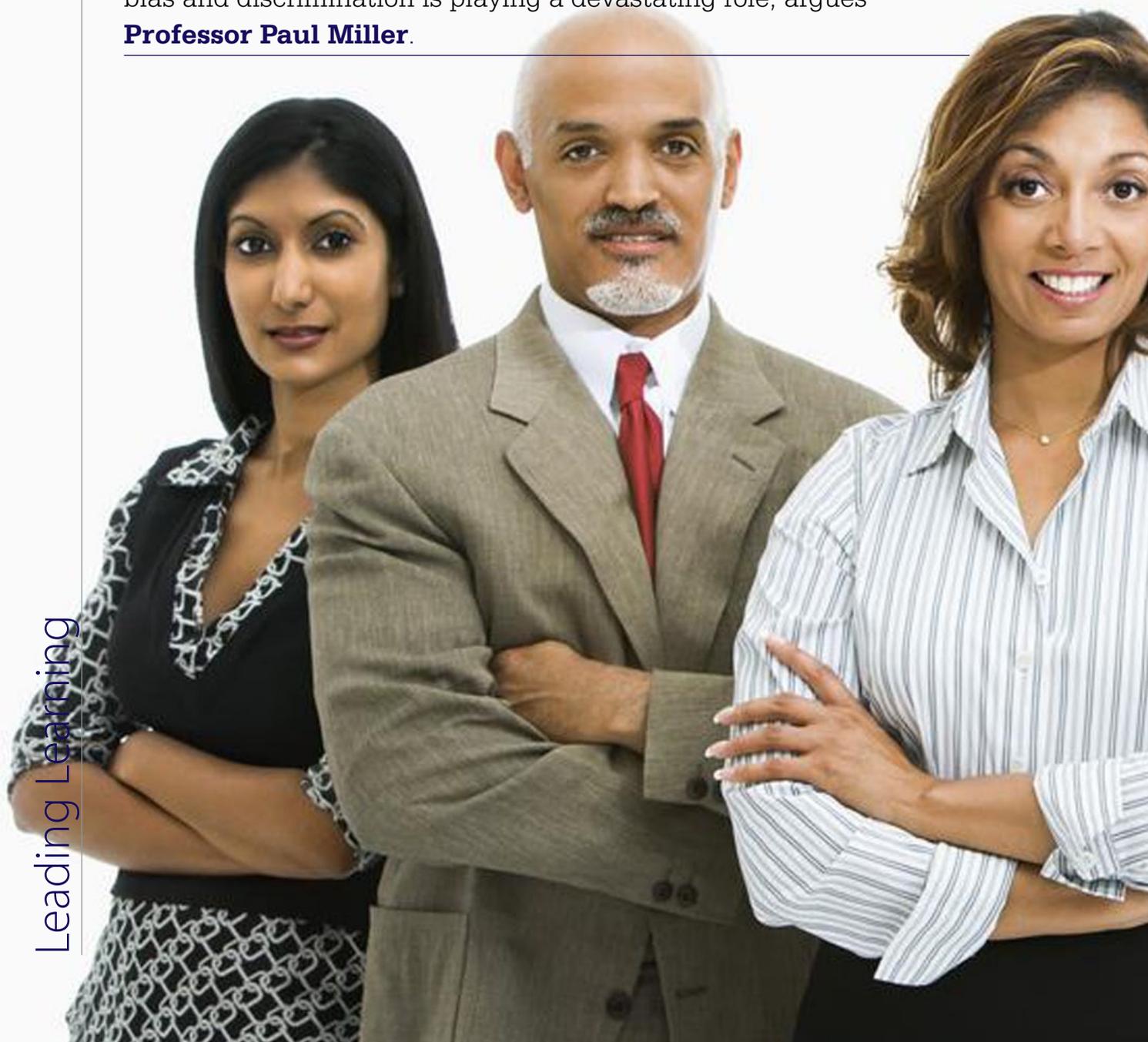


Race in/equality and school leadership: **what can school leaders and governors do?**

No school likes to think of themselves as racist. But subconscious bias and discrimination is playing a devastating role, argues **Professor Paul Miller**.



Over the past decades, race and equality in education in the UK have been merged into broader debates on 'diversity'. Although the merger of race and equality debates points to an environment in which various issues affecting minoritised groups and individuals are to be identified, the merging of race and ethnicity issues under a broad diversity banner has led to an invisibility of the everyday experiences of minority ethnic staff and students in educational institutions.

