

Evidence to the Sheffield Race Equality Commission

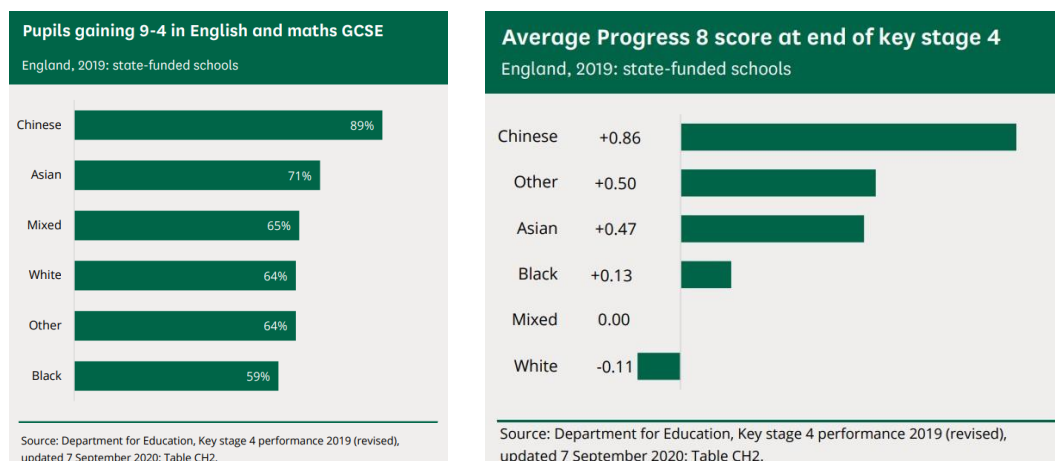
May 2021

A Report by Learn Sheffield, on behalf of all
schools in Sheffield
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What does the research and data tell us?

Reports published by the Department of Education provide a base for understanding the educational achievement of BAME groups in comparison to their peers. Early studies by Stokes et al¹ and Strand² in 2015 found gaps in educational achievement have narrowed over the last 20 years, and show a greater improvement for BAME groups than that of White British pupils. These gaps are evident from an early age and vary by ethnic group: Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black pupils all made gains albeit in different ways, i.e. progress made and absolute attainment. The increased achievement was attributed to parental, family and student factors with schools playing a relatively small part in comparison

A more recent report by Roberts and Bolton³ in 2020 found that at 16, Black pupils had the lowest incidence of achieving a 9-4 pass in English and mathematics of any ethnic group. This data also noted that Black African pupils significantly outperforming Black Caribbean pupils, which underlines the risk of reaching conclusions about broad groups (including BAME pupils as a whole) which may overlook significant variance or detail.



The paradox of better than average progress resulting in lower than average attainment is illustrated in a report from the Department for Education⁴ (2020). Table 5 of this document shows (as cited by Roberts and Bolton) a positive Progress 8 score for Black pupils (+0.13) and yet a lower than average Attainment 8 score (Attainment 8 is another accountability measure used by the Department for Education):

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/439861/RR439A-Ethnic_minorities_and_attainment_the_effects_of_poverty.pdf

²https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/439867/RR439B-Ethnic_minorities_and_attainment_the_effects_of_poverty_annex.pdf.pdf

³<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9023/CBP-9023.pdf>

⁴https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/863815/2019_KS4_revised_text.pdf

Table 5: Attainment by ethnicity, England, 2019(state funded schools)

	White	Mixed	Asian	Black	Chinese
End of key stage 4 cohort					
2018	396,680	24,646	55,737	28,949	1,875
2019	406,708	27,018	58,111	31,175	2,006
Progress 8²²					
2018	-0.10 (-0.11 to -0.10)	-0.02 (-0.03 to 0.00)	0.45 (0.44 to 0.46)	0.12 (0.11 to 0.14)	1.03 (0.97 to 1.09)
2019	-0.11 (-0.12 to -0.11)	0.00 (-0.02 to 0.01)	0.47 (0.45 to 0.48)	0.13 (0.12 to 0.15)	0.86 (0.80 to 0.92)
EBacc entry					
2018	36.0%	41.8%	48.5%	45.0%	63.6%
2019	37.5%	44.3%	50.6%	46.5%	61.6%
Achieving English and mathematics (at grades 9-5)					
2018	42.6%	43.7%	50.2%	38.8%	75.3%
2019	42.4%	43.8%	51.9%	37.8%	76.3%
Attainment 8					
2018	46.1	47.3	50.4	45.0	64.2
2019	46.1	47.6	51.2	44.9	64.3
EBacc average point score					
2018	3.98	4.14	4.48	3.93	6.01
2019	4.00	4.19	4.57	3.94	5.99

