

Governors' responsibilities on dealing with racial harassment in Bristol schools

Responsibilities of Governing Bodies on Race Equality

We are now four years on since the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) (RRAA) came into force placing a number of specific and general duties on schools.

Governors are the "responsible body" for implementing the Act, so any breaches, lack of progress or acts of discrimination within the school, could result in legal action against them rather than the staff.

The duties are as summarised below:

General Duty

The general duty means that governing bodies must have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity
- promote good relations between people of different racial groups

Specific duties

The specific duties are intended to help schools meet the general duty. The specific duties are:

- prepare and maintain a written race equality policy
- assess the impact of all policies on pupils, parents and staff from different racial groups. In particular, schools should assess whether their policies have, or could have, an adverse impact on the attainment levels of pupils
- take reasonable practicable steps to publish results of their monitoring each year, highlighting the trends and issues they plan to address

Recording and reporting racist incidents

To meet the General Duty and comply with the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) statutory Code Of Practice, schools should record, monitor and report all racist incidents, as outlined in the DFEE circular 10/99 'school inclusion: pupil support' section 4.32

'All schools' behaviour policies must make clear that racial harassment will not be tolerated and say how staff and pupils should deal with it. The school should record all racist incidents, and parents and governors should be informed of such incidents and the action taken to deal with them. Governing bodies should inform LEAs annually of the pattern and frequency of any incidents'

In April 2004 the LEA issued all schools with guidance folders 'Guidelines for Dealing with Harassment in Bristol Schools'. This also included the new reporting form that should have been implemented from April 2004. The new form has replaced a quarterly method of collecting data, and we are now asking schools to complete one form per incident when they occur and return a copy to the Race Equality Officer in the LEA, a copy should also be retained in the school and this will create a consistent recording and monitoring system and aid the school and governing body to comply with their duties under the Act.

Governors are responsible for reporting to the LEA on the number and nature of racist incidents and taking appropriate action in cases of racial harassment or racial discrimination. Schools should have a trained governor with a responsibility for equality. They should work with the member of staff who monitors the nature and frequency of racist incidents and they ensure that full reports are presented regularly to the governing body.

In addition, every school must have a Race Equality Policy, with an associated Action Plan, and should have a cycle for reviewing all their policies and curriculum areas in the light of the RRAA, and if they receive the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant, should have a plan for its implementation. Governors should be aware of all these documents.

If you would like any further information or support please contact Susan Coombes - E&LL Race Equality Officer. Telephone 0117 9037595 or email susan_coombes@bristol-cit.gov.uk