Collaboratives on addressing racial inequity in covid recovery

Education

Briefing Paper

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Contents

Summary and Introduction

Summary

- The impact of Covid-19 on Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students has accentuated longstanding disparities in education. These structural inequalities are well documented in terms of educational outcomes and transitions between sectors.

- The intersectional ways in which these disparities occur mean that BAME students and their communities are affected indirectly via the economic and employment impacts of the pandemic, but also directly through increased health inequalities

- Socio-spatial circumstances (e.g. housing and 'space' to study; supporting other family members) impact disproportionately on families experiencing poverty. Structural inequalities and their tendency to intersect with race mean that many BAME children and young people are more likely to experience these barriers to learning. These barriers project into the future and impact significantly on children and young people 'catching up'.

- Despite recent claims of no evidence for institutional racism in the UK, accumulation of evidence over several decades runs counter to this assertion and has significant implications for the ways in which BAME children and young people's educational outcomes are assessed. The pandemic has highlighted the important role of teachers in student assessment, particularly teacher-based assessments. Past research suggests teachers will require greater support in addressing the possibility of unconscious bias within the processes of assessment. This will be an important consideration in relation to teaching, learning and assessment in the post-COVID recovery period and beyond.

Introduction

> *'While notions of diversity are celebrated within the schools, issues of race and racism are routinely avoided, ensuring that institutionally ingrained patterns of discrimination remain unchanged'* .[1]

The former Archbishop of York once said that the 'true purpose of education is to produce citizens'[2] yet many BAME* people know that education does not equate with citizenship. Education does have a purpose in that it is the driving force in preparing young people for adult life, however, institutional racism impacts upon the educational outcomes of Black, Asian and minority ethnic students, which will be explored throughout this briefing.

Despite the recently commissioned 'Sewell Report'[3] which attempts to deny the presence of institutional racism, the weight of historic and contemporary evidence suggests otherwise. In this briefing, we review evidence, showing how the changes to schooling brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated existing structural educational inequalities experienced by BAME students and teachers. Moreover, we examine ways in which the longstanding presence of systemic, institutionalised racism gives cause for specific concern in terms of the implications for educational recovery of BAME students in a post-pandemic world. Drawing from the limited range of evidence available so far, this briefing establishes key aspects of these patterns of racial disparity in education, before offering several implications for policy and practice. In doing so, we hope to provide starting points for a wider discussion of how race and ethnicity needs to be a crucial part of any post-COVID recovery considerations, whilst communicating our specific educational concerns.

Whilst we are keen to emphasise that the challenges posed by COVID-19 have impacted all sectors of education and, thus, imply the need for a co-ordinated institutional response, the briefing foregrounds evidence for primary and secondary students. Arguably, the pandemic has posed a most immediate threat to the success of students aged 5-18 and their onward progressions in both academic and economic terms. The experiences of students and staff of colour in this sector are illustrative of the key challenges faced in education. Over the last 18 months, emerging research has given us some insight into the immediate effects of COVID and its impact on students and staff; the longer-term effects are perhaps less easily discernible at this point as the pandemic is ongoing.

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* We acknowledge the usage of the term BAME is problematic and homogenises minority ethnic groups.

1. Longstanding racial disparities in education

Institutional racism in education reflects racism in broader society. 'It [institutional racism] can be detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.'[4] Race reports have consistently been commissioned since the 1970s,[5] yet, institutional racism is seemingly a permanent feature in society.[6,7,8] When Gillborn[9] examined the English education system through a critical race lens, he argued the intentionality of white policymakers in developing racial discrimination. Gillborn concluded that ambiguous 'best practice' policies meant to enhance all students' education, steadily produce inequitable outcomes that negatively impacted BAME students. The publication of the report from the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities in March 2021[3] did little to disrupt the status quo and served to deny the existence of institutional racism in society claiming, institutional racism "is used too casually as an explanatory tool" and "robust evidence" alongside the consideration of other factors is required to prove its existence[3]; despite the relatively recent evidence to the contrary.[10] The examination of policy in initial teacher education and schools[11] indicates an "absent presence" of race[12] in educational policy demonstrating a denial of the salience of race and racism. Such deracialised policy documents, at worst imply a strategically constructed absence which tolerates racial inequity for some of the most vulnerable communities. Ever vigilant scrutiny of policy language is needed to illuminate hidden meanings. For example, the use of the term disadvantaged pupils[13] is prevalent, and care is needed to ensure conflation of the challenges experienced by many Black students "with working class-ness, 'disadvantage' and educational deficit" does not lead to "a newer kind of deficit model based on 'common-sense racism'; one which suggests that it is not the intrinsic and innate inability (intelligence, potential to learn) of BAME students that is the problem, rather their 'background' is the problem for the institution to solve."[13]