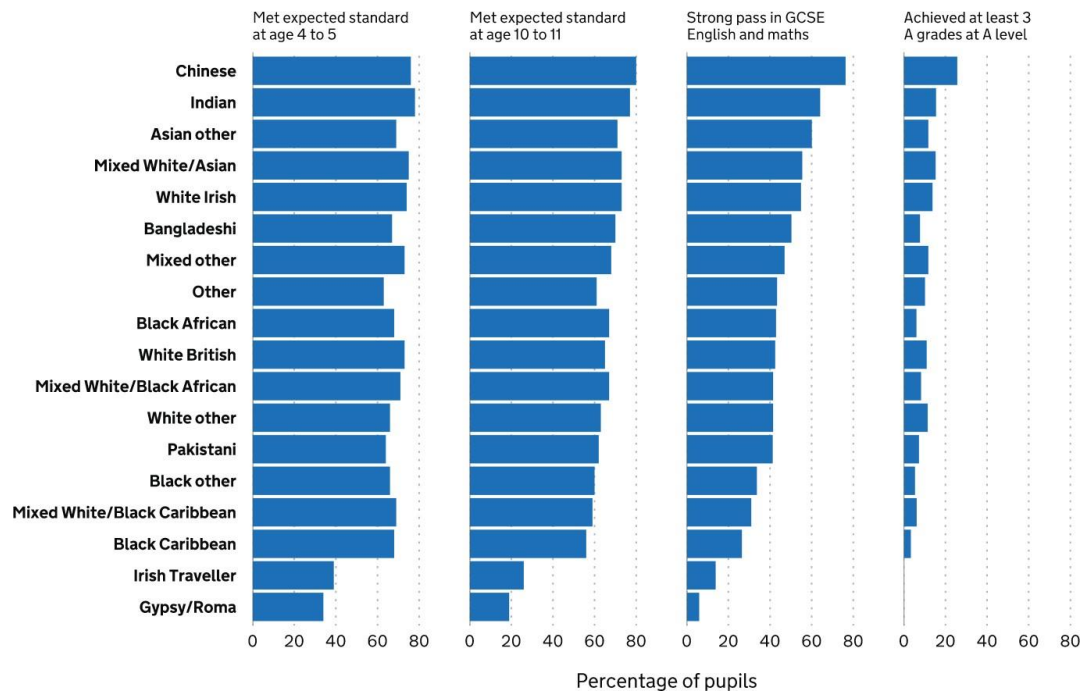
Source: Key stage 4 attainment data

The most important and relevant research on the area of racism in schools is the Education and Training report⁵ from the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (2021). The report highlights the gains made in educational achievement by ethnic groups but concludes:

“The picture of educational achievement across ethnic groups is complex, and different social, economic and cultural factors contribute to this: parental income levels, parental career and educational achievement, geography, family structure, and attitudes towards education within the family and wider community”

The report shows complex educational journey of 18 ethnic groups based on the most recent data available. The table below shows percentage of pupils attaining the expected or accepted goals in the early years, at the end of primary school, GCSEs and A levels.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-report-of-the-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities/education-and-training>



This highlights the fact that all ethnic groups are not equally disadvantaged by the education system. Some, such as Chinese or Indian fare well in almost all areas and others such as Gypsy/Roma perform poorly at all stages of education. Other groups such as Black Caribbean show worsening performance through their time at school. It also highlights disparities within the broad ethnic groups, e.g. the performance of Black African vs Black Caribbean.

Not all groups are succeeding; the reasons for this are many and varied and are tied to the pattern of immigration into the country. For example, those from a Black African heritage tend to be more recent immigrants than those of Black Caribbean heritage, and the ‘immigrant paradigm’ (as referenced by Strand⁶ in the Commission’s report) comes into play:

“The ‘immigrant paradigm’ (Kao and Thompson, 2003) suggests that recent immigrants devote themselves more to education than the native population because they lack financial capital and see education as a way out of poverty”

Other factors that might explain differences between different ethnic groups include the areas into which immigrant groups moved into, the socio-economic status in their home country, and levels of aspiration. The Commission’s report goes on to say:

“It is very difficult to judge on a national level the extent to which racism could be a determining factor in educational outcomes amongst ethnic minority groups. However, the fact that ethnic groups within the same system can have quite divergent educational outcomes, and that even within the major ethnic groups there are quite distinct trends, suggests that other factors may be more influential. Indeed, if there is racial bias within schools or the teaching profession, it has limited effect and other factors such as family structure, cultural aspirations and geography may offset this disadvantage.”

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-report-of-the-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities-supporting-research/ethnic-socio-economic-and-sex-inequalities-in-educational-achievement-at-age-16-by-professor-steve-strand>

This leads onto the impact of socio-economic status on educational achievement; those from a disadvantaged background have always performed poorly compared to their peers. Large regional variations exacerbate this inequality. Whilst the achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers has reduced steadily, it has not been reducing quickly enough and is thought to have reversed during the coronavirus pandemic. The Education Endowment Foundation⁷ estimates that the disadvantaged gap could have widened by as much as 75% in this period.

Forty percent of the attainment gaps present for disadvantaged pupils aged 16 emerged at the age of 5. These gaps form early on and continue throughout the course of a child's life. The Commission's report highlights three key themes that underlie this: family, geography and poverty. Research by Strand analysed family income, parental educational level and parental occupation status and mapped this against outcomes. This shows some stark differences, e.g. 35% of children whose parents had no qualifications gained a strong pass in GCSE English and mathematics, whilst for those whose parents were educated to a degree-level standard the figure was 73.5%. This disparity is far greater than any linked to ethnicity.

