

# Racial Harassment in Schools

A Guide for Parents, Guardians and Carers  
of children and young people using racist  
language or racially harassing other people



## Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for anyone whose child has been involved in racial harassment or using racist language at school.

Racist behaviour can affect anyone, whatever background they come from. People from any ethnic background can be racially harassed. Similarly, anyone can racially harass other people. Action needs to be taken when a child or young person racially harasses other people because it harms other children, their families, their community and wider society.

It is also in a child's best interests to stop using racist language or harassing others as soon as possible. If they don't stop, they risk being excluded from school. They also risk getting a criminal record.

This leaflet explains what racial harassment is and tells you about how you can help your child stop.





## What does the law say?

Race is legally defined on three grounds: colour, nationality and national origin. This means that whenever harassment involves one or more of these three factors it is considered to be racial harassment. Harassment based on religious or language differences can also fall under this heading.

The law states that racial harassment is a crime. The law also says Local Authorities and schools must provide services that treat everyone equally and fairly. In addition, since September 2007, schools have had a legal duty to promote community cohesion. Racial harassment is therefore always treated seriously.

The report that was produced after the death of Stephen Lawrence said that for the purposes of reporting and recording:

“A racist incident is **any** incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person.”

The report said this because in the past, racial incidents have often not been reported and investigated properly.

Schools therefore have a duty to make sure that **all incidents which are reported to them** as racial incidents, or are thought by staff to be racial incidents, are recorded, properly investigated and reported to the Local Authority (even if the investigation finds that an incident was not racist).

Racist language and behaviour may sometimes be unintentional, especially when children are young. Nevertheless, the impact on the victim, their family and the community as a whole can still be serious. All such cases should therefore still be recorded by schools as racial incidents.

Racial harassment can be:

- physical attack, the threat of being hurt or other threatening behaviour;
- racist name calling or making fun of people;
- provocative behaviour, such as staring or following people around;
- racist abuse, insults, threats, or using words which other people think are racist – either verbally or in texts, emails or on line;
- not including or allowing other people to take part because of skin colour, religion, language or racial group;
- bringing things into school which have racist writing or pictures, for example books, leaflets, badges or graffiti;
- encouraging others to be racist;
- abusing possessions.



Racial harassment doesn't always involve obvious well known racist language. Any references to colour, nationality and national origin which upset other people will be treated as racist.

## **What you can do if your child is found to be racially harassing other people at school**

We ask all parents, guardians and carers to work together with their child's school to help stop racism. It is very important to sort problems out, rather than letting them continue.

Please talk to your child. For example you could explain that:

- someone else found what they said/did upsetting;
- racism is taken very seriously by schools and society in general (schools want to protect children from being hurt);
- racism is a serious issue for Britain and schools want to help everyone to learn to get on well together;
- racism is serious because around the world – a lot of people have been very badly hurt when it has motivated violent actions;
- schools have to take any reports of racist behaviour very seriously and there will be tougher sanctions if the behaviour continues;
- parents, guardians and carers of children who have been hurt or upset by racism can report incidents to the police.

## School Procedures

Schools have a duty to protect children and young people from racial harassment and must have a policy for dealing with racial harassment and promoting good relations between people from different racial backgrounds. Schools also have a duty to record all racial incidents that are reported to them. They must report all incidents to the Local Authority soon after they happen. Each year schools should also report the total number of incidents to their Governing Body.

This means that if a racist incident has occurred the school will look into it carefully and take action.

The Local Authority in Somerset has given guidance to schools about ways to investigate and deal with racial harassment. Further support is also provided when requested.

When schools report incidents to the Local Authority, they do not include children's names. However, if a child or young person continues with racist behaviour, a school may seek support from the Local Authority. If they do this, it is important to remember that they are not only protecting children from racial harassment, but also trying to help your child, stop them being excluded from school and in the longer term possibly ending up with a criminal record.





**If you would like further advice and support, please contact your child's school. You can also contact Somerset County Council:**

**Tel: 0845 345 9122**



Produced by the Children & Young People's Directorate,  
Somerset County Council.

**For additional copies, please contact: The Equalities and  
Diversity Team, Children and Young People's Directorate,  
Somerset County Council 01823 356644**

## **Working together for equalities**



This document is also available on request in Braille, large  
print, tape or disc and can be translated into different  
languages.



This leaflet was updated in May 2009.