Black, Asian and minority ethnic students

Before the arrival of COVID-19, BAME students faced various race inequalities within the education system:

- There was significant variation in educational outcomes for BAME students. Whilst some (e.g. Chinese and Indian students)[14,15] show significant success in attainment throughout all phases of education, others, such as Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi pupils continue to underachieve.[16,17,18]

- Black students are at greater risk of being excluded from school. After decades of decline since the late 1990s, exclusions have been on the rise since 2013.[19.] In fact, Black Caribbean students are excluded from primary, secondary, and special needs schools, at least three times the rate of others.[20] Students who have been excluded are rendered vulnerable to poor mental and physical health,[19] poor attainment and employment[21] and have a higher probability of being 'a victim or perpetrator of crime' than other students.[19]

- Localised deprivation, special educational needs, and low socio-economic status play a role in a student being excluded, affecting their educational progression. Nearly 80% of permanent exclusions were of students who were eligible for free meals, had an identified special need.[22] With the families of BAME children more likely to experience income-based inequalities, coupled with racialised institutional practices,[23] their risk of exclusion is heightened.

- Despite such racialised patterns of exclusions being well-known by government, there has been a significant reluctance to act. Out of the 30 recommendations from the Timpson Report[19] on exclusion, only 6 have been implemented. Whilst this raises the possibility of further changes to be made in the future,[24] the tenor of the recent Sewell Report (2021) and its dismissal of institutional racism suggests further opportunities for redress in line with Timpson (2018) may not be forthcoming. Many in the charity sector and race researchers were very disappointed with the Timpson Review since it seemed to deny racism as a factor in the exclusion of Black Caribbean students and those from Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller heritage groups.

- Research has shown that only 16% of teachers' predicted grades at A-level were correct but 75% of grades are over-predicted and high-attaining, disadvantaged students are more likely to be given lower grade predictions than their richer peers, thus affecting their choice of university, future career trajectories and subsequent social mobility.[25,26,27] Research comparing internal assessments with outcomes from blind examinations found pupils from Black Caribbean, Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage groups were more likely to score lower in subjective teacher assessments than their White counterparts.[28] Factors affecting teacher assessment include teacher bias

and low expectations, lack of ethnic diversity in the teaching profession and the effect of family knowledge and empowerment on successful engagement with schools.[29,30]

- Intersectional factors such as poverty, language, and special educational needs influence the academic trajectories and life chances of BAME students.[31]

Black, Asian and minority ethnic teachers

The Black, Asian and minority ethnic teacher population does not reflect the ethnic diversity of the student population which is approximately one-third BAME.[32] The current workforce is predominately white. In 2019, eighty-five percent of teachers were from white British ethnicities, 65% of students were White British[33] and BAME teachers only number 66,039 or 14.3% of the 453,813 workforce[34] which may appear to be representative of the total population. On closer examination of the statistics teachers of colour number 8.1% (Chart 1) including mixed race teachers whilst representing 12.9% of the working age inhabitants,[35] showing there is an underrepresentation of BAME teachers in relation to the population. This represents a detriment since the ethnic diversity of pupil population is not represented in the profession and thus a cultural dissonance ensues. Therefore, to navigate this ethnically polarised teacher-student ratio, teachers have a responsibility to identify and develop their critical consciousness. Furthermore, teachers must understand their existence as 'racial/cultural beings' and their impact on assessments and educational outcomes.[36]

Chart 1. School Teacher Workforce [34]
Percentage and number of school teachers and percentage and number of the working age population (2011) by ethnicity

Ethnicity	% of teacher workforce	Teachers	% of working age population
Asian			
Bangladeshi	0.6	3,000	0.8
Indian	1.9	8,900	3.0
Pakistani	1.2	5,700	2.0
Asian other	0.7	3,200	1.7
Black			
Black African	0.9	4,200	1.9
Black Caribbean	1.1	4,900	1.2
Black other	0.3	1,500	0.5
Mixed			
Mixed White/Asian	0.4	1,700	0.5
MixeWhite/Black African	0.1	600	0.2
MixeWhite/Black Caribbean	0.4	1,700	0.6
Mixed other	0.5	2,400	0.5
White			
White British	85.7	395,900	78.5
White Irish	1.5	6,900	1.0
White other	3.8	17,700	5.6
Other including Chinese			
Chinese	0.2	800	0.9
Any other	0.6	2,800	1.1
Unknown	Not applicable	38,800	Not applicable

