

Preventing and responding to racist bullying

**Practical guidance for schools and settings
supporting children and young people**



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FOREWORD

Every child and young person has the right to feel safe, valued and included in their school or setting. Yet for too many children, racism continues to be a reality that impacts their wellbeing, sense of belonging and ability to thrive.

We know that schools have a vital role to play in challenging prejudice, promoting inclusion and responding effectively when racist bullying occurs. We also know that many staff are working incredibly hard to do this, often in the face of complex and evolving challenges. However, good intentions alone are not enough. Staff need the confidence, knowledge and practical tools to recognise, prevent and respond to racist bullying consistently and effectively.

In recent years, we have seen growing concern about racism and racist bullying within schools, online spaces and wider society. We have heard directly from children and young people who have experienced racist language, stereotypes, exclusion and discrimination. We have also heard from education staff who want to do more but who often tell us they would welcome greater support and clearer guidance. That is why this resource is so important.

This guidance has been developed by the Anti-Bullying Alliance, with input from organisations across the children's and anti-racism sectors, to provide practical support for schools and settings. It recognises that racist bullying can take many forms, both offline and online, that it can have a profound impact on children and young people, and that tackling it requires a whole school approach rooted in respect, inclusion and equity.

Importantly, this guidance is not about placing additional burdens on staff. Rather, it is about supporting the children's workforce to feel better equipped to identify concerns, challenge harmful behaviour and create environments where every child feels they belong.

There is no single action that will eradicate racist bullying. Addressing it requires commitment, leadership, education and ongoing reflection. But by working together, listening to children and young people, and taking meaningful action when concerns arise, we can make a significant difference.

We are grateful to the many organisations and individuals who have contributed to this guidance and shared their expertise. We hope it will prove a valuable resource for teachers, school leaders and all those working with children and young people as they continue their efforts to create safe, inclusive and welcoming environments for every child.

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INTRODUCTION

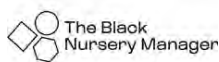
This guidance is designed for everyday use by teachers, support staff, lunchtime staff and senior leaders. It focuses on preventing racist bullying, responding quickly and effectively when it happens and working with parents and carers so behaviour changes and children feel safe. This guidance should be used in line with ABA's preventing bullying and responding to bullying framework. You may want to read these first.

WHO IS THIS GUIDANCE FOR?

Throughout this guidance, the term schools is used to refer to all education settings supporting children and young people, including mainstream schools, special schools, alternative provision, pupil referral units and further education settings, unless otherwise stated.

THIS GUIDE HAS BEEN SUPPORTED BY THE FOLLOWING ORGANISATIONS:

- BulliesOut
- Child1st Safeguarding Consultancy Limited
- Childnet
- Coram Kidscape
- Coram SCARF
- Equilibria
- Everyday Racism
- NASUWT
- Not So Micro
- NSPCC
- Parent Zone
- Solutions Not Sides
- The Black Nursery Manager (Training & Consultancy) Ltd
- The African Caribbean Education Network



DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS GUIDANCE

Clear definitions help ensure staff respond consistently and appropriately when prejudice related incidents occur. The definitions below draw on widely used frameworks and national guidance. Throughout the guide, we refer to 'schools', which should be taken to encompass the widest range of educational settings for children and young people.

The Anti-Bullying Alliance definition of bullying

The Anti-Bullying Alliance defines bullying as:



The **repetitive, intentional hurting** of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an **imbalance of power**. Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological and it can happen face to face or online.



Three important elements are usually present in bullying:

1

Repetition

Bullying typically happens more than once or has the potential to be repeated over time.

2

Intent to cause harm

The behaviour is intended to hurt, intimidate or exclude.

3

Imbalance of power

This may relate to physical strength, popularity, group size, social status, identity-based power, or access to resources or information.

Bullying can take many forms including physical violence, verbal abuse, social exclusion, spreading rumours, coercion and online harassment.

The definition of racism

In this guidance we draw on the definition of racism established by the Macpherson Report [\[link\]](#), which examined institutional racism following the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

Macpherson (1999) defined racism as:



conduct or words or practices which disadvantage or advantage people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. In its more subtle form it is as damaging as in its overt form.



This definition is intentionally broad. It recognises that racism is often experienced in subtle or everyday ways and that the impact on the person targeted is central.