Of course, much research has focused primarily on the educational outcomes of BAME pupils. A report⁸ by The Runnymede think tank in 2020 advocated considering education as a wider enterprise and suggests radical change including the reform of:

- The teaching workforce, so that it is more representative of society and is more 'racially literate' (defined as 'the capacity of teachers to understand the ways in which race and racism work in society, and to have the skills, knowledge and confidence to implement that understanding in teaching practice')
- The national curriculum and associated examinations so that it reflects the diversity of society and promotes anti-racism
- Policies in schools so that they are aligned to a holistic anti-racist approach

Clearly, many factors impact the performance of ethnic groups. These are largely societal and historical. Stokes et al. states:

"The evidence suggests that the relative contribution of schools is smaller than that of parental, family and student factors. However, school interventions may be easier to deliver than those which are targeted at the home."

Schools have an important part to play in tackling inequality, promoting understanding of different cultures, groups and regions, and in delivering a relevant and meaningful curriculum. They are not, in themselves, the sole solution to addressing racism and racial equality in society. The Commission's report is clear on the need to improve the 'core offer':

"If some categories of children persistently underachieve, the biggest element of the solution is likely to be improving the school's core offering so that all children can do well, rather than simply applying interventions to certain children or groups of children, however they may be defined."

⁷ [https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/EEF_\(2020\)_-_Impact_of_School_Closures_on_the_Attainment_Gap.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/EEF_(2020)_-_Impact_of_School_Closures_on_the_Attainment_Gap.pdf)

⁸ <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/Runnymede%20Secondary%20Schools%20report%20FINAL.pdf>

Institutional approaches to related race equality duties and frameworks

All schools are required to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

The current inspection framework helps to frame the key elements of the duty in that it explores themes of discrimination, harassment, victimisation, removing disadvantage and promoting equality. The importance of social, moral, spiritual and cultural (SMSC) education permeates through the entire framework. More recently, promoting British values (democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs, and for those without faith) has been made explicit within the framework.

An update from Ofsted⁹ on 4 May 2021 makes clear the focus on the PSED will become more explicit still. It states:

“We will continue to focus our summer 2021 activity on all children, young people and learners. This includes those who share protected characteristics and those who live in households with people who share relevant protected characteristics.”

And:

“We have considered how the return to routine inspection and summer activity 2021 could have an impact on individuals or groups of people who share protected characteristics. Our intention is to ensure that the return to routine inspection plays its part in advancing equality, diversity and inclusion.”

Ofsted is mindful of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the most vulnerable children and recognises that many of these may have a protected characteristic or have family members with a protected characteristic. Inspections or visits to local authorities by Ofsted will help to ensure that decisions made are in the best interests of children in the context of the pandemic.

Central to Ofsted’s 2017-2022 strategy is for the inspectorate to be ‘a force for improvement through intelligent, responsible and focused inspection and regulation’. History tells us that changes at Ofsted can have a profound impact on the running of schools. There is little doubt that this new focus on the PSED will cause schools to revisit, refocus and refine their approach to equality.

That said, we must not be complacent to think that improved policies will automatically lead to a fundamental change in culture; the quality of implementation is vital. There are examples of excellent practice within the city, with BAME pupils outperforming their peers in terms of both progress and attainment, but this is not universal. It is vital that all schools and their governors understand fully their statutory duties and that this underpins their core offer.

The new emphasis on PSED from Ofsted will serve to support this agenda, but there is a risk that this is viewed as another measure on which schools will be judged. Schools have had to deal with a raft of changes and challenges in the last five years: the introduction of new performance measures such as Progress 8, reform of GCSE qualifications, a new inspection framework, the associated focus on curriculum intent, implementation and impact, and of course the pandemic.

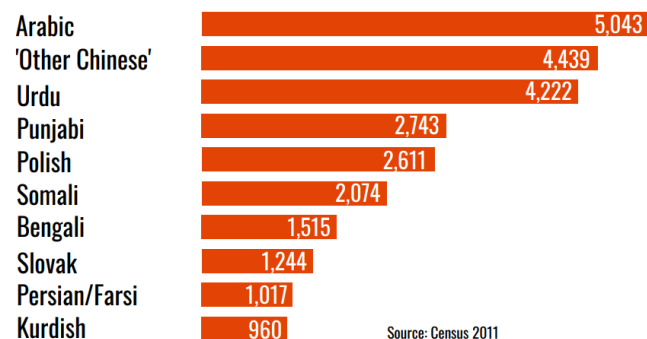
⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsteds-phased-return-to-inspection/ofsteds-phased-return-to-inspection>

The Sheffield context?