Despite regulations and policy initiatives, the experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) teachers has not significantly improved as institutional practices appear to lag behind policy positions and official intents, thus creating a gap between intent and outcomes. An area of concern regards that the implementation of current regulations on racial equality in schools is not being adequately and appropriately monitored by government (Miller, 2016), which undermines any intent to change, through the creation of an environment in which schools and other educational institutions are let off the hook for not fulfilling or where they can renege on their racial equality duty.



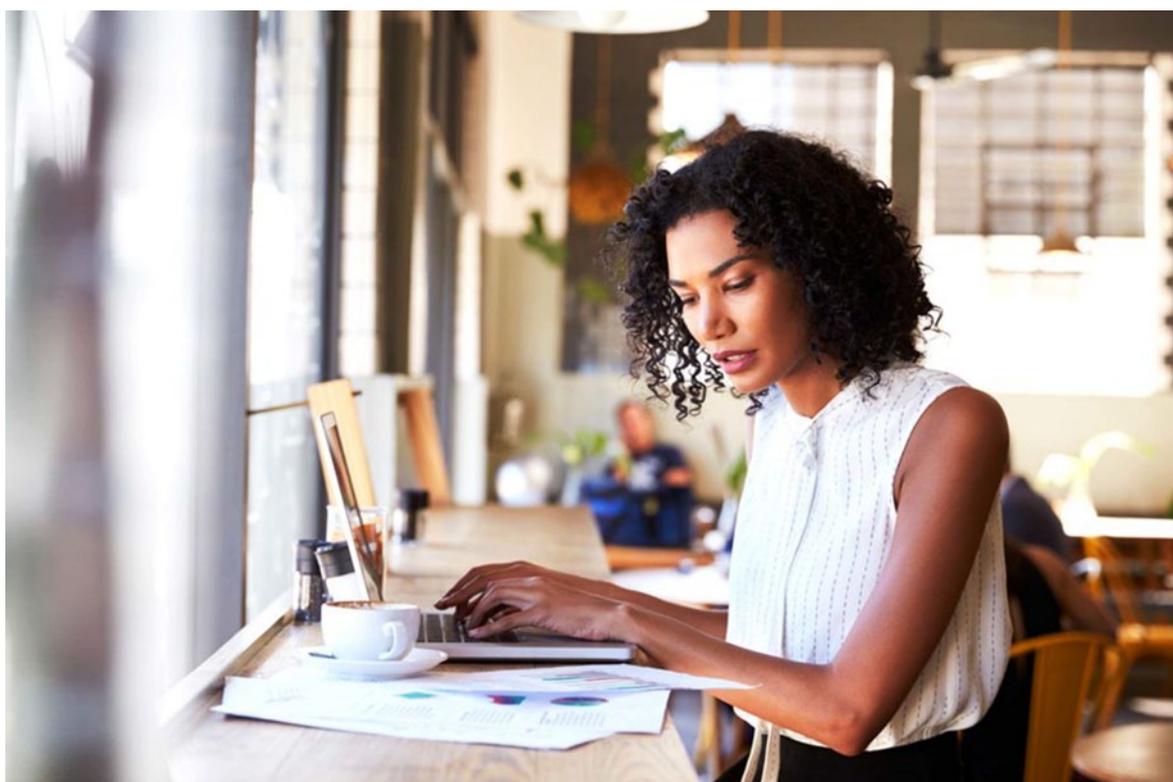
Despite the fact the numbers of BAME students in schools is trending upwards, there is also evidence that the participation of BAME teachers remains disproportionate. This is the same for schools serving majority white and/or majority BAME students. For, despite the unquestionable value and necessity of having teachers and school leaders from BAME backgrounds in schools, schools operate as sites of whiteness (Matias, et al. 2015) – where, despite the ethnic makeup of the student population, almost invariably, teachers and school leaders are predominantly white (Feistritz, 2011); and where leadership is primarily concentrated in the hands of white teachers (Earley, et al. 2012). The research is consistent that BAME teachers tend to occupy mostly entry level and junior positions, and this has nothing to do with lack of aspiration or ambition, but more to do with discriminatory institutional level practices.

BAME students and teachers

BAME students and teachers make up an important part of the overall school population in England. They are an important group of individuals from non-white descent, and, although not a homogeneous group, their experience of the education system in terms of race/ ethnicity-based discrimination is broadly consistent. Whilst this may make our task of understanding race/ ethnic based discrimination in education easier; it also raises questions about the espoused versus the actual role of education and educational leaders in promoting or ensuring race-equality. To support our understanding of these matters, it is important to bring ourselves up to date with the position and status of BAME students and teachers in English schools.

