

## **RACE EQUALITY TEACHING**

c/o 38 Hillside Gardens, Highgate, London N6 5ST  
020 8348 2174, gillian@trentham-books.co.uk

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
London SW1

c/o [schoolswhitepaper.team@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:schoolswhitepaper.team@education.gsi.gov.uk)

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Dear Secretary of State

### **The Importance of Teaching: Equality Impact Assessment (EQUIA)**

Thank you for your letter of 24 November. I am replying in my capacity as editor of the journal *Race Equality Teaching* and in consultation with members of the editorial board. The journal was founded almost 30 years ago and has consistently acted as a forum for the discussion of many of the principal topics addressed in *The Importance of Teaching*, and for the dissemination of new research findings and reports from schools and classrooms about successful practice. It is read and consulted throughout the UK and in many other countries.

In principle, we welcome many of the proposals and emphases in *The Importance of Teaching*, including its continuing references to the central role of teachers and other professionals, the need to address socio-economic disadvantage, the significance of Ofsted in holding schools to account, the significance also in this respect of the power of parents and other local citizens, the strategic role of local authorities in championing the needs of pupils and parents and in providing stimulus, challenge and support for schools, and – not least – the need to encourage innovation. With particular regard to race equality, we welcome the recurring references to poor educational outcomes for some though not all communities and to the need to eliminate prejudice-related bullying.

Also, however, we have a number of concerns, particularly about the ways in which issues of race and ethnicity are dealt with in the equality impact assessment (EQUIA) which the Department has published. I will mention these only briefly in this letter, but shall be glad to expand on them in due course. I hope you will refer to them in the report to be published soon on the DfE website about preliminary responses to the White Paper, as mentioned in your letter of 24 November. The concerns are as follows.

1. EQUIAs valuably require public bodies to identify evidence about inequalities and use such evidence as part of mainstream planning and decision-making, and help third parties to hold public bodies to account. The requirement to conduct EQUIAs was introduced into law in Great Britain by the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, following analogous legislation in Northern Ireland. Subsequently, in the following years, the duty to conduct and publish such assessments was extended to a range of other equality issues, as eventually itemised in the Equality Act 2010. With its recurring references to socio-economic inequality, *The Importance of Teaching* EQUIA in effect extends the duty further. This is a very significant and welcome development. However, poverty affects different communities in

different ways, and there are distinctive needs in each community which have to be addressed directly and explicitly, not left to chance within a general programme. *The Importance of Teaching* rightly criticises 'one size fits all' approaches. However, it frequently appears to assume that tackling socio-economic disadvantage will inherently and automatically raise levels of educational attainment in all communities, regardless of ethnicity and of experiences of discrimination and prejudice. There is persistent evidence over three decades to show that this assumption is false.

2. Over the last 40 years, the teaching profession has developed and consolidated a substantial body of practical expertise and theoretical understanding relating to the teaching of English as an additional language (EAL), to cultural sensitivity more generally, and to tackling prejudice and racism. Practical support, advice and training for teachers have been provided by local authorities, and by a series of influential national projects. *The Importance of Teaching* EQUIA does not appear to recognise the valuable expertise which has been built up in these regards over many years, and the crucial role which has been played, and still needs to be played, by local authorities and national projects. If this valuable knowledge and expertise were to be lost or diminished, for example as a consequence of funding for EAL being no longer ring-fenced, there would be an extremely adverse impact on large numbers of pupils and their families, and on their life chances and future capacity to play a positive part in public life.
3. It is widely recognised amongst teachers, headteachers, parents and observers that a very significant role is played by teachers who are themselves from minority backgrounds. In addition to teaching, they make invaluable contributions as mentors, role-models, advisers, policy-makers and decision-makers. It is regrettable that the EQUIA for *The Importance of Teaching* fails to acknowledge this.
4. *The Importance of Teaching* EQUIA rightly recognises and emphasises that educational attainment differs measurably between different groups and communities. It does not, however, recognise that the overall national picture obscures substantial regional differences. The two largest communities in which attainment is substantially below the national average are the African-Caribbean community and the Pakistani community. Overall, the attainment gap at 16+ for African-Caribbean pupils in 2009 was about 11 percentage points. But in the East Midlands and in Yorkshire and the Humber it was close to 20 points, and in the North East over 30. There were also large differences between individual local authorities. The attainment gap in Lambeth, for example, was only four percentage points, whereas in Bristol, Camden, Hackney, Kirklees and Leeds, amongst many others, it was at least 20. Similarly in relation to the Pakistani community there were significant regional differences. Overall, the attainment gap in 2009 at 16+ was almost eight percentage points. But in London the attainment of Pakistani-heritage pupils was four points *above* the national average, whilst in Yorkshire and Humber it was about 15 points below. It is regrettable that the EQUIA for *The Importance of Teaching* does not take account of the significance of these regional variations. It is essential that the Government should explain how its policy proposals will address regional variation.
5. A central purpose of an EQUIA, as explicated clearly and at length in the recent consultation paper issued by the Government Equalities Office (GEO) on specific duties required by the Equality Act 2010, is to enable citizens and equality campaigners to hold public bodies to account. To achieve this purpose an EQUIA must not only cite relevant evidence but also provide precise bibliographical references for the evidence on which it bases its judgements and expectations.

Concerned citizens cannot otherwise check, if they wish, whether the judgements and expectations are well-founded. It is therefore regrettable that the EQUIA for *The Importance of Teaching* does not provide a single bibliographical reference. It is not reasonable, in this respect, to expect readers to turn to the White Paper itself and to search through the endnotes. In any case, not all the relevant sources are given in the White Paper.

6. Finally, a relatively small point about the EQUIA for *The Importance of Teaching* which may appear trivial at first sight but may actually be significant. At paragraph 7 it refers to the recent report entitled *How Fair is Britain?* The reference is relevant and valuable. However, the EQUIA states that the report was produced and published by the European Court of Human Rights. It was, in fact, produced and published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. The error implies that the authors of the EQUIA, and all those who read and approved it in draft form, were careless or ignorant. The DfE will need to reassure equality campaigners, and indeed all concerned citizens, and more importantly all headteachers, teachers and governing bodies, that civil servants tasked with overseeing the implementation of *The Important of Teaching* are neither careless nor ignorant in relation to equality issues, but are on the contrary deeply committed and substantially well-informed.

In closing, I should like to thank you again for your letter of 24 November inviting initial comments and responses about *The Importance of Teaching*. I look forward to contributing to further deliberations and discussions.

Yours sincerely

(Dr) Gillian Klein  
Editor, Race Equality Teaching