- The lack of BAME teachers is not solely due to a lack of interest in teaching but also issues faced as they manoeuvre the teacher-education and career pipeline,[8] for example, 30% of primary school and 23% of secondary school BAME teachers felt that the school appraisal system did not support them.[37] The role of racism, microaggressions and marginalisation increase isolation, exclusion from informal yet vital social networks and religious affiliation all prove disadvantageous for promotion and career progression.[38]

- The expectations on BAME staff to act as role models and to provide support for BAME students when they seek out a member of staff who will relate to their experience is an additional burden not expected or carried by their white colleagues. This invisible load is often unrecognised and unremunerated.[39,40]

2. The effects of COVID-19 on the education of Black, Asian and minority ethnic students

Schools with a high number of Black, Asian and minority ethnic pupils are likely to face safety concerns regarding the health of those within the school environment.[41] Schools that have a high population of BAME students are likely to witness their students falling behind in course subjects and Key Stage testing.[42] In their recent study the Educational Endowment Foundation reported[43] an estimated 36% attainment gap for disadvantaged students. The effects of the 'COVID-19 learning gap' on the education for BAME child development cannot be traced to one issue. Instead, a culmination of factors such as school closures, technological lacunas, and the reliance on teacher assessments in lieu of public examinations as an expedient measure makes for a complex interaction of factors that will require careful policy consideration.

School closures, attendance and learning loss

According to UNESCO's global school closure data, pupils in the UK averaged between 21-30 weeks out of school.[44] This break in the continuity of education has impacted attendance rates.[45] The Children's Commission report[46] found 71% of children agreed that they were excited to be back at school after the first lockdown; 93% said they were happy to see their schoolfriends again and 63% were worried about not being able to go to school under another lockdown. Ten percent of children are absent each day, but it is not known how many are consistently absent, or how many have not returned to school at all since September 2020, nor their ethnicity.

A National Foundation for Educational Research report 2020[41,46] showed attendance was lower for students in receipt of Pupil Premium (45%) noting that school leaders with high proportions of pupils from BAME backgrounds were more likely to report parents were concerned about the safety of their children in terms of contracting or transmitting COVID-19 than schools with no Black, Asian and minority ethnic pupils (65% compared to 35%). Thus, despite the disproportionate COVID-19 death rates in several BAME communities, Black, Asian and minority ethnic children had no exemption from school, as a result parents may have been reluctant to send their children to school.

Although the DfE collects pupil-level data from schools it is not easy to identify the number of pupils who may have been removed from the school learning environment (indicating they may have been withdrawn for home education). The Children's Commissioner notes, "Anecdotally, local authorities and some schools have reported… …concerns about rises in both home education and school exclusion, but we do not have the data to substantiate these accounts at present".[46] Furthermore, the DfE has not collected data on school exclusions during the COVID-19 crisis. Therefore, the number of Black, Asian and minority ethinc students who may have been excluded from school or withdrawn are not known but this could greatly impact these students' outcomes.

