



Policy Briefing (Issue 23) **Race on the Agenda**

‘Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system’ –The DCSF White Paper and its impact for BAME communities

ROTA is a social policy think-tank focusing on issues that affect Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. ROTA aims to increase the capacity of BAME organisations and strengthen the voice of BAME communities through increased civic engagement and participation in society. ROTA is a membership organisation, a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee set up in 1997 to take over from GLARE (Greater London Action on Race Equality) originally set up in 1984. ROTA is the host for MiNet: the London focused BAME network, which joined ROTA in 2002 to strengthen the voice for London's BAME voluntary and community sector (VCS) in the development of regional policy. ROTA provides policy infrastructure support, voice and representation to BAME and equality organisations, and influences social policy at regional and national level by providing voice and representation, Carrying out and publishing in-depth research, holding regular networking and policy events, producing free and accessible publications, working in partnership and providing policy training.

Introduction

In July 2009 the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published its School's White Paper – ‘Your child, your schools, our future’. The document set out the government's plans for the England's school system, and proposed partnerships across sectors for its delivery. With regards to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities its proposals will have an impact on:

1. BAME organisations delivering services for young people, their families or within an educational setting.
2. BAME children, young people and their families' experiences and expectations of the education system.

This briefing will summarise the key proposals of this White Paper and consider the impact that these could have on BAME organisations and BAME communities. The key proposals that this briefing will focus on are:

1. The proposed pupil and parent guarantees

2. Partnership working
3. The role of Central Government, Local Authorities and Children's Trusts
4. School Report Cards and School Performance
5. The Workforce.

This briefing will also identify gaps in the document as it stands, and ROTA will seek to engage with the DCSF and the BAME third sector to raise these concerns as the proposals are developed.

For the full White Paper and Equality Impact Assessment please visit <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/21stcenturyschoolssystem/>

General Implications for the BAME Sector and the Communities it serves

This White Paper has a number of broad implications for the BAME Third Sector and the communities that it serves. A recent internal consultation that ROTA conducted with the BAME Third Sector identified education as a top policy priority, and the potential impact of this White Paper demonstrates why this remains the case.

With a strong focus on partnership working, between schools and other education and wider service providers, the proposals in the document offer opportunities for the BAME sector to engage with their local authority on both a strategic and a practical level. Attention paid to the role of parents and the various ways in which to support parents has potential impact on BAME families and organisations who work to support them. The emphasis on the work of local authorities and the responsibility placed at a local level to co-ordinate and monitor school performance creates opportunities for local groups to engage with schools and funding in place to form partnerships. Potential changes to the National Curriculum with also impact on BAME young people, and the importance of a flexible and broad approach to education creates new opportunities for engagement.

However, there are also proposals which could potentially cause difficulties for BAME communities and organisations. The lack of attention paid to the existence and impact of discrimination is a key concern and one that will be highlighted by ROTA directly to the DCSF. The document places little emphasis on the experiences of BAME pupils or the roles of BAME services or BAME representation in the school workforce. There is a potential for increased competition between schools if proposals around School Report Cards and partnership arrangements are not appropriately managed. Finally the introduction of a pupil and parent guarantee, while outlining what the public can expect from the education system, also creates opportunities for BAME families to be penalised if they are not properly supported to understand, navigate and engage with the education system. Given these concerns it is crucial that the BAME sector works together to engage with this legislation from the outset, to ensure the views of BAME communities are considered and that any negative impact upon communities and organisations are reduced.

Key Proposals

While the original White Paper has a lot of detail, ROTA has identified five key proposals that will potentially impact upon BAME communities and organisations. Therefore this briefing focuses on these areas, in the context of the wider document, alongside the Children's Plan and the Every Child Matters Framework.

The role of Central Government, Local Authorities and Children's Trusts

The paper outlines how, by 2010, local authorities will have the responsibility for commissioning education provision and children's services for those aged 0-19, and up to 25 for those who are disabled or have learning difficulties. Presented as having the 'role of a strategic commissioner', local authorities will be the 'key commissioner of services for young people' responsible for learning and skills provision.

