

**Policy on collecting data on pupils' social  
and ethnic background in England**

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# Issues to address

- Notion of ethnicity
- Policy on data collection regarding social and ethnic background
- Schools and parents
- Uses of data



# Concept of ethnicity

- The concept of ethnicity is subjective and multifaceted and tends to evolve over time
- Likewise ethnic identification is a subjective and multidimensional phenomenon – information on ethnicity difficult to collect
- Not possible to base ethnic identification on an objective and rigid classification of ethnic groups (ONS, 2003)



# Principle of ethnic monitoring

- Controversial for many years - practice became widespread in 1980s
- Arguments against ethnic monitoring:
  - Wrong in principle to distinguish people on the basis of colour
  - Identifying individuals in this way would increase their chances of being discriminated against
  - If information fell into the wrong hands it could be used to discriminate systematically against whole groups (Fitzgerald and Sibbitt, 1997)



# Principle of ethnic monitoring

- Counter arguments:
  - Discrimination was already occurring and would persist whether or not ethnic statistics were available
  - It would be impossible to track down discrimination and disadvantage – or assess policies to deal with them unless there was accurate measurement (Fitzgerald and Sibbitt, 1997)



# Role of local authorities

- Main impetus towards ethnic monitoring came from local authorities
  - Pragmatic considerations: local authorities needed to make case for additional resources – e.g. for urban regeneration and funding for children from minority groups
  - Race Relations Act came into force in 1976: to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups
- Question on ethnicity first included in 1991 census (Fitzgerald and Sibbitt, 1997)



# National reporting by schools

- Since 1990, schools have been required to ask parents the ethnic group of each pupil on entry to primary education and again on entry to secondary education
- National reporting of this information was initially in the form of school totals, allowing for little effective ethnic monitoring
- The Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) specified that monitoring and evaluating the attainment and progress of minority ethnic groups are an essential component of achieving race equality in education (DfEE, 2000)



# Individual pupil level data

- From January 2002:
  - Information about pupils was reported on the basis of individual pupil records
  - Included information on pupils' ethnic group: allowed for systematic monitoring of the progress and achievements of pupils from different ethnic groups
- Benefits:
  - Better information at school level, locally and nationally on the attainment of pupils from different ethnic groups, which can help identify barriers to achievement and inform strategies to raise standards
  - More effective targeting of funding (DfEE, 2000)



## Current policy

- The Department for Education (DfE) requires schools to provide individual level data on pupils' background characteristics, including ethnic background as part of its annual school census
- Data must also be provided on eligibility for free school meals, language spoken
- The data collection is a statutory requirement under the Education Act 1996 (DfE, 2015)



# Ethnicity codes

- Ethnicity codes in the census reflects categories used in the 2001 national population census, with some additional categories and local authorities can add to these with DfE agreement
- Data enable progress of children from different backgrounds to be monitored
- Help schools and local authorities:
  - to identify barriers to achievement
  - to put in place strategies to raise standards
  - to comply with equal relevant equalities legislation
  - to ensure effective allocation and targeting of funding (DfE, 2015)



## Who provides the data?

- The DfE recommends that those with parental responsibility determine the ethnic background for children at primary school.
- Pupils aged 11 to 15 are deemed sufficiently mature to determine their own ethnic background.
- DfE recommends that decisions regarding a pupil's own ethnic identity – if aged between 11 and 15 – are best made with the support and knowledge of their parents (DfE, 2015)



# Uses of data

- School census data are used for school funding, to monitor pupil absence, attendance and attainment
- Data are used by:
  - policy divisions of the DfE
  - other government departments
  - local authorities
  - external agencies
  - educational researchers (with strict confidentiality controls) (DfE, 2015)



# Ethnic groups (DfE, 2015)

White	White – Irish
White	Traveller of Irish heritage
White	Any other white background
White	Gypsy / Roma
White	Gypsy
White	Roma
White	Other Gypsy / Roma
Mixed	White and Black Caribbean
Mixed	White and Black African
Mixed	White and Asian
Mixed	Any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British	Indian
Asian or Asian British	Pakistani
Asian or Asian British	Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British	Any other Asian background
Black or Black British	Black Caribbean
Black or Black British	Black – African
Other Ethnic Groups	Chinese
Other Ethnic Groups	Any other ethnic group
Refused	Refused
Information Not Yet Obtained	Information not yet obtained



# Ethnic groups (broad categories)

White

Mixed

Asian or Asian British

Black or Black British

Other Ethnic Groups

Refused

Information Not Yet Obtained



# References

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