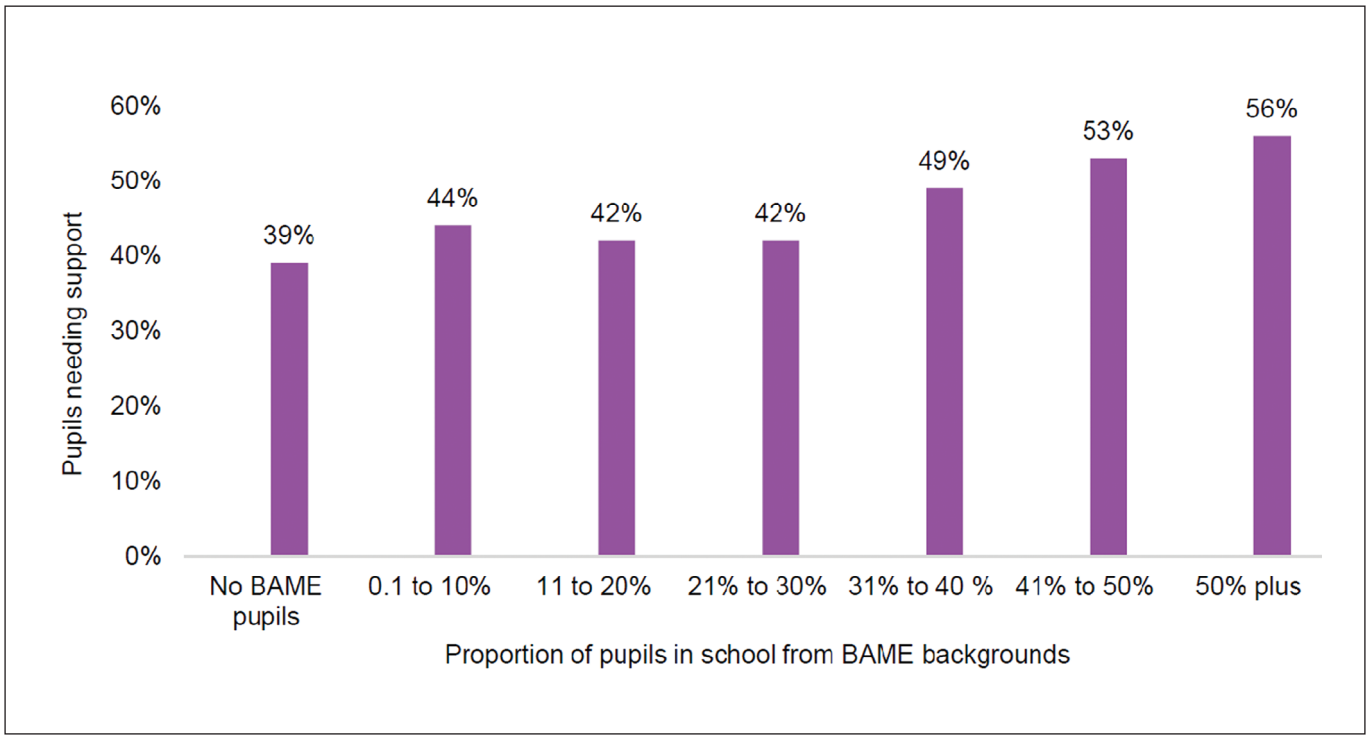
Data collated from the Department for Education[47] shows the attendance of vulnerable children and pupils on free school meals (FSM) was lower than for other pupils during March 2020 and May 2021. Disadvantaged students may experience a lag in their educational growth and development due to school closures and low attendance would compound prevailing inequalities in the education system.[48]

Highlights from the 2020 NFER Report[41] concerning students' progression notes:

- Most teachers (98%) in England during the 2019-20 school year felt pupils were behind in their studies.
- Disadvantaged pupils were found to be further behind in their studies and their attendance; 61% and approximately 47%, respectively.
- Sixty-five percent of senior leaders reported BAME parents' safety concerns regarding letting their child return to in-school learning.
- Nearly half (44%) of teachers reported that their pupils needed intensive catch-up provisions before returning to school.
- Most senior school leaders found funding, support for pupils' wellbeing and the need for clarity of governmental guidance to be at the top of the priority list for a successful return to school.
- Schools with a high proportion of BAME students reported a greater need for intensive catch-up as shown in Chart 2.

Chart 2. Factors Influencing the Need for Catch-up Support [41]

The proportion of pupils in need of intensive catch-up supporty by the proportion of pupils in school from BAME backgrounds



Source: NFER survey of 1782 teachers. 1344 teachers responded.

In a study by the Educational Endowment Foundation where they examined 6000 pupils in autumn 2020 after the first lockdown, they found that Year 2 pupils' attainment in reading and mathematics were significantly lower.[49] The All Party Parliamentary Group on Oracy (APPG)[50] reported that school closures had a detrimental effect on spoken language. "Two thirds of primary teachers (69%) and nearly half of secondary teachers (44%) say school closures had a negative effect on the spoken language development of students eligible for pupil premium, compared with 1 in 5 teachers for their most advantaged pupils". If oracy is affected this will impact reading and literacy skills. For children with English as additional language this will have detrimental consequences for their progression and educational outcomes across the whole of the curriculum.[52]

