

Black Lives Matter, Anti-racism and Protest: Support for Schools

A small group of staff in PCC Children, Families and Education have met to consider support the Council could provide to schools around Black Lives Matter (BLM), and areas in which we could encourage schools to make positive changes. This stems from the 25 May murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis and following protests that spread across the world, including the UK.

In terms of areas of engagement and action we propose a three-pronged approach:

1. Black Lives Matter classroom resources

We have begun a collection of resources developed by different providers, including schools, charities, and education organisations among others. We are aware that some schools have already discussed BLM with their students and would like to encourage them to share these so they can be utilised by other schools in the city. These will be hosted on the PEP website. Those we are already aware of are included in the accompanying document.

It is important to engage with content that recognises that the strength of feeling for the BLM movement and protests, much as the impetus stemmed from occurrences in the USA, are not limited to the grievances felt in that country. Indeed they are also a reflection of perceptions of racism, discrimination and injustice felt by young people of country in the UK as well. Young people's heart-breaking narrations of their experiences of racism at the various protests in Portsmouth and beyond, particularly at school, demonstrate that despite multicultural classrooms and a diverse population it is a mistake to imagine that young people and their teachers 'do not see race' and problematic to conclude that 'at least our problems are not as bad as in the USA'. As such, in order to ensure that the subject matter resonates it is imperative that local and national *as well as* international perspectives are considered when BLM is being discussed. The [British Red Cross](#) resource provides a good balance as a start.

2. Teaching black history in schools and decolonising the curriculum

A clear agenda item that has come out of the recent protests is the desire to revisit the school curriculum, particularly history, as an integral part of anti-racist activism. This has given impetus to the [campaign](#) run by The Black Curriculum, among others, that calls for authorities to explicitly recognise the importance of including Black History in the education system, which 'will give British students of all backgrounds a deeper understanding of the varied and wide-ranging cultural contributions to Britain'. It should be noted that ex-pupils from at least 11 schools in Portsmouth have written letters to their former schools' administration and governors requesting the curriculum be changed. The MP for Portsmouth South, Stephen Morgan has also written to the Government, advocating for Black History to be taught in schools. Schools could consider lending their support to this campaign.

Schools remained bound by the National Curriculum and exam board specifications. Within these constraints there are some examples, in our city and beyond, of where schools are already diversifying the curriculum. We would encourage schools to share their resources and to consider other areas that could be included. The attached document includes resources that could support, and again the PEP website will serve as a repository for other useful resources that schools develop or identify and have found useful.

'Decolonising the curriculum' is a discussion that has been ongoing in UK Universities for some years now, where it is recognised that educational establishments can cause barriers to knowledge and understanding, and can provide some guidance to schools. It begins with the assumption that global histories of Western colonial domination have limited what counts as authoritative knowledge, whose knowledge is recognised, what educational institutions teach and how they teach it, with the consequence of alienating some students, as well as reinforcing harmful and racist stereotypes (read the Decolonising SOAS [blog](#) for more information).

3. Longer-term, transformational institutional change

Academics have long argued that to bring about structural changes in relation to discrimination and racism in our institutions it is not sufficient to adjust training and, in the case of schools, to amend the curriculum. Indeed, they argue that focusing on the introduction of Black History in the curriculum without changing the practices and the system itself is highly problematic and tokenistic. They advocate therefore the following, alongside these initiatives:

- hiring more diverse teachers and head teachers, Teach Portsmouth campaign will support this
- making sure that teacher training is focused on issues of teachers' and school professionals' conscious, unconscious and dysconscious bias
- transforming classroom and behaviour management from being based on psychological/medical/pathologising attitudes to re-thinking classrooms in ecological terms, where discipline is a tool for learning, and where authentic solidarity is established between all students/teachers/families, especially those from diverse communities
- interrupting the deficit perspective that lives at the intersections of race/language/disability/citizenship/gender/sexual orientation.

The list of actions is long, based on the incredible amount of research that it has been done (thanks to Dr Valentina Migliarini at the University of Portsmouth for this list). Much of it is publicly available (e.g. David Gillborn and Deborah Youdell, Nicola Rollock, Stephen Ball, Alice Bradbury) and worth the read, if schools are serious about truly transformative actions.

4. Some additional considerations

- Your/your school's positionality - will you make the school's values clear in these discussions?
- At the same time, how will you encourage healthy debate and discussion among students?
- How will you safeguard the wellbeing your black students and other students of colour?
- How will you bring parents along on the journey?
- Will your school require support to deliver some of the content/facilitate discussions?

For further information, to join the working part or to share resources please contact

Sarah.Christopher@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

Freida M'Cormack , Community Cohesion Coordinator

John Webster, Hidden Harm Education Officer

Karen Thomas, EMAS Manager

Sarah Christopher, PEP and School Inclusion Manger