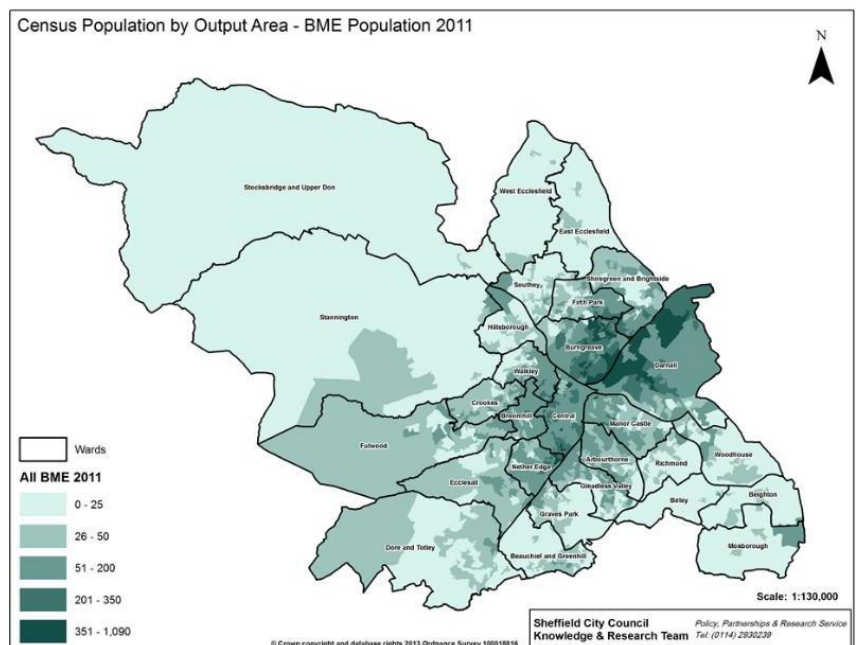
Sheffield is a large and multicultural city. Information¹⁰ from the 2011 census shows Sheffield has the 4th largest Core City BAME population after Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds. Nationally, Sheffield's BAME population ranks as the 29th largest, on a par with Islington and Coventry. 14.2% of Sheffield's households are classed as BAME and 88% of Sheffield's residents were born in the UK.

In terms of ethnic groups the last census showed 19.2% of Sheffield's population was of black or minority ethnic origin. The Pakistani community remains the largest minority ethnic group (4%) and the Other White group is the second largest. The Black African group is now the third largest, having increased by two and a half times since 2001, and includes the Somali community. The Arab, Chinese, Indian and Other Asian groups have also doubled in the last ten years. More recently, Sheffield has seen an increase in the number economic migrants from European Union ascension states. This is reflected in the main languages spoken in the city:

10 most common main languages, other than English, spoken in Sheffield:



Like many cities, the distribution of ethnic groups across the city is not even, with high populations located in the centre, east and north-east of the city. Citywide, more than 88% of Sheffield residents were born in the UK. In Stocksbridge and Upper Don (located in northwest Sheffield) only 2% of residents were born outside of the UK, compared with 44% in the central ward. We are mindful that greater analysis is required of which specific ethnic groups reside where in the city. The map below demonstrates the spread of ethnic groups (as a collective) across Sheffield as per the 2011 census.

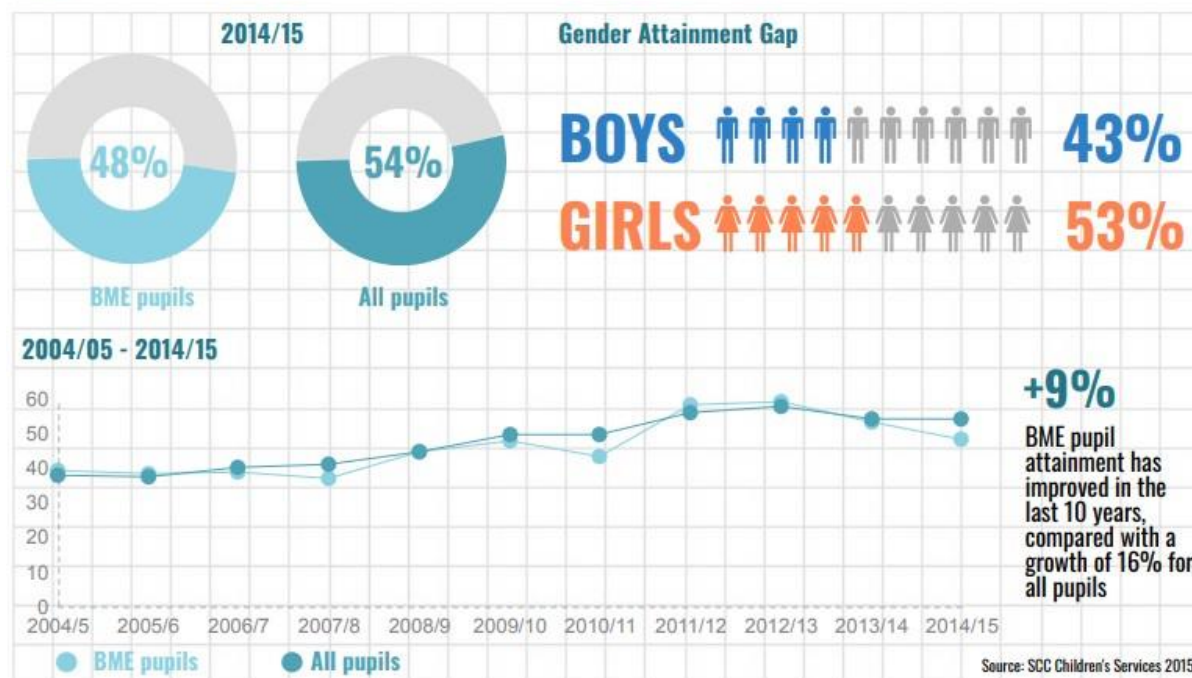


¹⁰ <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/your-city-council/population-in-sheffield>

Analysis of outcomes of the BAME group as a whole shows improvement over time.