An Ofsted report on children facing the harshest effects from school closures found there was a deterioration in some fundamental skills and development. For example, young children were reported to have reverted to wearing nappies after being successfully toilet-trained. A loss of concentration was noted in older pupils and there was a general increase in students' physical inactivity with sometimes the attendant consequences to their well-being. For students who may be residing in abusive and negligent homes an anxiety exists as referrals to social workers decreased during school closures. Concerns remain about children who were out of sight during school closures, with falling referrals to social care teams raising fears that domestic neglect, exploitation or abuse is going undetected.[53]

School closures have shown there was a noticeable decrease in the proportion of disadvantaged pupils working at expected levels and fewer had resumed working at expected levels on return to school in Autumn 2020.[54] Furthermore, pupils that participate in Free School Meals (FSM) averaged an 8 point standardised score gap in both reading and maths compared to non-FSM pupils.[49] Schools with high levels of disadvantaged students have experienced higher levels of loss than other schools, particularly in secondary schools (2.2 months in schools with high rates of free school meal eligibility and 1.5 months in schools with low rates of free school meal eligibility).[49] Higher proportion of students from ethnic minority backgrounds are eligible for FSM, except Indian and Chinese groups.[54] and are likely to experience lower attainment. Low-income households is a measure used by ONS to indicate whether a child is eligible for FSM and with 30% of Black households considered low-income, it can be inferred that BAME pupils may represent a substantial number of those students in the COVID learning gap.[55] Data examining the COVID-19 learning loss focussed more on primary than secondary schools.[42,54,56] Also noteworthy, is the absence of references to pupils' ethnicity and a preponderance of the term 'disadvantaged pupils' within all reports.

Research such as the Leeds Trinity report[58] indicates variance in the experience of BAME parents and families during the first lockdown with respect to racial tension related to the origins of the coronavirus. Some Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic parents had limited or no English language skills which impacted on their ability to home school children and their understanding of the tasks being sent home from schools and early years settings. In such situations, older siblings or other family relatives were often asked to assist. Some Black, Asian and minority ethnic parents who were educated outside the UK were unfamiliar with the National Curriculum or the Early Years Foundation Stage which led to low levels of confidence when attempting home schooling. They may also be less familiar with school processes and ways in which their child's progression may be supported towards positive learning outcomes.

Whilst learning loss in terms of Language and Mathematics is crucial[59] to a child's development, lost learning in other areas must not be overlooked particularly in relation to foundation subjects or alternative learners.[59,60] For example, lockdowns resulted in children having lost out on swimming and water safety lessons. Before lockdown 1 in 4 children could not swim the required 25m. 1.88 million children have also missed out on swimming.[51] The impact is larger on younger children and those living in poverty, as they are at greater risk of accidental death by drowning. In five years' time, only 35% of Year 7 pupils living in the most deprived areas of England will be able to swim compared to 77% in the least deprived areas.[51]

Limitations caused by technological access

Following the closure of schools during the lockdown in March 2020, private schools offered higher levels of teacher-pupil contact time compared to state schools.[58] Some parents were critical of the support provided by schools especially when they were asked to teach new topics with little support provided. Black, Asian and minority ethnic children are more likely to come from low-income families than White British children.[62] Before the pandemic, from April 2016 to March 2019, Black Britons were twice as likely to be living in low-income households than their white counterparts. Furthermore, although most UK households do have internet access (96%), technological disadvantages are more prominent in households of BAME students.[63,64] Moreover, BAME students' parents and carers are less likely to have sources of income to procure internet utilities or digital devices for remote learning. An estimated 200,000 students lacked the technology that would have allowed them to receive lessons online, with a further estimate of 700,000 students needing access to proper technology.[65,66] Whilst up-to-date figures that provide a comprehensive ethnic breakdown of students most affected by the technological divide are difficult to establish, the known intersections of income-based poverty and race point to the likelihood of significant digital disparities for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic families and students.

Suspension of public examinations, predicted grades, and teacher assessment

The suspension of public examinations in Summer 2020 led to confusion and upset as it became evident that the algorithm used to moderate the teacher predicted grades submitted by schools resulted in many students receiving lower grades. The students most likely to suffer were from disadvantaged backgrounds.[67] Following this debacle, the Minister for Education decided to revert to teacher assessed grades. However, it is unclear how this impacted the progression and outcomes of BAME students. A study by researchers at Birmingham and Nottingham universities[68] currently underway notes 82% white pupils, 67% Black and 42% Asian pupils felt satisfied with the way in which their schools dealt with the COVID crisis.

