of these projects, systems or programmes with your team. How do they promote equity? How can they be improved upon?
- In what ways, if any, is there open dialogue around race and diversity in your school? For example, is this through the curriculum, extracurricular activities? Whose voices are centred? Are voices of minority ethnic teachers included?
- Do you actively and openly tackle discrimination in your school? If yes, in what ways? And who is leading and monitoring this advocacy? Are all voices sought and represented?

Possibilities for action

Becoming fluent in anti-racist language and comfortable with anti-racist conversations and practices

Enacting change to better reflect the needs and goals of increasingly diverse schools requires institutionalised intentionality and support, including willingness to lean into – not away from - discomfort. It is crucial to be intentional about putting issues of racial literacy and anti-racist practices on the agenda of all staff members and school governors in majority White as well as ethnically diverse schools. To elevate minoritised voices, consider offering professional development leadership training for minority ethnic teaching staff that is specifically focused on skills to effectively alleviate racial discrimination and inequity in schools.

Making space for conversations about race and ethnicity within school

The assumption of the colour-evasive approach to engaging with staff and students is that in order to treat people equally it is important not to notice race and cultural differences. Yet, minority ethnic teachers feel that viewing race as insignificant prevents a deeper examination and acknowledgement of the role that race and racism plays in their lives and in the lives of minority ethnic students. Facilitating appropriate spaces and structures within the school for minority ethnic teachers to share their experiences of racialisation will help your school build more authentic 'multicultural' capital, keep up dialogue about equity and social justice and recognise the manifestation of social hierarchies in inequitable opportunities and potentially disrupt them.

Concerns and experiences of school leaders in ASCL Ethnic Diversity Network

“A starting point though for this is White colleagues really need to understand some of the language around race, critical race theory for example or white privilege, white superiority, all these ideas [...] in order to be deliberate you have to have this understanding.”

“I just realised, after a period of time, that nobody talked about race at all at any level. If you did feel that there were issues that needed to be addressed, there wasn't really a forum where you could take your point of view and feel that you were going to be properly listened to.”

2. Be mindful of how teachers are deployed and promoted in your school

What is the problem?

Many teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds opt to pursue alternative roles outside of the state school sector if they are unable to progress in their career. Research has demonstrated that racial inequalities are a factor in teachers' career progression. Stereotypical approaches to minority ethnic staff development, such as direction into pastoral rather than academic roles, further impede opportunities for progression into senior leadership. The statistics for non-White school leaders are woeful and certainly not reflective of the diversity of the schools. Our recent research has also highlighted additional intersectional discrimination experienced by teachers from different ethnic subgroups who teach specific subjects, as well as teachers who for example have a migrant or working-class background or other marginalised identities. Alongside stalled careers, the weight of environmental microaggressions (such as an absence of minority ethnic representation in school leadership, the stress of raising concerns about racial issues, and limited professional self-efficacy) exacerbates the high turnover of minority ethnic teachers.

What did teachers say in our research?

"Pushing someone into a SEN role or into a pastoral role ... I think people genuinely feel they're doing people a favour and it's wrong and it's something that I highlight, and I shout about. I am at the table and so I make my voice very clearly heard, but it is about unconscious bias."

"It's almost as if that we are invited to the table but we're there to be seen and not to be heard. So, it will be good to understand, if there can be a review, if a senior leader that is BAME has been in a position for five years plus, what is the school doing to support them in progressing further? There needs to be some accountability in that area too."

Reflections on your practice

- How are teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds currently being deployed in the school?
- What is the ethnic make-up of your middle and senior leadership team?
- Which colleagues have been recently successful or unsuccessful in their promotion applications? And what can be learnt from their journeys?
- What objective measures does your school have in place to support your racial diversity and inclusion efforts in leadership to counterbalance the wider structural barriers? Think about talent identification and succession planning in relation to representation, promotion, strategic and effective development, pay, etc.

Possibilities for action

Starting career planning early

Teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to stay in teaching if they are well supported in the early phase of their career to understand and navigate the predominantly White profession. This support could entail strategic conversations about career planning with an informed mentor outside of performance management appraisal meetings.

A good way to avoid confusion or misunderstanding later on is to have an open conversation with new teachers about where their passions lie and about their career ambitions. Some minority ethnic teachers will of course be interested in following the pastoral career route. It is about listening and understanding their reasons, communicating the same expectations as of ethnic majority teachers, but also highlighting barriers and ways of realising their ambitions within specific pathways.

Mentoring, coaching, proactive talent identification and succession planning

The message from school leaders was clear; given that little progress has been made in terms of school leadership diversity, interrupting seemingly neutral procedures around promotions and creating professional opportunities is an entry point for challenging the reproduction of inequity in career progression for minority ethnic teachers. A common piece of advice was around the importance of being proactive in spotting and nurturing talent among these staff members rather than expecting them to take care of their professional

Concerns and experiences of school leaders in ASCL Ethnic Diversity Network

“Having [conversations] so that career feels more strategic, and people pick the right jobs or go into opportunities that are more energising and perhaps more strategic for further progression.”