GCSE ATTAINMENT

Proportion of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs at A* - C including maths and English



In 2016, accountability measures for schools changed to the Progress 8 measure and so comparisons with previous years are not possible. The disruption to examinations caused by the coronavirus pandemic means the most recent data set relates to the 2018/19 academic year. In Sheffield this data shows:

- At the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) 63.8% of BAME pupils achieved a good level of development, compared to 74.1% of White British, and 54.1% of disadvantaged pupils
- At the end of key stage 1, 71.8% of BAME pupils achieved the expected standard, compared to 80.4% of White British pupils, and 65.1% of disadvantaged pupils
- By the end of primary school, in terms of progress measures, BAME outperform their peers in reading, writing and mathematics (2019 data shows a dip). 56.5% of BAME pupils achieved the expected standard in (combined) reading, writing and mathematics, compared to 66.6% of White British pupils and 49% of disadvantaged pupils
- At the end of secondary school, BAME pupils outperformed White British pupils as measured by the Progress 8 measure (0.11 vs -0.11 respectively). The Progress 8 score for disadvantaged pupils and those with special education needs (SEN) were -0.48. and -0.71 respectively
- In terms of attainment, 33% of the BAME cohort achieved a strong pass in English and mathematics, compared to 41% of White British.

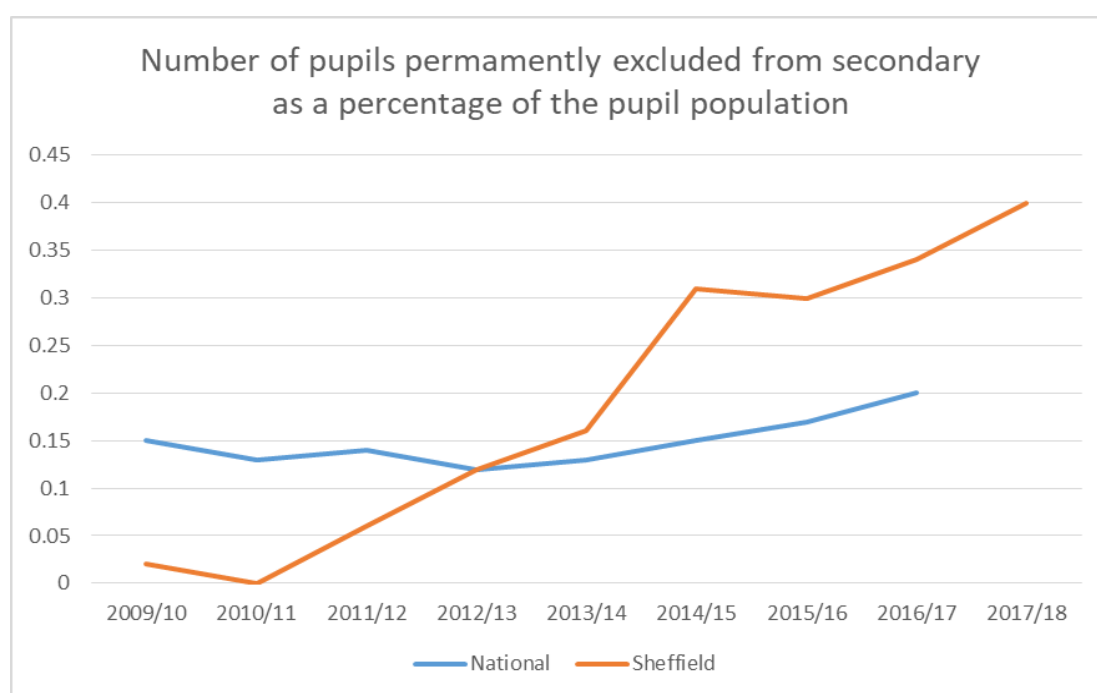
Analysis of the data for the BAME group shows the gaps in attainment at all phases of education in the city lag behind the national averages. This highlights the need for us to better understand the performance of individual ethnic groups rather than considering the BAME group as a whole and to have due regard to both attainment and progress.

The data shows a disparity between progress measures and attainment. In secondary schools in particular, the key accountability is now Progress 8 (this is a national trend and not one related to Sheffield). Whilst progress is a valuable measure, it is attainment that provides the ‘economic currency’ that allows pupils to progress on to the next step of their education and employment. This in turn impacts on potential future earnings and is hence linked to future socio-economic status.