BAME students

As at January 2017, there were 8.67 million pupils enrolled in state-funded and independent schools in England. This is an increase of just under 110,000 pupils, or 1.3%, since 2016. Of the 4,689,660 enrolled at primary schools, 32.1% are from minority ethnic origins; and of the 3,223,090 enrolled at secondary schools, 29.1% are from minority ethnic origins (DfE, 2017a). The proportion of students from minority ethnic origins has been rising steadily since 2006, and makes up 66.3% of the increase in primary school students between 2016 and 2017. Data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) suggests that there are an estimated 1,829,200 UK-domiciled students in higher education. Of this number, there are 33,290 whose ethnicity is unknown. Of the 1,795,910 whose ethnicity is known, there are approximately 21% or 377,225 students from BAME backgrounds (HESA, 2016). Despite the relative numbers of BAME students enrolled in UK educational institutions, it should be noted that numbers for BAME staff and leaders do not always reflect the ethnic makeup of the student body as a whole.



BAME teachers

In November 2016, there were 457,300 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers in state-funded schools in England - of which 86.5% of these were White-British. The percentage of head teachers recorded as White-British was 93.1% in 2016, and 90.4% of assistant and deputy head teachers were recorded as White-British. White-British account for 86.5% (395,564). Teachers from 'Other White Background' (3.8% (17,377)), White-Irish (1.7% (7774)), Indian (1.8% (8231)), Pakistani (1.0% (4573)) and Black Caribbean (1.0% (4573)) backgrounds are the next largest groups of teachers (DfE, 2017b). Of the approximately 20,000 qualified BAME teachers, approximately 1,200 are in leadership roles, of which 6.9%, or just over 230, are headteachers. Although there is some increase in the numbers of BAME teachers and headteachers in post, they show only marginal improvements compared with data from previous years, up to a decade.

The progression of BAME teachers

The progression of teachers and academics is a fraught, complex and contentious affair, and the progression of BAME teachers and academics is arguably more fraught, complex and contentious. There has been a sustained body of research on the progression of BAME teachers and academics, which has focused primarily on the barriers faced by BAME teacher and academics in gaining a promotion/ progression. Recently, however, a new body of research emerged, which examined the issue of BAME progression in terms of the factors which contribute to, or are more likely to aid in progression. Both schools of thought are essential in helping us to formulate an understanding of barriers and/or enablers in the context of progression for BAME teacher and academics.

Barriers to progression: teachers

Pioneering research on headteacher selection in England, by Morgan et al. (1983) found interview panels did not always base selection on clear criteria and selection was sometimes arbitrary. Nearly two decades later, Earley et al. (2002) found that racial/ethnic stereotyping was a factor in the progression/ promotion of BAME teachers to senior roles. This was reconfirmed a decade later, in 2012, by Earley et al. (2002) whose research concluded that ethnic stereotyping remains a problem in the progression/ promotion of BAME teachers. Research has also found that marginalisation and indirect racism (Powney, 2003), as well as the subtle influence of informal networks that excludes some groups (Harris et al., 2003), are factors influencing teacher progression generally, and BAME teacher progression, specifically. Bush et al. (2006) also found racial /ethnic discrimination was a factor in the career progression of some BAME teachers. Furthermore, Lumby and Coleman (2007) also found race/ethnicity was a barrier to the career progression of BAME teachers. A decade later, Lumby and Coleman (2017) found things had not changed much for BAME teachers, whose ethnicity remained a problem to their career progression.

McNamara et al. (2009), in research for the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), found that, although BAME teachers possess similar aspirations, qualifications and experience as other teachers, workplace discrimination was a major barrier to their progression. Research undertaken by Shah and Shaikh (2010) added new insights to existing debates based on findings that religious background and ethnicity can count against a teacher in progression rounds. In particular, they reported that being Muslim and male means a teacher is less likely in gaining an appointment as a headteacher.

'White sanction'

In 2014, from research on teacher progression, Miller found government policy, social connections, and school level jockeying/interference were important in progression decisions. In terms of government policy, recruiting and designing programmes such as TeachFirst and Future Leaders, primarily for graduates with first class degrees, from Oxbridge and similar institutions, places a clear limit on the numbers of BAME students who are likely to get into teaching, but also places those who graduate from such institutions, with the required degree classification at a clear advantage. This is a good example of what Gronn (2005) termed a designed or designer leader. In terms of social connections, progression is not actually based on what skills, qualifications or experiences a person possesses, but on the basis of who one knows or whom one is known by. Furthermore, who one knows or who one is known by, can interfere in

recruitment decisions by causing a candidate to be 'bumped' up or down.