“I had a very successful career as a subject leader and I ended up in pastoral and then that became my label even though I did all these other things that were not linked to pastoral.”

“It is really about school leaders being quite proactive about this and saying, ‘come on now’, not tokenism. We’re identifying people with talent property and then we’re actually putting systems in place so that we help those people to move through the system successfully.”

advancement in the same way as majority ethnic teachers with reference points from affinity groups, friends and family might do. Talent spotting is an effective strategy because many teachers understate their accomplishments for lack of confidence due to the dynamics of unequal power relations in the school and the society at large.

The best approach to mentoring and coaching must be sensitively contextualised to suit teachers in your school. Ideally, there should be a choice of mentors available. Many minority ethnic teachers would like to be mentored by a senior colleague from a similar background, but this might not be possible to arrange given lack of ethnic diversity in school leadership teams. Additionally, poor incentives offered to experienced colleagues of colour for mentorship can limit their opportunities to take up other roles in schools. Others believe that having career focused conversations with more senior colleagues outside of established (ethnic) affinity groups can be a beneficial learning experience for both parties. Finally, being coached or mentored by a neutral person external to the teacher's school has the benefit of bringing an outside perspective on any issues, and can also allow a teacher to speak more openly and honestly than may otherwise be the case.

Interrogating the 'fit' and 'merit' arguments

To minority ethnic teachers, different variations on the 'candidate fit' feedback in the recruitment and promotion process commonly signals 'race' without explicitly naming it. If your true objective is to improve diversity imbalance in your school and in the wider profession, consider for promotion (or as a new recruit) an equally qualified minority ethnic candidate because as a minimum they bring the perspective to the school leadership team that is currently missing. Some would advise schools without ethnic diversity to focus even harder on improving diversity literacy in the senior leadership team, including by seconding senior minority ethnic colleagues with relevant expertise.

"We had to be very careful who are the senior leaders who are actually doing this annual career discussion because minority ethnic staff didn't always feel comfortable speaking to everybody in the senior leadership team."

"I was actually told when I wanted to apply for a promotion that they wanted somebody from outside. I can't apply because that is not expected because they wanted somebody with slightly different skills. But if I went into the pastoral side and behaviour side that would be alright."

The belief that evaluating applicants for leadership positions according to the same criteria equals evaluating fairly can be problematic. Because the playing field is not level, seek criteria to include minority ethnic candidates rather than eliminate them from the leadership competition, including by interrogating your criteria of quality. For example, minority ethnic teachers are often asked or volunteer to bear additional responsibilities in school, so, take into consideration evidence of merit such as well-formed relationships with students and communities, advocacy work, organisation of specific events and activities, mentoring early career minority ethnic teachers, etc.

Applying an intersectional lens to recruitment and retention policies and practices

While the paths into teaching for many minority ethnic teachers might have been less traditional due to unequal opportunities, the multiple forms of discriminations (racism, sexism, ableism, classism, homophobia, linguicism, etc.) interlock to result in specific and even greater inequities for some groups. Examine existing inequities in career outcomes intersectionally. While many women appreciate flexible working arrangements due to caring responsibilities, not all women face the same levels of discrimination or barriers in leadership competition. Some of the examples of intersectional marginalisation discussed in our workshops in relation to minority ethnic teachers include: viewing multilingualism as a limitation rather than a strength in a female candidate of colour with a migrant background; on the other hand, equating a middle-class British accent in a candidate of Black Caribbean heritage with majoritarian privilege.

Avoiding tokenism

Having only a small number of minority ethnic educators and predominantly in entry and middle leadership roles sends a signal about tokenistic efforts to change institutional arrangements that preserve white privilege. There is a convincing argument to be made

“If you’re in pastoral, it is also about saying that actually that is a strength, it is an important domain alongside forming relationships. So, it shouldn’t be a glass ceiling because it’s an important domain, along with all the others.”

“Looking for people who may want to do flexible working which again might encourage more females to apply for jobs where there’s an opportunity to be flexible, we noticed that the applications were quite diverse.”

“As I said early on, somebody sees me and they think that I must be in admin or something like that. I can’t be in a senior position because of my language.”

“I have been a witness to a colleague who has done the same courses and the same developmental milestone,

that the commonly cited issues for inadequate rates of progression of minority ethnic colleagues into senior leadership, such as lack of experience and qualifications, can be effectively tackled with individually tailored continuous professional development.

Minority ethnic staff which metaphorically speaking 'sit at the same table' as ethnic majority school leaders might feel tokenised if viewed as experts in 'race issues' only, while at the same time their concerns around equity are not taken seriously or met with resistance and dismissal due to the presumably neutral hierarchy of school priorities. Additionally, they report being perceived as 'difficult' when they call out the racism or actively advocate for minority ethnic students they are put in charge of in pastoral and behaviour management roles. So, it is important to change the school climate in addition to increasing representation.

passing developmental milestones, but she hasn't progressed. She's Afro-Caribbean. Other colleagues who did exactly the same things as her, they did progress. Something needs to be done in that sense and I'm not quite sure whether leaders are listening or whether they are trying to understand how that feels."