On attendance, more detailed information is available. For the 2018/19 academic year:

- At primary school, the absence rate for BAME pupils was greater than the national (4.5% vs 4.1%) and lags behind that of their peers.
- At secondary school, the absence rate for BAME pupils was 6% compared to 5.6% of other pupils. The attendance of Black pupils (of all subgroups) is better than the national average for this group.

The incidence of permanent exclusions and fixed-term exclusions in Sheffield has historically been higher than the national average. A piece of research into exclusions was carried out by Learn Sheffield in 2018. It analysed national and local data from 2009/10 to 2017/18.

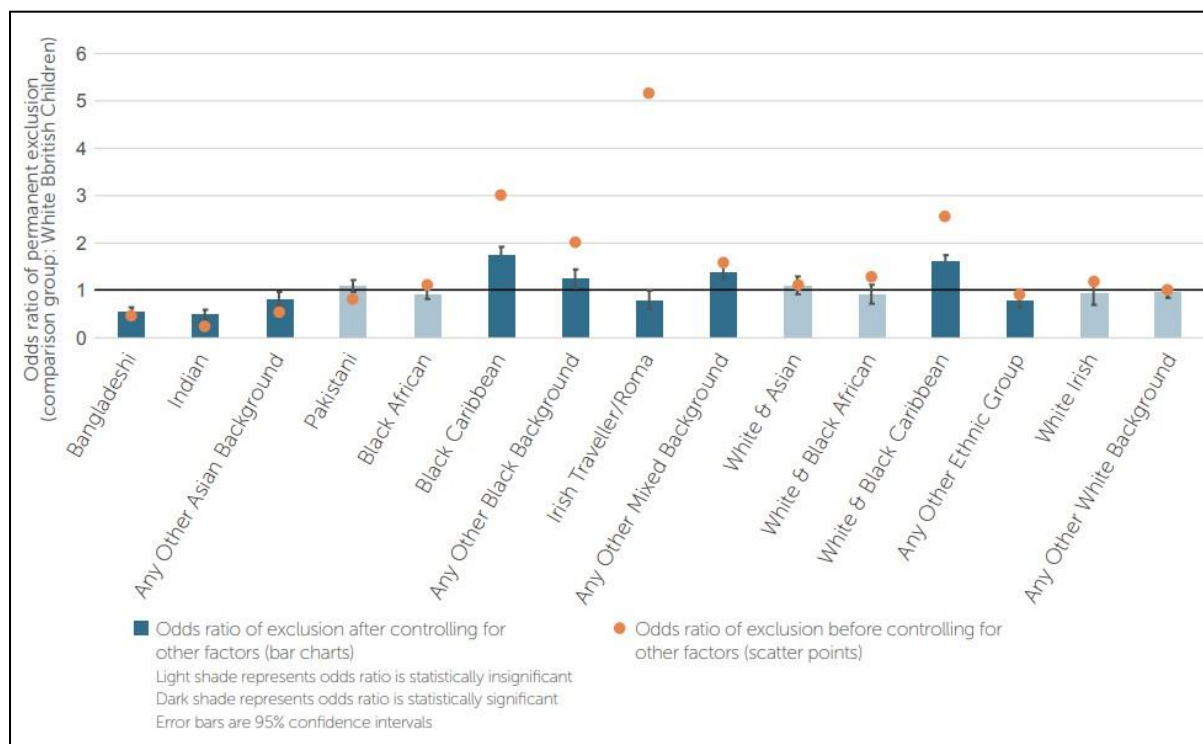


The report states:

“In Sheffield, historical data shows the highest predictive factor to be those with three of more fixed term exclusions in the two years preceding permanent exclusions; these pupils were nearly forty times as likely to be permanently excluded. Those with attendance at or below 90% were seven times more likely to face permanent exclusion. Those from the Roma community were three times as likely to be permanently excluded.”

More recent data indicates that the issue of Roma exclusions remains a key issue for the city. Data for 2018/19 from the Department for Education shows the Gypsy/Roma group accounted for the highest exclusion rate of any ethnic group.

The Timpson Review¹¹ into school exclusions published in 2019 carried out further analysis into the area of race and ethnicity. They calculated the ‘odds ratio’ of exclusion for different ethnic groups, i.e. how much more likely they were to be excluded when compared to their White British peers:



The report goes on to state:

“...the approximate chances of permanent exclusion for Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller children compared with their White British peers – once controls are applied for poverty, SEN, absence and other factors – drops from 5.2 to 0.8. This is not to say we should not be concerned about the higher rates of exclusion for children who are from Gypsy, Roma or Travellers of Irish heritage, and we know any group of children who have multiple factors are particularly likely to be excluded, as shown in the example of Rachel and Nathan. However, it does suggest the causes – and therefore the action that should be taken – are complex and wider than just focused on ethnicity. This more detailed insight should help better inform any efforts to address these issues across a local area.”

In Sheffield, permanent exclusions of the Roma group accounted for 3.36% of all exclusions and represents 22 pupils. Nationally, this Gypsy/Roma made up 1.08% of all permanent exclusions. A more crucial point for the city is that of the 90 Gypsy/Roma pupils permanently excluded nationally in that year, just under one quarter were in Sheffield. Many of these can be linked to one incident in one school, but the fact remains that reducing the rate of exclusions for this ethnic group is an urgent priority for Sheffield.