Racism can include:

- racist language or slurs
- stereotyping or mocking cultural identity
- exclusion based on ethnicity, nationality or culture
- discrimination or unfair treatment
- hostility towards someone's race, ethnicity, culture or heritage

Racism can be expressed directly, indirectly or through assumptions, stereotypes and structural inequalities.

A working definition of racist bullying

Building on the definitions above, this guidance uses the following definition:



Racist bullying is bullying behaviour that targets a person or group because of their race, ethnicity, skin colour, nationality, culture or heritage.



Racist bullying therefore involves:

- **intentional harm**
- **repeated behaviour or behaviour with the potential to be repeated**
- **a power imbalance**
- **a racist dimension to the harm**

Examples of racist bullying may include:

- repeated racist name calling or slurs
- mocking a pupil's accent, name, language or cultural background
- targeting someone because of their skin colour, natural identity (e.g. hair, natural features) or ethnicity
- repeated racist comments disguised as 'jokes' or 'banter'
- Stereotypes directed at a pupil
- excluding a pupil from social groups either online or offline because of their race or culture
- online harassment based on race or ethnicity

criticising or mocking hairstyles, clothing or physical features or culture traditions linked to a pupil's race, ethnicity, culture or heritage

Racist bullying can also intersect with other forms of prejudice such as religion-based bullying, xenophobia or Islamophobia.

Racism in schools does not always meet the definition of racist bullying.

It is important to recognise that while racist bullying is always racism, not all racism in schools is bullying.



I understand that a lot of students take the mick out of things and they don't really consider how it could be some sort of serious situation and how someone might actually experience that [racist bullying] and if someone experienced that, how they feel.



- young person

Some racist incidents may involve:

- a single racist comment or slur
- insensitive or stereotypical language used without full understanding
- a prejudiced remark made in a moment of conflict
- assumptions or microaggressions related to race or ethnicity
- using racist materials, resources and literature

These incidents may not involve repetition or an established power imbalance, which means they may not meet the traditional definition of bullying.

However, **all racist incidents must still be taken seriously and addressed.**

Responding appropriately may include:

- challenging the language or behaviour immediately
- helping pupils understand why the behaviour is harmful
- recording the incident
- supporting the pupil who has been targeted
- working with the pupil who used the language to develop understanding and empathy
- informing the parent/carer of the pupil of the incident

Addressing racism early helps prevent behaviour escalating into bullying and helps create a safer and more inclusive school environment.



Why we use the term “Black and Global Majority”

In this guidance we use the term **Black and Global Majority** when referring to people who are racialised as Black, Asian, Brown, mixed heritage or from other minoritised ethnic backgrounds.

This term is increasingly used in equality, diversity and anti-racism work because it recognises that:

- people who are racialised as non-white make up **the majority of the world's population**
- terms such as “ethnic minority” can unintentionally centre whiteness as the norm
- the term highlights shared experiences of racialisation and structural inequality while recognising diversity within these groups



So when people do say things about them, it puts doubts in their mind about who they are and it makes them feel inferior, as it were. Instead of feeling different in a positive way, it makes them think they are different in a negative way.



- young person

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that identities and preferences vary. Some individuals and communities may prefer other terms such as Black, Asian, minoritised ethnic communities or specific ethnic identities.

In practice, schools should:

- respect how individuals and communities choose to describe themselves regarding their identities
- use language that reflects dignity and respect
- remain open to learning as language and understanding evolve

Understanding intersectionality and overlapping forms of bullying

While this guidance focuses specifically on racist bullying, it is important to recognise that children's experiences of bullying and discrimination do not always fit 'neatly' into a single category. Many children and young people experience bullying that may target multiple aspects of their identity, background or lived experience. Understanding experiences in an intersectional way means that we can be sensitive to the way that social identities (e.g. race, gender, class etc) interact in ways that are more complex than considering single identities (Crenshaw, 1991).

Racist bullying can overlap with and be closely connected to other forms of prejudice-based bullying. Children and young people may experience several forms of bullying simultaneously, with each compounding the impact of the others (Galán et al., 2021). Schools should therefore be careful not to view incidents in isolation or focus only on a single characteristic when seeking to understand what has happened.

For example, a child may be targeted because of their ethnicity, skin colour or cultural background, while also experiencing bullying linked to their religion, language, migration history, disability, gender or other aspects of their identity (Haines-Saah et al., 2018). Some forms of bullying may be difficult to categorise, and schools should focus on understanding the child's lived experience and the prejudice or discrimination that may underpin the behaviour.