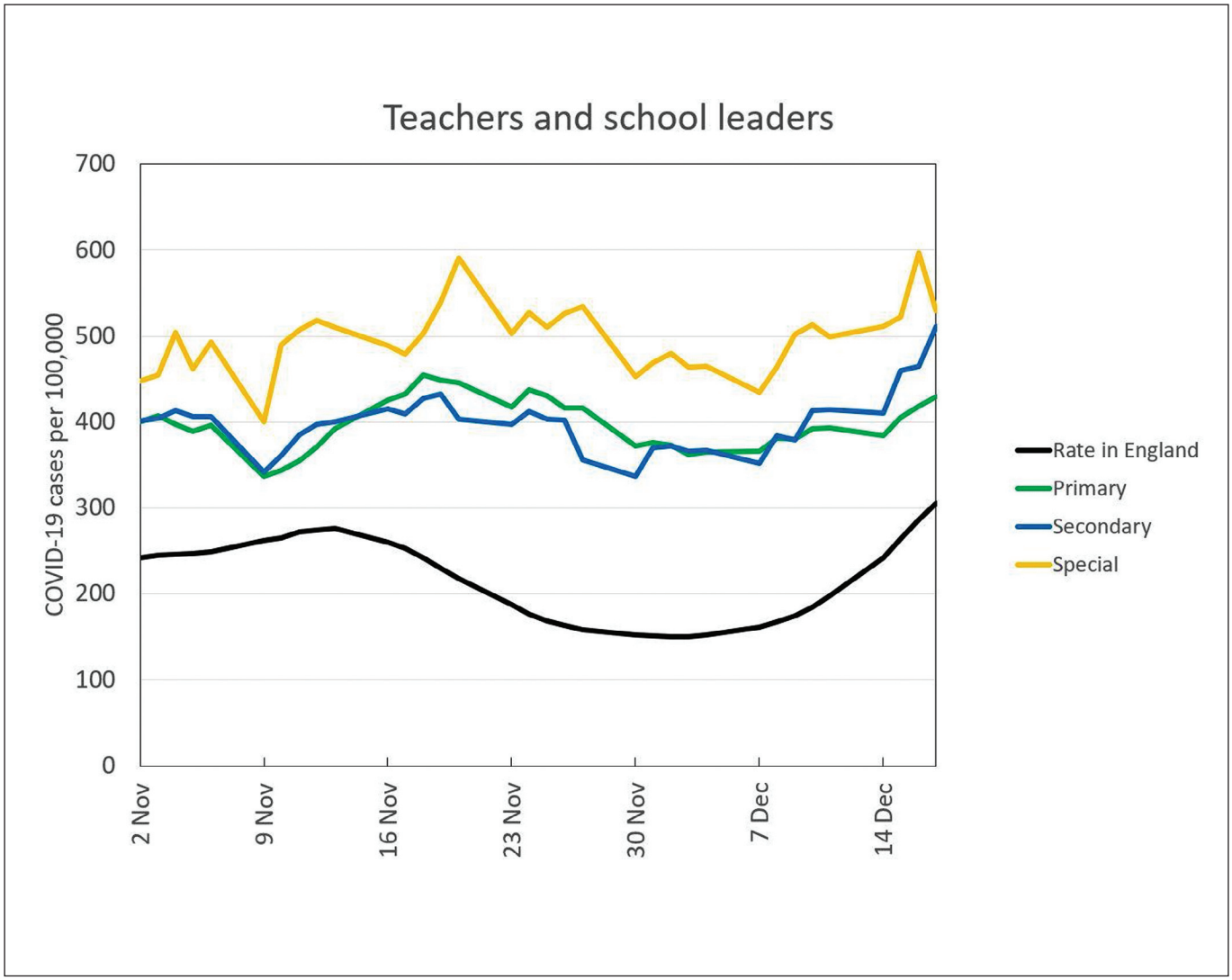
The impact of school closures on Autumn 2020 attainment shows students who were already low-attaining, those eligible for the Pupil Premium and those attending schools in more deprived areas tended to show greater declines in attainment than their peers. This indicates that pre-existing educational disparities have been exacerbated by school closures and lockdown.[57]

In 2021 students will again be graded using teachers' assessments of their students' course work and mock exam results. Based on previous research related to predicted grades and teacher assessment it is likely disadvantaged BAME students may well be adversely affected by this replacement exam regime.[69] It should be noted that research[70] shows BAME males in low socioeconomic groups are more disadvantaged in regard to social mobility and suffer lower income outcomes compared to white working class males. This data would suggest that in future years BAME males disadvantaged by the suspension of public exams in 2021 will suffer the consequences of structural racism throughout their lifetimes.