In an integrated study of progression among BAME teachers and academics from a range of different types of schools and universities in England, Miller (2016) concluded that progression/ promotion for BAME teachers and academics is, to a large extent, and in many cases, linked to or reliant upon the support and endorsement of a white colleague, a situation he labelled as "White sanction". Miller defines "White sanction" as a deliberate act "where the skills and capabilities of a BME individual are, first, acknowledged and, second, endorsed/ promoted by a white individual, who is positioned as a broker and/ or mediator acting on behalf of or in the interests of the BME individual." Although acknowledging that "White sanction" is problematic, as it positions white colleagues as gatekeepers, Miller also asserts that "White sanction" *usually* leads to positive outcomes for the BAME individual who has been endorsed by a white colleague. In particular, Miller argues that "White sanction" has two important outcomes: legitimacy (where a BAME teacher or academic and their knowledge, skills and experiences are accepted as equal on the basis of merit); and enabling (where the BAME teacher or academic is afforded different opportunities despite their race/ ethnicity). Miller warns, however, "that not every act of acknowledgement is itself 'white sanction' and, for 'white sanction' to occur, it must satisfy three conditions: acknowledgement/recognition, endorsement and 'brokerage'. Brokerage is about leveraging opportunities for the BME individual" (Miller, 2016, p.11). Miller's conclusions are consistent with conclusions drawn by McClendon (2004) from research on race/ ethnicity in education in the United States of America (USA) that "Whiteness has a certain invisible quality" (McClendon, 2004, p. 223) and power to open and/or close doors.



The Leadership, Equality and Diversity Fund

The government's own recognition of the issue of race inequality in school leadership, led it, in 2014, to introduce the Leadership, Equality and Diversity Fund (LEDF) which is aimed at supporting BAME teachers and teachers from other minoritised group to applying for senior leadership roles. According to the Department for Education, (DfE, 2016), the fund:

"... supports underrepresented groups covered by the protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010, with the aim to increase the diversity of the school leadership workforce. The funding has been provided to 'lead schools' in design and deliver leadership development training to increase leadership diversity. This is the only Department for Education (DfE) funded intervention to specifically tackle the issues faced by underrepresented groups and the programmes tend to contrast to

generic leadership training in that although there is a strong leadership element to the programmes, there also tends to be an element concerned with the protected characteristic the programme is addressing (such as 'race' or 'sex')" (DfE, 2016, p.5).

It should be noted, however, that access to this fund by schools, is through a process of voluntary bidding, and there is no automatic right of schools to receive funding support from this initiative. It is also not immediately clear how 'lead schools' are appointed and what a school could do to become a 'lead school'. That schools, however, have to bid to access this fund to support the development and progression of BAME and other minoritised aspirant school leaders is highly problematic. As yet, there has been no independent evaluation of uptake and/ or impact of this initiative, although the DfE's (2016) own review suggests 655 persons have completed programmes through 40 lead schools.

Institutions and racial equality

As mentioned earlier, despite equality regulations and initiatives being in place, practices at the level of educational institutions have not always reflected the content and spirit of these, indicating a "lack of commitment to change" (Ahmed, 2007, p.236). It is not immediately clear why educational institutions may sometimes exhibit a lack of commitment to change, although the ECU (2011) noted that some initiatives fail due to "the absence of resources and authority for the initiative, and sometimes fatigue and apathy towards new initiatives where previous staff experiences tend to be of unsuccessful initiatives that achieved neither substance nor sustainability" (pp. 46-47). These insightful observations by the ECU highlights the fact that a lack of leadership, the absence of a clear strategy and a lack of resources can translate into the failure of well-meaning interventions. Where leaders of educational institutions fail to commit themselves visibly and enthusiastically, within their institutions, especially, to supporting, investing in and, in some cases, leading racial equality initiatives; or where leaders of educational institutions fail to appoint individuals with a passion and clear mandate for tackling racial inequality, the content, focus, intended meaning and outcomes of such initiatives may be misaligned. Thus, 'doing' racial equality is serious business, and not all educational institutions approach this or can approach this with the degree of enthusiasm and interest required in order to make demonstrable change. There are those educational institutions that do less than the minimum, those that do only the minimum, and those doing more than the minimum to promote and foster racial equality in the area of staffing.

To assist our understanding of how schools and other educational institutions engage with racial equality, let's consider Miller's (2016) typology. Miller provides there are four types of institutions, namely: engaged, experimenting, initiated and uninitiated.