Taking an intersectional approach means recognising that different aspects of a child's identity and experience can interact and influence both the nature and impact of bullying. It means listening carefully to children and young people, understanding the wider context of incidents and avoiding assumptions about why bullying has occurred.

Common intersecting forms of bullying

Although this guidance focuses on racist bullying, schools should be aware that racism is often closely interconnected with other forms of prejudice and discrimination.

Bullying related to religion or belief

In practice, racist bullying and bullying related to religion or belief can sometimes overlap (Sapouna, De Amicis & Vezzali, 2023). Children and young people may be targeted because of their actual or perceived religion, or because assumptions are made about their ethnicity and faith.

For example, Muslim children and young people may experience Islamophobia, where hostility, prejudice or discrimination is directed towards them because they are, or are perceived to be, Muslim. Similarly, Jewish children and young people may experience antisemitism, which can target both religious identity and ethnic heritage. Schools should be aware that these experiences may not fit neatly into a single category and may involve elements of both racial and religious prejudice.

Developing religious literacy among staff and pupils can help schools understand the ways in which ethnicity, culture, race, religion and belief may intersect. This can support earlier identification of prejudice, more effective prevention work and more confident responses when incidents occur.

NB: The Anti-Bullying Alliance will be developing a separate toolkit on bullying related to religion and belief to complement this guidance.

Bullying related to nationality, migration or language

Some children and young people experience bullying because of their nationality, citizenship, migration history, refugee or asylum-seeking status, or because they are perceived to be from another country.

This can include anti-immigrant bullying, xenophobia, derogatory comments about where a child or their family comes from, hostility towards refugees or asylum seekers, or assumptions that someone does not 'belong' in a community because of their background.

Children and young people who speak English as an additional language may also experience bullying related to their accent, language proficiency or multilingualism. Such behaviour can be closely connected to racist attitudes and stereotypes, even where race is not explicitly referenced.

Appearance targeted bullying

Appearance targeted bullying can also intersect with racist bullying (Grothaus, 2026). Children and young people may be targeted because of physical characteristics associated with their ethnicity or heritage, including skin colour, hair texture, facial features, cultural dress or other visible aspects of identity.

Schools should be alert to the ways in which racist stereotypes can be expressed through comments about appearance and should consider the wider context when responding to incidents.



KNOW YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Before giving staff practical scripts, it helps to be clear about the duties you are working within.

Key points to reinforce in training:

- Race and religion or belief are protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. Schools must challenge harassment and discrimination whenever they occur, including bullying.
- Schools have a legal duty to promote good behaviour and respect for others. Racist bullying falls squarely within this duty.
- Keeping children safe in education statutory guidance (KCSIE, 2025) identifies prejudice-based bullying and racism as a safeguarding matter. Staff must act and pass concerns on to the Designated Safeguarding Lead. Effective safeguarding should be anti-racist and anti-discriminatory (Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2026).
- Government advice on preventing and tackling bullying expects schools to take a whole school approach, teach pupils about prejudice and respond promptly and appropriately when it happens.



A simple message for staff

If the language or behaviour targets someone's race, ethnicity, culture or faith, you must challenge it. It is both a behaviour issue and a safeguarding concern.

Working with external agencies

In some cases racist bullying may involve external agencies. For example:

- incidents that may meet the threshold for hate incidents or hate crime
- behaviour involving pupils from different schools or settings
- incidents taking place online or outside school but affecting pupils' safety in school or in the community
- concerns raised with organisations such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)
- situations where safeguarding concerns are present

Schools should:

- assess whether the incident may constitute a hate incident or hate crime and seek police advice where appropriate
- liaise with other schools DSLs or Headteacher where pupils from multiple settings are involved
- record incidents that occur outside school where they affect pupils' wellbeing or safety in or outside of school
- seek advice from the local authority, safeguarding partners or equality bodies where concerns escalate
- keep parents informed about how external support or escalation is being considered

Even when behaviour takes place outside school, schools still have responsibilities where it impacts pupils' safety, relationships or access to education.