The same data shows that White British remain the most excluded group. However, they account for 47% of the total (Sheffield is 81% White British). More than 70% of exclusions were for those eligible for free school meals; disadvantage means a greater likelihood of exclusion.

¹¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807862/Timpson_review.pdf

The Timpson Review found no evidence of systematic or institutional racism and acknowledges the complex factors underlying exclusion:

“The review has sought to explore what drives these differences, and the evidence gathered for this review indicates a range of interwoven, local factors that give rise to these differences. As well as the differences in the size of different pupil populations across the country, where exclusion rates are higher for some groups of children there will be a range of reasons. Some are in-school factors (policy and practice in schools and the wider education system) while others are out-of-school factors, both those related to place such as high levels of poverty, and those related to the child and family’s individual circumstances, such as the impact of trauma in early life.”

“Both the literature review and others who spoke to this review highlighted how wider factors other than ethnicity may also drive these differences. Children may have a number of overlapping vulnerabilities such as poverty, SEN, unsafe family environments and poor mental health, which could all act as a multiplier effect and contribute to higher rates of exclusion”

The report from the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities further supports this:

“...the Commission believes the causes for ethnic disparities in the rates of exclusions and suspensions are complex and multifaceted, and cannot be reduced to structural racism and individual teacher bias. Data shows, for example, exclusion rates are a much bigger challenge for Black Caribbean pupils than Black African pupils: in 2018/19 Black Caribbean pupils had a permanent exclusion rate of 25 in 10,000, compared 7 in 10,000 for Black African pupils.”

The data for Sheffield reflects the research findings and highlights the need for further investigation into the underlying reasons behind exclusion. Family, geography and poverty and other factors play an important role and the problem in Sheffield is further complicated by the nature of the migration. Many of the newcomers into the city are from abroad, and the rapid integration into the education system is a challenge, especially when English is an additional language.

Progress has been made in the achievement of pupils, but it is clear that there is still work to do on eradicating the inequality in provision and inclusion for some ethnic groups. As a sector, we recognise this. Further analysis is required to better understand the performance and underlying reasons for exclusion of individual ethnic groups and to ascertain the overlap between disadvantage (and SEN) and different ethnic groups.

The data shows the biggest inequality is between those from a disadvantaged background and their peers. Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector (HMCI) contributed to the Commission:

“Evidence presented from schools inspector Ofsted emphasised that with very few exceptions, good education for one kind of child is exactly the same as good education for another, irrespective of their sex, ethnicity, religion or other characteristics. Good curriculum, good teaching, good behaviour, good pastoral support, strong school culture, and high aspirations matter for all children.”

The proportion of good or better schools in Sheffield has improved over recent years. At the time when inspections were paused due to the pandemic, the proportion (85.7%) of good or better schools in the city was close to the national. There is, however, geographical variation across the city.

As a city, we now need to revisit how the notion of how we can collectively improve the core offer. This will require strong system leadership, with schools and multi-academy trusts working collaboratively for benefit of all schools. To be clear, focussing on improving the quality of provision for all does not mean simply continuing with previous practice; this is not about doing nothing. Instead this is about all parts of the sector working together to improve the quality of provision across the city in order to address the inequality faced by some cohorts of children.

Tackling inequality in Sheffield – potential solutions

A Cultural Curriculum

The report on education and impact from Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities captures the need for a different approach to the curriculum:

“It is widely accepted that the school curriculum and the way it presents the historic past can be central to creating a sense of belonging amongst pupils and a belief they can contribute in the future. When those from different ethnic and social class backgrounds can see, hear and read about their heritage, and the contribution their forefathers and mothers have made to this country through the ages, they can identify themselves as a part of British history. This is not about teaching the personal history of each individual but rather linking the story of different ethnic groups to a unifying sense of Britishness.”

“A well-sequenced, knowledge-rich curriculum, based around subject disciplines, can help students to acquire a sense of place and a framework for understanding cultural diversity. The national curriculum seeks to reflect this multi-layered story and is the product of years of dialogue and research, but not every school is able to deliver it in the way that is proposed. We heard that many schools and teachers do not have the knowledge or confidence to teach the kind of history suitable for a multi-ethnic UK and need additional support to do so. There is a clear need for better, high quality resources that teachers can use and trust.”

The curriculum in schools sets out the knowledge, skills and understanding that we wish our pupils to have at the end of a particular phase of education. It is not confined to the classroom, many of the most valuable skills they will learn are interpersonal, and the curriculum shapes attitudes.

We need to review the curriculum that we deliver so that it is more engaging for more of our pupils. It needs to celebrate contributions to knowledge from all cultures and this, to a degree, is irrespective of race. We need to create a balance between national and global identity. This is not about necessarily eradicating or eliminating elements of the curriculum relating to Britain’s colonial past for example, but instead about reframing them and understanding how that past has helped to shape the present (and the future).

We also need to consider how themes of equality, identity and ‘British’ values can truly permeate all areas of the curriculum so that we have a more integrated and fair society. We need to do this in way where by it is not an addition to a lesson or the school calendar, but instead something that underpins all that we do.