3. COVID-19 Effects on Black, Asian and minority ethnic teachers

The pandemic has impacted education and staff worldwide have scrambled to retain momentum in students' progression within educational systems. Differences in access to technology, political bodies, and health services all play a major part in how school leaders forge ahead with academic agendas. Department for Education data for COVID infections shows it is 1.9 times higher for teachers and 3 times higher for teaching assistants than the general population. Given that 92.7% of headteachers are white[35] and most of BAME teachers are classroom based it is clear they were exposed to higher risk of infection and were more likely to succumb to the virus.

Chart 3. Impact of COVID on school workforce I School Staff Covid-19 Rate



Source: NEU (2021). Impact of COVID on school workforce.[71]

Excessive workloads were one of the main concerns of teachers prior to the pandemic. Inordinate marking that did not enhance pupil growth, lesson planning that did not support pupil outcomes and immoderate usage of pupil data and assessments as 'performance management objectives for teachers' are examples of the pre-pandemic pressures experienced by teachers.[71,72,73,74]

School closures have clearly impacted teaching. Teachers have worked long hours to retain continuity of face-to-face learning for children of key workers whilst attempting to plan home learning and deliver some teaching online for students at home. Workload pressures increased and many teachers worked through their Easter 2020 vacation to provide on-going learning support and cover for the children of key workers.

Teachers have been especially overwhelmed by additional factors beyond their control, such as the transition to the digital classroom. In the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) recent COVID-19 Educational Response states:

> When schools close, especially unexpectedly and for unknown durations, teachers are often unsure of their obligations and how to maintain connections with students to support learning. Transitions to distance learning platforms tend to be messy and frustrating, even in the best circumstances. In many contexts, school closures lead to furloughs or separations for teachers.[48]

In the face of the challenges of teaching and providing high quality education during school closures and the subsequent opening of schools, headteachers were advised by their professional bodies to consider the workload and well-being of teachers as a priority.[75]

The British Education Research Association (BERA) organised a media series entitled, The Impact of COVID-19.[78] to address the unprecedented challenges administrators, teachers, and students faced during the pandemic. Allana Gay, a headteacher and co-founder of the grassroots organisation, BAMEed Network, discussed specific health and well-being issues for BAME teachers. Early in the pandemic, with the high rate of BAME deaths for National Health Service (NHS) workers compared to their white colleagues, BAMEed observed similarities in the workplace conditions of BAME teachers—the forward-facing service positions, longer work hours, strong work-ethics, extended family living conditions, and prevalence of pre-existing medical concerns equated to greater risk exposure to the virus.[76]

By May 2020, the BAMEed Network published a COVID-19 workplace risk assessment guidance as remediation of COVID-19 risk for BAME teachers. The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) pandemic guidance for Black, Asian and minority ethnic school members was based on Public Health England (PHE) empirical data of inequalities found in the unique health and well-being status of the BAME community.[79] Whereas BAMEed located the responsibility for the COVID-19 risk assessment with the senior leadership team, the EIS guidance encumbered BAME teachers with the responsibility for their own risk assessment. The EIS claimed difficulty in assessing 'specific risks related to BAME members', therefore, Black, Asian and minority ethnic members were incorporated into 'other vulnerable groups' .[3] EIS also advised the individual BAME school members to contact their headteachers to voice pandemic risk concerns, arrange for individual risk assessments, engage with association representatives, and, if necessary, educate their headteachers with an EIS-prepared letter that the BAME members must forward. The EIS manner of addressing the health and well-being of the BAME teachers may have resulted in less effective COVID risk mitigation as studies[33,77] have shown that Black, Asian and minority ethnic teachers are typically silenced, marginalised, and subject to microaggressions that may prohibit active participation in their schools.

Before the pandemic, teachers faced high levels of mental health issues due to work related stress, often more than other occupations.[80,81] From 23 March 2020 primary, secondary and higher education were online. Unless the school leaders had previously implemented virtual learning policies, most staff, and students faced a paradigm-shift in education.

As we now live in a world with COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown measures across the UK, it is highly likely that teachers will continue to face stressors above their usual capacity.