PREVENTATIVE WORK WITH PUPILS AND STAFF

Effective responses to racist bullying begin long before an incident occurs. Schools that actively promote inclusion, belonging and respect for diversity are better placed to prevent racist bullying, recognise concerns early and respond confidently when incidents arise. Prevention is not separate from responding to racist bullying. It creates the culture, relationships and shared understanding that make effective responses possible.

Responding well to incidents of racist bullying is essential, but schools should be working to ensure that no child or young person experiences this harm. Preventing racist language and discrimination is a legal duty under the Equality Act. Effective prevention requires a whole-school approach that recognises racist bullying as an equality and safeguarding issue, not simply a behaviour matter.

Promoting and celebrating diversity, identity and belonging

Schools should create an environment where all children and young people see themselves, their families and their communities reflected positively throughout school life.

This should go beyond one off events or awareness days and be embedded throughout the curriculum, wider school activities and everyday interactions.

This may include:

- ensuring diverse representation across the curriculum, including literature, history, science, the arts and civic life
- teaching about the contributions of people from different racial, ethnic, cultural and faith backgrounds
- celebrating a wide range of cultures, languages, traditions and experiences in meaningful and authentic ways
- providing opportunities for pupils to learn about each other's identities, experiences and communities
- challenging stereotypes and misconceptions wherever they arise
- ensuring displays, resources, books and teaching materials reflect the diversity of modern Britain and the wider world
- promoting positive role models from a wide range of backgrounds and sectors, not only sport and entertainment
- creating opportunities for pupils to share their experiences, cultures and perspectives where they wish to do so

When children and young people regularly encounter positive, respectful and accurate representations of difference, they are more likely to develop empathy, challenge prejudice and contribute to an inclusive school culture (Celeste et al., 2019; Gomez, Rucinski & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2021)

A strong culture of belonging and inclusion provides the foundation for restorative approaches and helps schools rebuild relationships when harm occurs.

With pupils

Schools should use a cross-curriculum approach, including RSHE, citizenship and RE but also many other subjects, to develop pupils' understanding of racism, identity, religion and belief in age-appropriate ways. This should include exploring power, inequality, prejudice and the impact of racism and faith-based discrimination, rather than focusing solely on awareness or celebration.

Pupils should be taught about bystander behaviour and supported to become upstanders who understand how to challenge or report racist bullying safely and appropriately both at school and online.

Assemblies, tutor time and wider school activities should be used to challenge stereotypes, reinforce clear expectations and communicate that racism is not tolerated.

Schools should actively listen to pupil voice through surveys, councils or focus groups to identify concerns, patterns and hotspots. This is particularly important given the underreporting of racist bullying.

With staff

All staff should receive regular, ongoing training to ensure they are confident to:

- Recognise racist bullying behaviours including those behaviours that may be harder to detect.
- Have confidence and knowledge in areas such as anti-racism, diversity, inclusion and religious literacy
- Intervene promptly using shared language and consistent approaches
- Understand learned bias, positionality and power, and how these can influence interactions and responses

Expectations around challenging racist behaviour should be clear and consistent. These should be embedded within the staff code of conduct and reinforced through induction for new staff and volunteers.

Challenging prejudice can be emotionally demanding. Some staff may also have lived experience of racism.

Support should be provided to:

- Provide space for debriefs after serious incidents
- Offer supervision, reflective practice or employee assistance schemes for pastoral staff
- Make it clear that leaders will back staff who challenge discriminatory behaviour
- Encourage staff to ask for guidance if they feel unsure how to respond

Preventative work should be ongoing and reflective, recognising that understanding of racism and identity develops over time for both pupils and staff. A consistent, informed approach helps create a school culture where racist bullying is less likely to occur and more likely to be addressed effectively when it does.



PRINCIPLES THAT SHOULD GUIDE EVERY CONVERSATION

1 ACKNOWLEDGE AND VALIDATE

- Do not minimise or brush things aside.
- "Thank you for telling me. I understand this must have hurt you. What you experienced or heard is not acceptable."

2 USE CLEAR, EXPLICIT LANGUAGE

- Call the behaviour what it is.
- Do not label young people as 'racists'
- Rather than "unkind behaviour", use "racist language".
- Be clear when language is racist in nature.
- Context can help us understand what happened, but it must never be used to excuse or downplay racist behaviour or the impact of racist bullying. Racism should always be named and addressed on its own terms.

3 BE CALM, CURIOUS AND FIRM

- Ask open questions, avoid accusations, and show you want to understand what happened.