Local authorities will have to work in partnership with Children's Trusts. Children's Trusts will be a partnership of schools and wider services, whose board should have representation from schools and wider partners including the third sector. The local authority would be required to ensure that these boards have representation from all partners. The Children's Trust would also be positioned with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and therefore seek to influence the priorities for Local Area Agreements. It is crucial that BAME organisations who work with children and young people ensure BAME representation on the Children's Trust Board, are engaged in the trust and have BAME views fed up to the LSP.

The document therefore sees central government as being responsible for the National Curriculum and testing system, ensuring fairness of a funding system and regulating minimum standards and fair access to school places. Where the DCSF believes that a local authority is not making the necessary improvements they can challenge that authority. The proposal is that the relationship between the DCSF and local authorities mirrors that which should exist between the local authorities and schools.

The implications of this for BAME organisations are significant. The majority of work would take place at local authority level and within the Children's Trust for that area. Therefore, for local BAME groups it is essential that they understand the structures in place, and how they can be used to influence local area priorities and therefore potential funding to meet the needs which they identify for BAME communities. Likewise, it is crucial that BAME infrastructure organisations are clear on the role of central government, and the extent to which changes in implementation can be affected by influencing government departments, and when the responsibility has become a local one. Working with BAME networks, such as MiNet for London, to ensure that the experiences of BAME children, young people and their families are communicated at all levels, from the grass roots up is one way to circulate a message. Likewise, BAME organisations have to be supported to engage with local structures directly and represent communities where necessary.

Pupil and Parent Guarantees

The White Paper introduces both a pupil and parent guarantee which respectively outline what pupils and parents can expect from schools, as well as what schools can expect from them.

Pupil Guarantee:

This focuses on behaviour, discipline, order and safety; the school curriculum; teaching methods that meet needs; the provision of sport and cultural activities; and the promotion of health and well being. Within these areas the document outlines what schools are already expected to do and what more this guarantee offers.

The fact that the pupil guarantee outlines the importance of flexible curriculum that is relevant to pupils is welcomed, and the broader options for ages 14-19 could incentivise more young people to be willingly engaged in education. However, it is important that these options are well communicated to pupils, parents and those organisations advising or supporting BAME young people, given the evidence that some BAME young people will be entered into lower tiered exams based on the perception that they are less capable than others. This discrimination needs to be addressed in advance of these plans coming to fruition in 2013 to prevent the same patterns appearing with those advised to take diplomas.

While this guarantee seeks to offer pupils a tool to engage with school policy and have expectations for their school experience, there are some difficulties with it at present. The first concern for ROTA is the perceived prioritisation of behaviour over curriculum, teaching methods, activities and health and well being. From the work that ROTA has conducted on school exclusions and serious youth violence it is evident that much unacceptable behaviour can be linked to poor provision in the other sections of this guarantee, for example disengagement from the curriculum or specific needs around emotional and mental health needs. Given the disproportionate numbers of certain BAME group who are excluded from mainstream education, the prioritisation of behaviour and order, coupled with a lack of consideration given to managing exclusions and their use is a concern.

Checking progress and seeking to support children and young people also features in the guarantee when considering teaching methods. However the offer of one-on-one and group support is focused in primary school and Year 7. Evidence suggests that it is between Year 7 and Year 9 that attainment levels of some BAME groups begin to drop; the proposed interventions do not address this and therefore may not improve the performance of all groups.

Parent Guarantee

The Parent Guarantee seeks to provide parents and carers with the information they need to support their child and make decisions. They also set out both the rights and the responsibilities for parents, and offers access to wider support services and advice.

