

RACE RELATIONS ACT 2000 – MONITORING OF INCIDENTS IN SCHOOLS

Report By: MANAGER OF PUPIL, SCHOOL AND PARENT SUPPORT

Wards Affected

Countywide.

Purpose

1. To consider the Council's implementation of the requirement to monitor all incidents of racial harassment in the County's maintained schools.

Financial Implications

2. None.

Report

3. Race Relations legislation imposes a general duty on local authorities, in carrying out their functions, to have regard to the need to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups. A more specific duty is placed on schools to prepare and publish a race equality policy. Schools must monitor and assess how their policies affect ethnic minority pupils, staff and parents.

Prevention

4. The Herefordshire Education Service, with advice and support from the Council's Race Equality Officer and relevant local groups, has given considerable attention to strategies for reducing the possibility that racist attitudes and incidents will occur within schools. It is an important part of the Council's work not least because the relatively small though growing number of pupils in Herefordshire schools who have minority ethnic origins (see the line graph attached to this report) which means that pupils only have very limited work and social experience of the diversity they will meet in other parts of Britain.
5. A key part of the strategy, which was a major focus of the seminar for Councillors on 26th March, is a programme of Education for schools to use with their students. One element of that comprises the curriculum approved and recommended by the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE), whose recommended syllabus was approved in September 2001. The scheme approved by SACRE focuses on religious beliefs in all their dimensions, with an underpinning emphasis on tolerance and understanding.

6. In addition, other curriculum materials and support have been provided in a variety of ways – notably including the document that accompanied the Anne Frank Exhibition in the Cathedral in the Autumn of 2003 and the recently purchased video produced by Leicestershire, dealing, in dramatised form, with racial harassment. *Appendix 1* to this report outlines the key features of the Herefordshire Educational Services Strategy for preventing (and dealing with) racial intolerance and harassing behaviour.
7. The overall approach to minority ethnic issues in the County's schools is outlined from page 10 in the document, *Inclusive Education in Herefordshire: Diversity in Action* (Appendix 1). That document places all the work done within the Education Service within the broader context of other minority groups. In effect, this document is the Equality Policy for the Education Service.

Monitoring of racist incidents

8. Herefordshire Council is monitoring incidents of racial harassment in maintained school. An extensive consultation was held with all schools in the County in the spring of 2002, based on a document: "*Dealing with Racial Harassment; Guidance for schools*" (abstract at *Appendix 2*). The document outlined the requirements on all schools under the Act and in response to the recommendations of the Macpherson Report, which followed the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry. The document also emphasised that the work of schools and the Local Education Authority in these areas would be a key focus of the regular Ofsted Inspections. Ofsted would be looking in particular at the systems in place for monitoring and dealing with racial harassment. A summary of Ofsted judgements in the last year in Herefordshire schools in this general area of work is attached at *Appendix 3*.
9. The Education Directorate works closely with the Council's Race Equality Development Officer and the Police. There is an excellent flow of information between the Race Equality Officer and relevant staff within the Education Directorate. One example of this, following a visit to a family by the Race Equality Officer, highlighted problems at a particular high school. A joint visit to the Headteacher by the Race Equality Officer and an Education Service Officer led to improvements at the school and a jointly provided training session for staff. Other planned preventative activities include 'guest spots' at staff meetings and presentations to pupils through assemblies. Much strategic work is jointly carried out with the Council's Race Equality Officer in addition to specific pieces of day-to-day work. The Police are similarly interested in taking a more pro-active and greater preventative role in schools and a programme of support work is being developed jointly.
10. The system under which schools report relevant incidents to the Education Directorate was introduced during the summer term 2002. Initially, no reports were received, largely because schools were judging most of the potential incidents as being no more than examples of the normal type of interaction that can occur among any group of children and young people, and were therefore not regarding them as falling within the category. However, the definition of harassment is very broad. Harassment occurs where, on grounds of race or ethnic or national origins, a person engages in unwanted conduct which violates another person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

11. The developing understanding within schools of the reporting requirement has caused the level of reporting to increase as follows –

April 2002 to July 2002	Nil
September 2002 to August 2003	9
September 2003 to March 2004	15

12. It needs to be emphasised that this rise in the number of incidents reported is judged not to be a sign of an increasing number of incidents, but a greater recognition of the importance of reporting, and an acknowledgement of the broad definition that has to be applied.
13. Work is continuing on improving the reporting of relevant incidents. In particular, a new system will be introduced during the summer term 2004. Under the new arrangements, all schools will be required to send in a report each term, even if there have been no incidents in the relevant period, i.e. nil returns will be required. The return will also contain a reminder of the breadth of the definition, so that incidents within the definition are not treated as general incidents of conflict between pupils.
14. Further monitoring of incidents notified by schools will be included, as a separate item, in the future regular monitoring reports to this Committee dealing with complaints received about Education services provided by the Council.

Dealing with the reports of racial harassment

15. All reports of incidents sent to the Education Directorate by schools are read immediately they are received. The action then taken varies, depending on the level of seriousness of the judgement made about whether or not the incident contains an element of inter-racial intolerance. The possible range of key responses, in ascending levels of intervention, are –
- (i) no LEA action required, though the relevant racial harassment form will be filed;
 - (ii) telephone conversation with the school exploring the nature of the incident;
 - (iii) a meeting with the Headteacher and/or other relevant staff to consider evidence in more detail;
 - (iv) carrying out a fuller, independent investigation at the school, including discussions where necessary with relevant parents;
 - (v) if appropriate, additional support will be given, including staff training offered to the school;
 - (vi) involvement of the police or other relevant external organisations (for example, the West Midlands Consortium Education Service for Travelling Children may be asked to assist if an incident involves Travellers with whom the service are in contact), including, possibly, individuals representing particular ethnic groups.
16. Work with schools will be developed further through an externally funded half time post of Education Race Equality Officer. The person to be appointed will work closely with schools in order to assist them to develop their strategies. The new person will also work closely with other officers in the Education Directorate, and with the County's Race Equality Officer, to develop broader strategies for assisting the work with schools.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee consider the actions taken within the Herefordshire Education Service to monitor and deal effectively with issues of racial harassment, and identify areas in which further development or action is required.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None identified.