4 SEPERATE THE BEHAVIOUR FROM THE CHILD

- This helps conversations stay productive.
- "You are not a bad person. The language you used is racist and has caused harm."

5 BE RESTORATIVE AS WELL AS CORRECTIVE

- Sanctions may be necessary, but the long-term goal is understanding, attitude change and preventing repetition.

WHEN YOU WITNESS OR HEAR AN INCIDENT

All staff have a responsibility to respond promptly and consistently when they witness or are informed about racist bullying. How adults respond in the moment sends a powerful message to pupils about what is acceptable and whose safety matters.

Schools have the powers to intervene in bullying that takes place off school premises e.g. on the way to and from school or online.

Respond immediately and name the behaviour

If it is safe to do so, intervene straight away. Calmly stop the behaviour and clearly name it as racist bullying. Avoid minimising language or reframing the incident as banter or a misunderstanding. Make it clear that the behaviour is not acceptable and goes against the school's values, behaviour policy and legal duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Prioritise safety and support

Check that the pupils involved are safe and supported. Where appropriate, separate pupils to prevent further harm and ensure the targeted pupil has access to a safe adult.

Do not ask the targeted pupil to explain or justify what has happened in front of others. Any detailed conversations should take place privately.

Record and report

Record the incident as soon as possible, using the school's agreed systems. Records should clearly identify the incident as racist bullying and include what happened, who was involved, and what immediate actions were taken.

Report the incident in line with school procedures, including to senior leaders or safeguarding leads where required. Racist bullying should never be dealt with informally or in isolation. See the definitions section about what constitutes a racist incident/racist bullying.

Follow up appropriately

Ensure that the incident is followed up with:

- Support and check ins for the pupil who has been targeted
- Clear consequences and educational responses for the pupil who has bullied
- Communication with parents or carers in line with school policy

Staff should not assume that one response is sufficient. Ongoing monitoring and follow up are essential to prevent the harm being repeated.

Do and avoid for staff

Do

- Act promptly and calmly
- Name racist bullying clearly
- Centre the safety and wellbeing of the targeted pupil
- Record and report all incidents
- Follow agreed policies and seek support from senior staff

Avoid

- Ignoring or delaying a response
- Minimising the behaviour or questioning intent in the moment
- Asking the targeted pupil to resolve the situation themselves
- Handling the incident informally without recording
- Treating racist bullying as a normal behaviour issue



RECORDING, REPORTING AND LEARNING

Effective recording is an important part of preventing and responding to racist bullying (EHCR, 2018). It helps schools identify patterns, monitor the effectiveness of their response, understand where additional support may be needed and demonstrate their commitment to creating a safe and inclusive environment.

Schools should record all racist incidents, including incidents that may not meet the definition of bullying. While a single incident may not constitute bullying, recording lower level incidents can help schools identify repeated behaviour, emerging patterns and wider safeguarding concerns.

Records should be accurate, timely and clear. They should include:

- what happened
- where and when the incident occurred
- who was involved
- any witnesses
- the impact on the pupil who was targeted
- actions taken by staff
- follow up support provided
- outcomes and any further actions required

Recording incidents consistently enables schools to identify:

- repeated behaviour involving individual pupils
- patterns across year groups or pupil groups
- locations or times where incidents occur more frequently
- trends over time
- emerging issues within the school community
- whether interventions and preventative measures are having the desired impact

Schools should regularly review recorded incidents rather than viewing them in isolation. Looking across incidents can help identify hotspots, recurring themes and areas where additional action may be needed.

Schools may also find contextual safeguarding approaches helpful when analysing incidents. This involves considering the wider contexts in which harm occurs, including particular locations within the school, journeys to and from school, online environments, peer group dynamics and community influences.

Senior leaders and governors should receive regular anonymised information about racist incidents and trends. This can help ensure appropriate oversight, accountability and strategic planning. Recording should not be viewed simply as a compliance exercise. Effective recording and review processes help schools learn from incidents, strengthen preventative work and create safer environments for all children and young people.

Where possible, schools should record racist incidents separately from other behaviour incidents so that patterns relating to race, ethnicity, culture, nationality or religion and belief can be more easily identified and addressed.

Remember: All racist bullying is racism, but not all racism is bullying. Schools should record and respond to all racist incidents, whether or not they meet the definition of bullying.