It is crucial that BAME organisations, who work in either an advice giving capacity, or to support families, engage schools with this guarantee. Research has

demonstrated the different ways in which some BAME parents exercise choice and the difficulties that they have with navigating school systems, in particular engaging with appeals processes and entering examinations. Therefore, while the guarantee seeks to offer this support, schools and the local authority must take into account the fact that for some BAME families engaging with schools is more effective with grass roots or community based support. It is also important that BAME parents and carers are supported by BAME groups to understand what they can expect from schools, what they can question and what they can express.

The parent guarantee also refers to school governors, which reflects the commitment in the document to encourage governor participation from minority groups. Once again the BAME third sector has a role to play in supporting and empowering BAME parents and carers to become governors as well as raising potential barriers to this engagement with schools, Children's Trusts and central government in order to maximise impact.

Partnership Working between the BAME Third Sector and Others

While the White Paper does outline the importance of schools not working alone, and forming partnerships within the local area, there is limited recognition or exploration of the role that the third sector in general, or the BAME third sector, could play in this. Furthermore, there is much weight placed on the accreditation of service providers, which could potentially limit BAME grass-roots' engagement in the absence of support. Many community based BAME service providers do not have the capacity or resource to be accredited in the same way that national and larger organisations do. Therefore, any accreditation process would have to attempt to include smaller groups in this process and take into consideration the differences in the services they provide.

The Children, Young People and Families Grants Programme which is run by the DCSF (and out for consultation at present) as well as their recently published Third Sector Strategy and Action plan do take into account the differences in capacity and resources of community based groups. It is important for policy organisations to raise this in relation to the White Paper on occasion where partnership specific proposals are consulted on. If this is left out then it is unlikely that BAME groups will be fully engaged in the partnership process, or benefit from this proposed structure in any way. This would be a missed opportunity to better support BAME children and young people in education, as well as their families and carers.

In addition to the above concerns, partnership working between schools is important to address the isolation that some 'failing' schools experience, compared to others in a local area. Following the introduction of Choice and Competition between schools in the 1980's, BAME families who were less aware of the application systems and who couldn't afford to move into catchment areas were isolated in less well-performing schools. League tables have sustained this divide and competition between schools, and potential partnerships between schools of varying levels of achievement could be one way to begin to address such divisions.

School Report Cards and School Performance

It is proposed that School Report Cards (SRC) be introduced from 2011. These would report on outcomes across a school's responsibility including attainment, progress, well-being of pupils and reducing the impact of disadvantage, as well as recording the views of parents and pupils. The DCSF will be working with Ofsted to develop the card next year and launch a prospectus of it. The proposal acknowledges that it is important to be clear on how comparisons could be made between schools that face different experiences. The DCSF Expert Group on Assessment have asked that the cards be brought in as soon as possible to replace the Achievement and Attainment tables which currently receive most public attention. It is the aim of the DCSF that this card will run alongside the Ofsted report at the centre of monitoring school performance and holding them accountable.

The introduction of SRC's has the potential to offer a fairer and clearer picture of school performance and success. The competition that exists between schools, based on current levels of monitoring success through league table positions, matched against parents who are fully engaged with the system and can afford to move if necessary, has seen BAME children isolated in a number of schools which have been labelled as 'failing'. If a broader reporting system is put in place, and partnerships between schools is something which is reported upon, then the extent to which schools will be operating in isolated competition with one another could be reduced.

However, if this system is to support BAME families in choosing schools to attend, and BAME children who are in school, then support must be offered to parents to understand the system from the outset. It will be important for organisations who work with BAME families to fully understand the SRC system and advise parents in light of this. If BAME families are not supported to engage with this new system, competition between schools could isolate communities further and gaps between schools in local areas could increase, in spite of incentives for partnership work. The DCSF has suggested that they will consult further on how SRC performance will be reported, and it important that the BAME sector remain engaged with this. The DCSF have stated that 'we recognise that the way an overall score is constructed would be critical to its success with schools, the education community, parents and the public.