Wholesale curriculum reform will require change at a national level, i.e. to the national curriculum and the qualifications framework. Furthermore, any future curriculum needs to utilise modern technologies so that it is dynamic and able to respond quickly to global events and priorities. For example, consider the Black Lives Matters movement or the coronavirus pandemic – when will our National Curriculum reference these?

Professional Development

We recognise that the subject knowledge of our workforce will be crucial if the curriculum is to be developed successfully. Learn Sheffield funded a Racial Equity Programme¹² of professional development opportunities in the current school year. It was designed to offer Sheffield schools and academies support as they engage with the challenge of ensuring that their provision and curriculum promotes and develops racial equity. The programme was designed to be a starting point and now needs to be further developed.

The new Education Strategy is currently in draft form but does set out two proposed programmes to consider in the light of recommendations from this commission:

- A CPD offer focused on staff subject knowledge, developing racial literacy (and common language) to promote discussion and improve equity, teaching techniques which support pupil reflection and the content relating to equality in the new 'Relationships and sex education and health education' (RSHE) curriculum.
- A toolkit to support settings to develop as anti-racist settings and address racial equity. This will include a dashboard which will be aggregated to contribute to city-wide strategic planning in the future in relation to recommendations from the Sheffield Racial Equality Commission.

This approach would include an offer to all schools and academies in addition to targeted projects. It would be accompanied by a research project to support evaluation and inform future planning.

Reform of the accountability measures

The key accountability measure for secondary schools is Progress 8. Broadly speaking, this measures the progress made by a pupil across a range of different subjects from the time they start in Year 7 to the time they leave in Year 11. A positive score indicates that they have made progress greater than would have been expected given their prior attainment.

As we have seen, progress and attainment are quite different things – it is possible (as is the case for the Black ethnic group) to have a positive Progress 8 score and yet still have lower than average attainment. For some ethnic groups, this means that whereas they were 'far below' their peers they are now merely 'below'. This methodology will not help to address inequality; these pupils will not have the necessary qualifications to move on to their next stage of education or employment.

We therefore need a different approach to accountability, perhaps one that does not in some way serve to condense all that schools do into a single figure. One solution might be to develop a dashboard of measures which all carry equal weighting.

Data on governing boards and staff to inform representation

As a city, we need better information about the composition of our governing boards and staff in schools. Public data¹³ shows that in 2019: 85.7% of all teachers and 92.7% of headteachers in England were White British. 94% of governors and trustees identified themselves as White British in a survey¹⁴ for the National Governors Association from 2020.

As a city, we aim to increase the diversity of our workforce, but recognise the need to be pragmatic in our approach. There is little evidence on the impact on greater diversity in the teaching profession,

¹² <https://www.learnsheffield.co.uk/Training-and-Events/Racial-Equity>

¹³ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/workforce-and-business/workforce-diversity/school-teacher-workforce/latest>

¹⁴ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/workforce-and-business/workforce-diversity/school-teacher-workforce/latest>

but for some pupils, a teacher who understands to their background might serve as a role model. Our experience tells us that from the pupil perspective, the characteristics of the best teachers are related to consistency, engagement, fairness and support and not the ethnicity of the teacher. Increasing the diversity of the workforce would help to support the creation and delivery of a cultural curriculum through sharing their experiences with both pupils and their colleagues, i.e. increasing racial literacy in the workforce. We need our teachers to understand more about race and racism in society, and to have the skills, knowledge and confidence to use this to inform their own practice. We need the culture of our schools to be cognisant of the multicultural nature of Sheffield; we need to celebrate and share our mixed experiences.

More forensic analysis of our data

As a city, we need to understand the nature of inequality in our schools better. This ranges from outcomes through to exclusions. We need to start to analyse the interplay between different factors, so that we can begin to understand some of the common features linked to exclusions etc. We need to develop our approach so that we understand the cumulative impact of different factors, including ethnic group, disadvantage, deprivation, SEN etc.

Strengthening the core offer

The research suggests that strengthening the core offer will be the most effective approach to tackling inequalities. This focusses on improving teaching and the curriculum, which have the greatest impact on outcomes in any setting, recognises the link to overcoming disadvantage, and seeks to break the cycle of underachievement.

If the purpose of a school, academy or college is to maximise life chances then the key to this is attainment and readiness. Attainment (i.e. qualifications) opens the door to opportunities for young people. A strong and broad curriculum coupled with great teaching supports readiness and enables young people to walk successfully through those doors. Resilience, growth mind-set and the ability to make and develop relationships are good examples of the wider impact of an effective curriculum.

Disadvantage is a central theme, be that in terms of finance (poverty), or of in terms of support, nurture and experience (family). We understand the complex interplay of factors that contribute to the different experiences of school faced by some pupils, and recognise that, as schools, we won't be able to fix everything. But supporting young people and their families to overcome barriers is a core element of being an inclusive setting and we need to consider all options in doing this.

Schools are the heart of their community. They are unique places of where all races and cultures mix together and learn about each other. We need to build upon this capital, this captive audience, to promote understanding and diversity.