

Empower parents to play an active role in their child's education

Aim: To ensure there are positive relationships between staff and Black Caribbean parents as a basis for addressing disproportionality, developing anti-racist education, and ensuring pupils achieve their full potential.

Positive engagement with Black Caribbean parents is an essential part of developing anti-racist education and leadership in our schools and settings.

Historically, Black Caribbean parents have been ill-served by the education system. In 1960s and 70s Britain, hundreds of black children were labelled as "educationally subnormal", and wrongly sent to schools for pupils who were deemed to have low intelligence. In response, Black communities in the UK came together to create 'supplementary schools' as a way of fighting back against the racism and inequality that their children were facing in mainstream schooling.

Today many, although certainly not all, Black Caribbean parents still feel that the education does not support their children to achieve their full potential and many of the statistics included in Ealing Race Equality Commission report would support this view.

However, despite this there has still been a history of pro-active engagement by Black Caribbean families in endeavours, alongside, and also independently of, local authorities and schools, in order to improve the educational experiences and outcomes for their children.

For example, the involvement of the Black community in Ealing in the monitoring of Section 11 funded provision, the co-production of the blue handbook: 'Preventing and Addressing Racism in Schools' (2003) and the partnership with the Black community in the Ealing Diane Abbott conference 'Ealing Schools and the Black Child' and the follow-up conference with Professor Gus John (2004).

It is against this back drop that school leaders will be seeking to start the process of engaging positively with their Black Caribbean parents. There are two key aspects to this:

- Relationship building to engender trust
- Pro-actively seeking, listening to and acting upon the views of Black Caribbean parents

Below are some suggestions as to how school leaders can start this process.

Relationship building

- Review the quality and type of interactions between staff and parents, for example, in the playground. How could this be enhanced further?
- What actions might be taken to positively and genuinely engage with those parents who are consistently on the periphery?
- What steps might be taken to change the narrative from 'hard-to-reach' parents to consider how the school or setting is going to maximise all opportunities to extend outwards to connect with individual/groups of parents?
- Support staff so that they can actively 'listen to seek understanding' (rather than to immediately respond) when communicating with your Black Caribbean parents
- Each staff member (senior leaders, middle leaders, class teachers, Support Staff, SMSAs, Office Staff) to identify those Black Caribbean parents with whom:
 - They have an existing respectful, positive relationship
 - They have a relationship that could be strengthened further. How might this be achieved?
- Consider how genuine, meaningful, and positive relationships with your Black Caribbean parents are going to be actively developed and invested in? Consider those individuals who may have previously felt invisible or overlooked, within your school or setting.

Pro-active seeking of parent views

The entrenched nature of the attainment gap for Black Caribbean pupils is an indication that we need to do something different to bring about positive change. Schools should invest in developing relationships with parents and seek to set up processes where the views of Black Caribbean parents are genuinely sought and acted upon, over the long term. Some considerations for embarking on this journey are below:

- Actively seek feedback from as many of your Black Caribbean parents as possible.
- Whilst doing so, ensure that the views of individuals who do not usually contribute are captured too. Consider the person best placed within school to make contact to gather these views
- Remain mindful that some Black Caribbean parents might not provide open and honest feedback for fear of the potential repercussions for their child – which then impedes the accuracy of the school or settings self-evaluation outcomes
- Conversely, some schools or settings might be taken aback by the type and extent of the feedback received - particularly from those Black Caribbean parents who may have felt 'silenced' previously (not necessarily by the school/setting); and that the recent shift in the public perception and awareness may now empower the provision of more open, honest and sometimes, uncomfortable feedback
- A Toolkit called '[Open, honest and uncomfortable conversations about race](#)' has been developed which may be helpful when planning your engagement with Black Caribbean parents. It can be used:
 - Proactively – for example, by initiating meetings with Black Caribbean parents to receive their individual or collective feedback; to foster the climate, and establish ways to work closely together in partnership
 - Reactively – in response to any unexpected feedback received whether individually or collectively (e.g. as an outcome of the self-evaluation processes, or via any other means).
- ELP is also developing training for schools around setting up parent forums and building positive relationships with parents which will be available in the next academic year.

Concerns about 'Saying or Doing the Wrong Thing'

Staff may have concerns about 'saying or doing the wrong thing' when engaging and building relationships with their Black Caribbean parents and it may be helpful to reflect on the following prior to contacting parents:

- Am I clear about my reasons, motivations, and intentions for wishing to meet and communicate with our Black Caribbean parents?
- Am I only initiating communication because our school needs information from our Black Caribbean parents?
- On a day-to-day basis, do staff normally acknowledge the presence of Black Caribbean parents genuinely, warmly, and respectfully?
- Do I believe in what I am saying and communicating?
- How can I maintain my curious and growth mindset throughout the communication process?

It is important that any communication with Black Caribbean parents is carried out with sincerity, respect, humility, and authenticity. It is highly likely that Black Caribbean parents will detect / perceive if the communication it is merely a tick-box exercise.

It is important to communicate as an 'equal' participant, who is open to engaging in a shared learning experience during the process, as opposed to the stance of being 'the expert'.

It may be helpful for school leaders to acknowledge and openly declare the fact that:

"We appreciate that we may not have always got things right in the past and, we acknowledge that moving forward, we may not always say or do the right thing. However, we're willing and keen to receive feedback, and to continuously learn and improve throughout the process"

Further resources

- [Black Caribbean Parents' Forum's Feedback to Schools \(June 2020\) – Feedback from Black Caribbean Parents' Forum Steering Group | Ealing Grid for Learning \(egfl.org.uk\)](#);
- [Ealing Young People's Voices Podcast re: egfl.org.uk/blm](#) (with titles and timings of each section) or <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1O2d1Zoj9ZdkUPR6xZFDwfvapyZ9Uxc9x?usp=sharing>. Discussions relating to 'Does racism still exist in Britain?' and 'Experiences of Racism in Education'

Websites

- [Ealing Black Caribbean Parents Forum Black Caribbean Parents Forum](#)
- [Parents Action and Resource Centre PARC](#)
- [Community Empowerment Network CEN](#)

Related content

[Race equality guidance - seven education priorities](#)

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