Teachers reported they were dissatisfied with the quality of in-school teaching. Almost three-quarters of teachers (74 per cent) did not feel able to teach to their usual high standard.[41] For BAME teachers, the pandemic compacted stressors as they processed ongoing political, economic, and social issues in their workplaces and wider society—intersectional discriminations, pandemic effects on income, and remote teaching challenges—complicating their already complex work lives.

4. Conclusions and implicationss

This briefing is intended as a starting point for a continued discussion about the educational and wider impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities in the UK. At this stage then, we offer a number of implications, drawn from our analysis of the evidence. In doing so, we hope to contribute a compass heading for those future initiatives that seek to address concerns and patterns of inequality that we have documented.

What is clear is that pre-existing and well-evidenced racial disparities in the educational experiences and outcomes for children and young people from BAME communities are brought into sharp focus by the current public health crisis. These structural inequalities are complex in their intersectionality and are thus not effectively explained by focus on one factor alone. Similarly, any response in policy and practice terms must be a collective one. It will involve multi-professional working of considerable sophistication. Perhaps more fundamental in this will be the need to reach professional agreement about those institutional processes that may themselves stand in the way of success. This collaborative knowledge building and future planning is made significantly more difficult by renewed and re-invigorated discourses of denial and dismissal where institutional racism is concerned. Such rebuttal is not new but, once again, it shows us the mountain to climb and the careful steps we need to take together.

For education, the specific implications are that:

1. Students from BAME communities, intersected by poverty are most likely to have fewer means to establish the sort of certainties for sustained engagement that catching up will require. These are a mixture of resource limitations that precede COVID-19 and those that are consequences of it, as the downward economic pressures are exerted unevenly on different families and communities. The widening of educational achievement gaps for these communities over time is a real concern.

2. Persistent economic and environmental factors will continue to act disproportionately on learning and development, impacting upon all phases of education. Such factors will be manifest in the further limitations for students to find learning ‘spaces’ in which they can develop fluency and confidence through practice, concentration and support.

3. The rate of recovery for BAME students in educational terms may be slowed by both existing factors relating to structural racism as well as those reliant on professional judgements/ assessments made in specific light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The persistence of underachievement under these circumstances may reinforce uninformed presuppositions about parental engagement and support.

4. The professional challenge posed by COVID-19 recovery raises questions about the recruitment and retention of school staff; the need for school’s access to allied professionals (e.g. in health and well-being) in supporting families; the need for collaborative working across school and wider educational structures that have become more fragmented.

5. Teachers from BAME communities, whilst attending to their own risks post-COVID, may experience further pressures and workloads as they respond to managerial expectations to be central to an institution’s address of progression and outcome gaps for BAME students. There are implications here for ways educational establishments could fall short of collective, holistic strategies of recovery by placing emphasis on racialised and gendered conceptualisations of role modelling for BAME students.

6. Previous institutionalised judgements/perceptions about communities and variations in engagement with education may be further amplified at a time when schools will be under pressure to close gaps and evidence ‘catching up’ by means of blunt instruments of accountability, insensitive to local circumstances and demographics.

5. Questions for discussion

The circumstances resulting from the pandemic give us opportunities to examine professional practice and achievement 'gaps' that are mediated by race for the purpose of interrupting long standing inequalities. Focusing our intellectual and practical energies on the concern that gaps may widen, is a necessary focus on achievement inequalities, long overdue.

In the interests of such interruption, we offer some questions to initiate discussion:

1. At a school and classroom level, what gaps in evidence and professional knowledge will need to be addressed to better identify and respond to students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities falling behind?

2. The pandemic stands as an example of how engagement in learning is subject to structural forces, beyond the control of individuals and families. How might the relationship between school, home and community best develop from here to better address students' achievement, development, and well-being?

3. At local, regional, national, and transnational levels, how might schools, teachers and allied professional services work together to build the necessary collaborative knowledge, understanding and strategies for recovery that properly acknowledge how race and achievement intersect?

4. At a strategic level, what needs to happen to ensure that activities and commitments to address issues of race and achievement are sustainable beyond the energies and professional investments of individuals, and that they survive the immediate phase of post-pandemic recovery?

5. How might the intellectual energies of the Higher Education community be best mobilised to contribute to a collective intelligence at school and local levels that helps inform, disseminate, and evidence professional practice supporting recovery?

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Collaboratives on addressing racial inequity in covid recovery

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