1. In an **'engaged'** institution, there are BAME staff at all levels of its hierarchy, including in (senior) leadership roles.
2. In an **'experimenting'** institution, there are a small number of BME staff in posts and a smaller number of BME staff in leadership roles.
3. In an **'initiated'** institution, there exists a framework for meeting its legal duty, BAME staff recruitment is restricted with only a few BAME staff in posts, but no BAME staff in leadership roles.
4. In an **'uninitiated'** institution, no framework or plan is in place to meet its legal duty and no BAME staff are in posts (Miller, 2016, p. 13).

As mentioned above, implementing racial equality is a complex, multi-faceted endeavour that requires strong leadership – both at the level of specific initiatives and at the institutional level; appropriate and adequate resources, as well as a plan that accounts for the long term and not only or merely short-term wins. Furthermore, Kalra et al. (2009) note that, for diversity initiatives to be productive, changes to institutional cultures must be promoted and implemented. This highlights the need for leadership that is committed in speech and in action, cutting through the paralysis of action associated with diversity issues (Ahmed, 2007; Mirza, 2008).

Race in/equality and school leadership – role of school leaders and governors

Teacher progression is a fraught activity due to the complex nature of educational



institutions, and due to the complex nature of human interactions within them. Despite these complex issues, there needs to be deliberate actions to make educational institutions more racially and ethnically diverse. From their interviews with black male headteachers, Miller and Callender (2018), found their entry into the teaching profession was “accidental” and the result of “White sanction” (Miller and Callender, 2018, p.11). Furthermore, data from the Department for Education (DfE, 2017b) shows that individuals from BAME backgrounds are less likely to enter teaching, since, they are least likely to pass their degrees, and those who pass their degrees are least likely to pass with good grades, thereby being unable to meet the entry requirements for a place on a teacher training programme. This situation deepens the challenge and widens the representation gap, thus restricting the potential pool of prospective BAME teachers, and, ultimately, leaders. Tackling issues to do with the pipeline requires leadership from government and schools, that dovetails in a collective agenda and endeavour, aimed at changing cultures, attitudes and behaviours. That is, initiatives by government must be met by school leaders and governors with *genuine* enthusiasm and support, conceived and delivered from a place of social justice and public duty. As Miller (2016) notes:

“Light-touch and self-serving interactions and interventions are those that are superficial (voluntary or otherwise) and lacking in accountability, and that, by their existence, reify notions of exclusivity which highlight weaknesses in policy leadership and educational practices, from the nursery to university” (Miller, 2016, p. 14).

School leaders: school leaders, primarily headteachers, must use the power associated with their roles to change mindsets and build cultures of inclusion and justice. It is not enough to simply acknowledge the problem of race inequality. On its own, acknowledgment is rather passive, and social justice leadership is active. School leaders are, therefore, called upon to go beyond lip service and to examine official and research data, consult with staff, community interests, researchers and others, as necessary, in seeking not only to understand the severity of the problem, but also to develop and introduce mechanisms of support, such as: mentoring, shadowing, coaching, targeted professional development programmes, etc, that aim to or that can make a difference to BAME teachers. To the BAME teachers, such an active approach demonstrates two things. First, as individuals, the BAME teachers matter and are valued by school leaders. Second, their progression matters to their school’s leadership team.

School governors: the job of the school board is to make a school/ school leaders accountable to the state in the first instance and to the public in the second. These are important functions. As agents of the state, school governors have a duty to insist and ensure that the Equality Act is implemented and that those with protected characteristics are not disenfranchised. As agents of the public, school governors have a duty to question and challenge practices that do not promote equality (in this case racial equality), and to agitate for, demand and insist that programmes and practices to be drafted and implemented in response to said practices.



Leading change in racial equality in school leadership requires courage from both school leaders and school governors. And working in tandem with each other, school governors and school leaders, especially, are responsible for devising workable plans that can retain, if not raise, the confidence of teachers, students and parents. Thus, their status provides them much authority and influence which they can use to challenge and break down systems and barriers, replacing these with structures that encourage and facilitate equity. But meaningful improvements in racial equality in school leadership also require a collective endeavour and a broad-based coalition that appropriately draws upon other voices and talents from different segments within the education sector, including: policy makers, teaching unions, teachers, professional and technical staff and student groups. Crucially, input from BAME teachers and researchers in this area is vital, to help others understand the severity of the issues through lived experiences, and to debate, design and co-develop interventions. The inclusion of BAME actors, however, should not derogate the inclusion of white voices in this collective endeavour, for inasmuch as it is acknowledged that white teachers and school leaders can use their racial privilege to agitate for and lead change, it is also to be acknowledged that racial equality in school leadership is the business of everyone working in the field of education at any level.

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