WORKING WITH THE PUPIL WHO HAS BEEN TARGETED

Where possible, talk with the pupil on the same day. Reassure them clearly and explicitly that what happened was not their fault, and that it is understandable if they feel upset, angry or frightened.

Give the pupil space to talk without interruption. Listen carefully, allow them to explain in their own way and take their experiences seriously, especially if this is not the first time they have been targeted. Active listening is essential.

Use gentle, open questions such as:

- "What part of what happened has stayed with you most?"
- "Has anything like this happened before?"
- "How do you feel now?"

Consider the wider impact on the pupil's wellbeing and sense of safety, and what the school needs to change or put in place to address this. This may include:

- Feelings of insecurity or anxiety in particular spaces, lessons or at certain times
- Disruption to friendships or peer relationships
- Concerns about further targeting, including online or beyond the school gates
- Embarrassment in front of their peers
- Feeling powerless and humiliated
- Angry and frustrated

Put practical support in place quickly. This may include identifying a safe adult, making temporary seating or group changes, offering pastoral or wellbeing support, or agreeing safe routes around school, on the way to and from school and in the community/online, where needed.

Ask the pupil what a fair outcome would look like for them. While the school may not be able to meet every request, understanding their perspective helps build trust and informs an effective response. Take into account their wishes and feelings.

Plan follow up check ins, for example daily, after one week or one month, to ask whether things have improved and whether anything new has happened. Record these conversations so the school can evaluate whether its response has been effective.

Even where the behaviour has stopped, the impact may continue. Pupils may still feel unsafe around those involved, attending lessons or participating in activities. Schools should recognise the longer-term impact of racist bullying and consider whether additional adjustments or support are needed to rebuild safety and belonging.

If the children and young people knew that the school was taking the issue seriously, I think there would be a lot more coming forward and saying: "I'm being bullied and you need to help me."

- young person

What to do and what to avoid when supporting the pupil who has experienced racist bullying

Do

- Listen carefully and take the pupil's experiences seriously.
- Acknowledge the racism and the harm it has caused.
- Reassure the pupil that what happened is not their fault.
- Ask the pupil what support they need and involve them in decisions where appropriate.
- Take account of the pupil's wishes and feelings when planning next steps.
- Offer practical support to help them feel safe and included.
- Check whether this is part of a wider pattern of incidents or concerns.
- Follow up regularly to ensure the behaviour has stopped and the pupil continues to feel safe.
- Consider the longer term impact on the pupil's wellbeing, confidence, sense of belonging and participation in school life.
- Record concerns, actions taken and follow up conversations.

Avoid

- Dismissing, minimising or questioning the pupil's experience.
- Focusing solely on the intentions of the pupil who caused harm.
- Asking the pupil to educate others about racism or explain why something was offensive.
- Pressuring the pupil to take part in restorative conversations or mediation.
- Assuming the impact ends when the incident stops.
- Treating the incident as a one off without exploring whether similar incidents have occurred previously.
- Making promises you cannot keep about outcomes or sanctions.
- Expecting the pupil to resolve the situation themselves.



WORKING WITH A PUPIL WHO HAS BULLIED

Children and young people may repeat language or behaviours they have encountered online, from peers or from adults. How schools respond is crucial in preventing further harm and supporting learning and change.

So like we think that maybe it's [racist bullying] getting worse because like in the news and everything, like all the stuff about like immigration and like terrorist attacks. So like people could get provoked to like be racist to like minority groups

- young person

Our approach

It is essential that staff respond firmly to racist bullying while **not demonising the child or young person responsible**. We should avoid labelling pupils as "racist" or "a bully", as fixed labels can reinforce identity rather than support change and may lead to defensiveness or disengagement. Instead, we should name the behaviour clearly: for example, "that language is racist" or "that behaviour is bullying". This keeps the focus on what needs to change, while recognising that children are still developing their understanding, values and behaviour.

At the same time, it is important to be **unambiguous about the seriousness and unacceptability of racist behaviour**. Pupils must understand the harm caused and that there are clear consequences. Sanctions should still be applied in line with the school's behaviour policy, but they should sit alongside education, reflection and, where appropriate, opportunities to repair harm. This balanced approach ensures that pupils are held accountable while also being supported to learn, change and not repeat the behaviour.

Bullies are normally scared. They want attention basically, so they go and bully someone for the negative attention. They should learn to get attention for good things.