The Workforce

The document, as it stands, only makes one reference to representation in the school workforce, and this is in reference to school governors. This specific proposal states that the DCSF will be working with the Government Equalities Office to improve the 'low take-up of these roles from under-represented groups'. Given that the majority of the White Paper focuses on action at a local level, ROTA would expect that any significant engagement of potential school governors would also have to take place locally, and be coordinated by groups working with isolated and/or under-represented communities. At present any specific plans or guidance to reflect this expectation is missing from the document.

With regards to the wider workforce within schools, and those working from external bodies, there is no reference to BAME specific representation or under-representation. Given the volume of research which indicates a need for greater staff training regarding equalities issues, as well as evidence that teacher perceptions of pupils affect the expectations that they have of both their behaviour and academic attainment, ROTA would expect to see issue acknowledged directly.

Finally, references made to staff that attend schools from external organisations, including third sector groups imply that they will be supported with training. The White paper acknowledges that 'there has been a dramatic increase in the number of other professionals...working in schools, carrying out key tasks' and 'the wider workforce will also play a broader role beyond the classroom when some pupils need further support'. It is crucial any engagement of BAME organisations to support school delivery is achieved through a fair and supportive partnership. Furthermore, local BAME organisations should be encouraged to fulfil these roles and not sidelined in favour of larger generic service delivery.

If the school workforce is to meet the needs of all of its pupils then it needs to be diverse in its experience and expertise. It is crucial that BAME organisations engage with the DCSF and with Children's Trusts on this issue from the outset.

Gaps for Consideration

While the White Paper is very detailed, and makes a number of solid proposals for action that could potentially be of benefit to BAME communities and organisations, there remain gaps.

The most significant of these gaps is the lack of reference made to the existence and impact of discrimination in schools. This is so absent that even in the concluding paragraphs of the document it states that the proposals will 'create a system which progressively breaks the links between deprivation, disadvantage, disability and low educational attainment'; no reference is made to discrimination experienced by pupils both within and outside schools. This is a concern, especially when considered within the context of wider policy trends to focus on deprivation and disadvantage to the detriment of discrimination work. It is crucial that BAME organisations rebut this trend and highlight specific instances where discrimination needs to be tackled in its own right. Education is a specific area where one can distinguish between concerns of discrimination and those of deprivation. Conversely, the evidence used in the White Paper ignores this and conflates the two by conflating a number of issues into one such as in the following example:

'Living in a family on low income, having special educational needs or disabilities, and being looked after...all remain strongly linked to poor outcomes and low educational achievement, and are compounded by gender factors. For example:

76 per cent of girls from affluent Chinese backgrounds achieve five A-C grades GCSEs ...while only 16 per cent of white boys eligible for free school meals achieve this threshold.'*

This example fails to capture racial discrimination and conflates possible differences between ethnic groups with differences of socio-economic status. Other attainment statistics would demonstrate that regardless of class or socio-economic status some BAME groups have low attainment at GCSE levels.

Likewise, disproportionate levels of Black African, Black Caribbean, Irish Traveller and Mixed Black Caribbean and White pupils are excluded on a fixed or permanent basis from mainstream education. These examples of discrimination are not tackled directly in the White Paper, where as the impact of deprivation is, and as such have the potential to be lost or sidelined. While the Equality Impact Assessment for this White Paper acknowledges under-performance at GCSE level for some BAME groups it makes no reference to direct action to address this, and only focuses on addressing the impact of deprivation and special educational needs.

Moving Forward

Moving forwards from this policy briefing, ROTA will be seeking to engage with the DCSF directly to raise concerns regarding the White Paper and offer expertise to address them. We would also like to hear the views of BAME organisations in response to this White Paper and what you would like ROTA to co-ordinate for you in response to it. Potential work could be support through our networks to engage with local Children's Trusts about including BAME representation on their boards and raising any local BAME concerns within the Local Strategic Partnership. If you feel that as a BAME organisation you would like to explore with ROTA ways of responding to and working with the White Paper please contact Carlene on 020 7902 1177 or carlene@rota.org.uk

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