3. Be willing to recognise and tackle ‘whiteness’ as a cultural norm in schools

What is the problem?

If schools send a message of the White, monolingual, middle-class teacher idea as the image of a quality teacher or a school leader, then the worldviews and lived experiences of minority ethnic teachers are easily sidelined. This can make their everyday professional experiences psychologically and emotionally wearing, leading to burnout, feelings of non-belonging and, ultimately, turnover and attrition. Some examples of documented behaviour due to racialised stress include hypervigilance, withdrawal from colleagues in school, self-censorship in school settings, internalisation of feelings of personal and professional weakness, and giving up goals for career advancement. It is sobering that examples of unease reported by minority ethnic teachers stem from research in urban schools with large minority ethnic intakes, where nevertheless the curriculum is often noted to lack the history, perspective and values of racially diverse students and their communities, and which tend to undervalue minority ethnic staff as their cultural assets in the education of students.

What did teachers say in our research?

“What was put in place for my training was different from others because I was the only Black person. It ranged from like, ‘We can’t understand you because you speak very fast’ to ‘Our students are very impatient. You need to learn how to adapt to their environment.’”

“For example, I use my hands a lot, it’s just a cultural thing, to some people that is threatening behaviour or aggressive behaviour, the typical, you know, aggressive Black person or woman, or emotional.”

Reflections on your practice

- What qualities appear to be most valued in a teacher or a senior leader in your school? Look across demographics such as race, ethnicity, gender, and their intersection. In what ways do these qualities include or exclude particular staff members?
- In what ways do you celebrate diversity in your school? Take an inventory of the ways you celebrate diversity through the physical, emotional, learning and socio-cultural environments.
- Reflect on your school’s curriculum. What and whose stories are centred? Whose stories are silenced?

Possibilities for action

Challenge your cultural response to minority ethnic staff

Whiteness as a set of cultural norms and practices is embedded in our perceptions of and affective responses to colleagues from non-dominant ethnic heritage. This includes body language, facial expression, tone and speed of voice, etc. It is commonly observed that a woman of colour who is assertive is read as 'angry', 'standoffish' or 'difficult to work with', while such behaviour is normalised as competent and authoritative in a White male leader. Consider also whether your response to a colleague or a candidate of colour in an interview situation is based on implicit cultural biases versus professional evidence, such as South Asian women as timid and therefore not suitable leaders, or Black women as natural care-givers who excel in relationship building but not intellectually 'able' enough to lead the school.

It is important to reiterate that there are cultural differences in ways of working and being. A deviation from behaviours associated with White, middle-class, monolingual norms should not be deemed as an indicator of lack of professionalism or career ambition. In the case of progression into senior roles, White teachers, as one school leader said, 'shout and scream about all their achievements and accomplishments', while minority ethnic staff might hold different cultural values in that respect. Therefore, it is important to ensure that potentially unheard voices are listened to, validated and amplified.

Concerns and experiences of school leaders in ASCL Ethnic Diversity Network

"I think there's also this really interesting notion that generally Asian women are quiet and timid and subservient, or when you find one that isn't, then I think people start using labels like, a 'bully', 'aggressive', and they would not use those same words if it was a White male, and that's concerning, isn't it?"

"Some staff are very modest and they don't come with shouting, 'I'm fantastic'. Possibly culturally [different] as well."

Practising cultural recognition and inclusivity to foster belonging

Less formalised parts of school life present additional opportunities to communicate diversity values and racial literacy. For example, when organising staff social events, think about a non-drinking group of staff who will not come to the pub, but would join in another social activity (e.g. a picnic in the park or a meal at a restaurant). Small adjustments will help minority ethnic teachers feel included, valued and that they belong to the school community.

It is crucial to understand that not being part of White majoritarian culture can, as one school leader said, ‘tap away at your confidence to own your space’. Therefore, building your awareness of and acknowledging different strengths and knowledges of ethnically diverse staff members, not based on mainstream Eurocentric culture, will help dispel assumptions around the cultural deficit of minoritised communities.

“Many people from ethnic minority, and I’ll include myself – I don’t go to pubs, and I don’t really like football – so it almost becomes a divide of can I engage in this conversation with these people?”

“It would be very easy for someone from a background who doesn’t listen to Classic FM to feel intimidated in a discussion where people are talking about that, and not to think, ‘Actually, I know loads about [other things] and these people don’t.’”

Resources

For more support and to continue the conversation

The challenges faced by teachers and school leaders from minority ethnic backgrounds are certainly significantly different to those of their White colleagues. Grassroots organisations and individuals have decided to try to address the issues and are making a difference by supporting aspiring leaders from minority ethnic backgrounds either through mentoring, coaching, application writing or just offering a safe space to talk. If there is going to be levelling up in the UK, we would suggest it includes improving the diversity of leadership at all levels in all schools.

ASCL Ethnic Diversity Network - @ascluk

BAMEed - @BAMEedNetwork

Diverse Educators - @DiverseEd2020

Mindfulequity - @mindfulequityuk

Aspiring Heads - @AspiringHeads

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