- young person

First conversation

Describe the behaviour clearly and plainly, without judgement:

- "You used a phrase that targets someone's race and identity. That is racist language."

Link the behaviour to school expectations and legal responsibilities:

- "Our rules are clear that this is not acceptable because it causes harm and goes against our duties under the Equality Act."

Explore what the pupil understood using calm, neutral questions:

- "Where did you hear that word or phrase?"
- "What did you think it meant?"
- "How do you think it might feel to hear that said about you?"

Encourage accountability before moving to next steps:

- "Before we talk about what happens next, I need you to accept that this behaviour happened and that it caused harm."

Schools should check in with the pupil to understand whether there are underlying factors contributing to the behaviour, such as exposure to harmful language or content online, experiences of discrimination themselves, difficulties at home, or unmet emotional or educational needs.

This should be done carefully and separately from any consequences, making clear that:

- The behaviour remains unacceptable and has caused harm
- Safeguarding checks do not remove accountability or reduce sanctions
- Support is about preventing further harm and promoting learning and safety

Where concerns are identified, appropriate pastoral support or safeguarding processes should be followed in line with the school's policies. Staff should avoid framing this as excusing racist behaviour. The purpose is to ensure the pupil is safe, to disrupt harmful influences, and to reduce the risk of repeated harm to others.

Educational and restorative approaches

Alongside any sanctions, schools should consider educational and restorative actions, such as:

- Age-appropriate learning about racism, discrimination and different faiths
- Reflection or research tasks focused on the impact of prejudice
- Restorative conversations only where the targeted pupil agrees and the pupil who bullied has acknowledged their behaviour
- Implementing a whole-school approach to celebrating difference

Please note: Restorative conversations should only take place where the targeted pupil freely agrees, feels safe, and has not been pressured to participate. They should be facilitated by appropriately trained staff and should not be used as a substitute for accountability, safeguarding action or sanctions where these are needed.

Consequences

Apply sanctions consistently and explain them calmly. The aim is to reinforce boundaries and expectations, not to shame or humiliate. Consequences should sit alongside learning and reflection.

Recognising the influence of online environments on racist language

School professionals should be aware that some children and young people may be exposed to racist language through online spaces where such behaviour is normalised, repeated or presented as acceptable, 'humorous' or consequence free. This exposure can shape how pupils understand what is appropriate to say to others, even when they do not fully recognise the harm caused. While this context does not excuse racist behaviour, it is important that staff address it directly and help pupils develop critical understanding of what they encounter online.

Online influences are often closely connected with wider social environments, including media narratives and conversations at home. Parents and carers may themselves be exposed to similar content through digital platforms, which can affect the language children hear and repeat. For this reason, effective responses to racist bullying should include clear education about online responsibility, respectful communication and the impact of prejudice, alongside partnership with families where appropriate.

What to do and what to avoid when working with the pupil whose behaviour caused harm

The aim is to stop the behaviour, address the harm caused and support meaningful learning and behaviour change. While consequences may be appropriate, schools should also help pupils develop understanding, empathy and accountability to reduce the likelihood of future incidents.

Do

- Address the behaviour promptly and clearly.
- Explain why the behaviour is unacceptable and the harm it has caused.
- Focus on the impact of the behaviour, not just the pupil's intentions.
- Use clear language to identify racist behaviour when it occurs.
- Encourage reflection, accountability and learning.
- Help the pupil understand the experiences and perspectives of others.
- Explore underlying influence, e.g. peer pressure, online content, stereotypes or misinformation.
- Apply appropriate consequences in line with school policy.
- Consider educational approaches that support long term behaviour change.
- Work in partnership with parents or carers where appropriate.
- Monitor behaviour and provide follow up support to prevent repetition.

Avoid

- Labelling the pupil as a racist rather than addressing the racist behaviour.
- Focusing solely on punishment without supporting learning and behaviour change.
- Minimising the behaviour as banter, joking or a misunderstanding.
- Prioritising intent over impact.
- Expecting a quick apology to resolve the situation.
- Assuming the pupil fully understands why their behaviour was harmful.
- Publicly shaming or humiliating the pupil.
- Ignoring wider influences that may be shaping attitudes or behaviour.
- Treating the incident as resolved without monitoring future behaviour.

WORKED WITH PARENTS AND CARERS

Working constructively with parents and carers is essential when responding to racist bullying. Schools should aim to build trust, reduce defensiveness, and centre the safety, dignity and rights of children and young people, while being clear that discrimination including racism will not be tolerated.

Creating a supportive and respectful approach

School staff should approach all conversations with parents calmly, respectfully and without blame. Parents may feel upset, defensive, ashamed or fearful, whether their child has been targeted or has bullied others. A non-judgemental tone helps keep parents engaged and open to working in partnership with the school.

Be clear that the school's role is to safeguard children and young people, promote equality and meet its legal duties, not to label children, young people or parents as racist. Focus on behaviours, impact and learning, rather than intent or character.



Because any kind of "ism" like racism or disablism is kind of shut away in schools, but actually I think schools need to face it and to challenge it.



- young person

Working with parents of children who have been targeted

Parents of children and young people who experience racist bullying may have low trust in institutions or previous negative experiences of being dismissed. It is vital that schools:

- Listen carefully and validate the child's and family's experiences
- Clearly name racist bullying where it has occurred, rather than minimising or reframing it
- Ask them what they would like to happen
- Explain that the school is taking this seriously
- Explain the categories of abuse physical, emotional, sexual and neglect. This is emotional or other depending on the situation
- Explain what actions the school will take to stop the bullying and prevent recurrence
- Keep clear parents informed and involved, with agreed check ins and updates
- Offer appropriate support for the child's wellbeing and sense of belonging

Schools should reassure parents that racist bullying is taken seriously and addressed in line with the Equality Act 2010 and the school's anti bullying and behaviour policies.





Working with parents of children and young children who have bullied others

Conversations with parents of children and young people who have engaged in racist bullying can be challenging. Staff should:

- Be clear and factual about what has happened and the impact on the targeted individual
- Avoid framing the conversation around blame, but be firm that the behaviour is unacceptable
- As above, do not label children and young people as 'racists' but explain behaviour as racist.
- Emphasise that children and young people can learn and change, and that the goal is accountability, repair and education
- Support parents to understand why racist bullying is harmful, even if there was no harm intended
- Explain any consequences alongside restorative or educational actions

Schools should make clear that racist bullying is a serious matter with legal and safeguarding implications, while also supporting the child or young person to reflect, learn and develop empathy in line with anti-racist principles.



I think bullying stems from people's attitudes and a lack of understanding, around certain issues...they might feel like they don't understand it, so they feel they need to pick on that person's, what they view as a weakness, when really if they understood...it might be a different story.



- young person

Keeping parents onboard while upholding anti-racist values

Schools should be confident and consistent in naming racism and all types of discrimination, even if parents disagree or feel uncomfortable. Upholding anti-racist practice means prioritising the rights and safety of children and young people who are targeted, rather than avoiding difficult conversations.

Where parents challenge the school's approach, staff should refer back to the school's legal duties, policies and values, and seek support from senior leaders if needed. Clear documentation and transparent communication help maintain trust and accountability.

By working in partnership with parents, being clear about expectations, and centring learning and repair, schools can respond to racist bullying in a way that is supportive, constructive and rooted in equality and justice.

What to do and what to avoid when working with parents and carers

Do

- Be clear and confident in naming racist bullying when it has occurred
- Focus on behaviours and impact, not labels or assumptions about intent
- Listen actively and acknowledge parents' emotions, even when conversations are difficult
- Explain the school's legal duties under the Equality Act 2010 and safeguarding responsibilities
- Emphasise learning, accountability and repair alongside any consequences
- Keep records of conversations and actions taken, and share next steps clearly
- Seek support from senior leaders if conversations become challenging or escalate

Avoid

- Minimising or reframing racist or faith targeted bullying as "banter", "misunderstandings" or "falling out"
- Debating whether something was "meant" to be racist rather than focusing on its impact
- Positioning the targeted child as responsible for managing or resolving the bullying
- Expecting parents from minoritised backgrounds to educate staff about racism or faith discrimination
- Making promises that the school cannot keep or acting outside agreed policies

SOURCES OF FURTHER SUPPORT, RESOURCES AND GUIDANCE

For further advice, support and resources on preventing and responding to racist bullying, including specialist guidance on anti-racism and racial equality, please visit: <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/sources-further-support-resources-and-guidance-preventing-responding-racist-bullying>



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