

# **ESTYN school inspection reports and equality issues: *an exploratory analysis***

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## *Introduction*

The education sector has, historically, been notoriously slow in adopting measures to promote equality. In the early 1960s teachers in inner-city schools often seemed relatively indifferent to the changing demography of their pupils. This relative indifference *appeared* to be reflected in the training of teachers. Student teachers who were placed in inner city schools for their Teaching Practice were at something of a loss. Thus, shortly after the publication of *Race Community and Conflict* in 1967 I received a request from students in a large English Teacher Training College to give a guest lecture on (if I remember correctly) the education of black and ethnic minority pupils (although the terminology may have been different). I pointed out that although I was flattered by the invitation, school teaching really was not my subject and I was sure they could find a better qualified lecturer. But they insisted and asserted that there was no one else they could ask – only Rex and Moore had anything to say on the issues they faced - and whatever I was able to say would be of great value to them.

When I met the students they complained that their lecturers had nothing to say about the conditions the students would encounter in city areas with significant immigrant populations. Given the recent arrival of migrants from the Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent it was not surprising that most college lecturers lacked experience in the schools in question. Furthermore, the lecturers had no material to which they could refer in preparing their lectures. Issues in the education of minorities have since attracted scholars from a wide range of social sciences and there is now an excellent and growing research-based literature and enough accumulated data for the thorough preparation of young teachers. In addition to the large body of academic work there has, from the 1960s onwards, been a literature de-

veloped from within the minority populations themselves, often in protest at the inadequacy or inappropriateness of the educational provision for their children and at discriminatory practices inbuilt in our education systems. This protest is not confined to schools, in the 2010s university students began to ask 'Why is My Curriculum White?'

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act of 2000 was passed in an attempt to speed up the implementation of the 1976 Race Relations Act and to make provision for proper enforcement of the law. The requirements of the 1976 Act were never fully understood and in interviewing some Welsh county councillors in the late 1990s it was clear that many of them had never heard of the Act. The Act also was thought by many to be mainly rhetorical and its implementation perhaps voluntary. The 2000 Act was due to be implemented in 2001; a number of Chief Executives of Welsh unitary authorities seemed to think that the Act only applied to English cities or cities with significant minority populations. So slowly were steps being taken to ensure implementation that the Commission for Racial Equality sent fortnightly letters to Chief Executives reminding them of how many days they had to go to implementation in April 2001. Thus in my last year before retirement I again found myself asked to advise on equality issues, this time in an atmosphere of slight panic as the due date for the 2000 Act approached. The voluntary sector was in demand to help public bodies and even received funding to help preparing policies. Very late in the process the Welsh Government realised that it had itself not made adequate preparations and was at risk of being non-compliant, and so invited representatives from the academic and third sectors to advise them.

Key requirements of the Act were that public bodies should have written policies on race equality, such policies were to be designed to both eliminate discrimination and to promote 'good relations'. Furthermore, these bodies were to publish annually the results of ethnic monitoring. Here I need to rely on largely anecdotal evidence from colleagues, but it seems to have been the case that a number of schools in Wales didn't really understand what was expected of them. One head-teacher, for example, refused to comply with the law on principle, saying he couldn't see the point and that it was quite unnecessary to have an equality policy. He probably subscribed to a view commonly heard among teachers in the more homogeneously 'white' areas that they 'treated all their pupils the same'. The very strong liberal ethos of teachers was being expressed in an uninformed and rather insular way. Teachers working with more diverse populations would not, we should hope, have expressed their liberal views in such a naïve way.

The 2010 Equality Act replaced the Race Relations Acts with provisions to protect all minorities from discrimination – minorities defined by their ‘protected characteristics’. Public bodies are required to have Strategic Equality Plans implemented through Action Plans and to monitor the impact of the policies on an annual basis. These plans are now statutory requirements and governing bodies are meant to review the policy and its outcomes every year and adjust the Action Plan as necessary.

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### *Preliminary Enquiry*

A few years ago I read six Estyn secondary school inspection reports to see how closely Estyn was scrutinising school equality policies and their implementation. None of the reports made any mention of equality policies or issues. When I commented on this to an Estyn inspector I was told that equality was not part of the inspection regime. When I raised this with an Estyn official I was told in no uncertain terms that inspectors were expected to scrutinise equality policies. Interestingly none of the many photographs illustrating the Chief Inspector's annual report for that year showed a pupil or teacher from a visible minority.

At the beginning of 2016 I scanned over one hundred Estyn inspection reports from across Wales in order to see if my original tiny sample had misled me. I took at my sample all the reports on inspections conducted in 2015 in nine LEAs from north, south and central Wales including urban and more rural authorities. The LEAs surveyed cover around 45 per cent of the *total* population of Wales (*i.e.* not necessarily 45 per cent of the school population). Eighty-eight primary school inspection reports were scanned and 14 secondary schools. Short reports following up an inspection report (other than those consisting of a short letter) were included in the initial scan but later excluded from the analysis because they were found to be addressing very specific issues only. Thus the totals dropped to 85 primary schools and 12 secondary schools. 'Scanning' the reports simply entailed a word-search on the documents in order to locate comments on 'equality', 'diversity' and 'ethnic' (and therefore ethnicity). The promotion of equality and the celebration of diversity might be expected to feature in the practices of schools and to be worthy of comment by inspectors. Schools are required to have Strategic Equality Plans, elaborated in Action

Plans. 'Ethnic' was selected as a search term because ethnic minority pupils are a group of pupils with protected characteristics whose performance specifically has to be monitored by schools and LEAs. After reviewing 54 reports 'poverty' was added to the search terms. Not only does the problem of deprivation feature in education policies but the Welsh government expects poverty to be addressed as an issue alongside the requirements of the 2010 Equality Act. It was, perhaps, an unfortunate oversight to miss it from the earlier word searches, given the high importance the Welsh Government attaches to its equality and anti-poverty policies.

It is important to note what such a scanning of reports *does not* show. Schools may or may not have specific policies and may or may not focus on issues of equality in their self-evaluation reports. Similarly Estyn inspection reports may or may not mention equality issues. Thus we have four possibilities:

		Estyn report	
		Comment	No comment
School self-evaluation	Comment	1	3
	No comment	2	4

We only have information in the columns of this table. If neither school nor Estyn comment on equality issues then plainly both school and inspectors are failing, but scanning the inspection reports only will not tell us if this is the case because the school's own documents have not been scanned in this enquiry. Thus a lack of an inspector's comment does not necessarily indicate an absence of comment by the school, only that the inspector found nothing that he or she felt needed comment - in other words 3 and 4 cannot be differentiated by the scan. If a self-evaluation did not include any comment on the three search topics we should certainly expect inspectors to comment - in other words, 4 should never occur, but we cannot tell if it does.

Let us therefore turn to the evidence in the first column of this matrix. Only in five reports on primary schools and two on secondary was no mention made of any of the three terms. Seventy per cent of the reports did not mention equality and six per cent specifically commented

on equality policy and practice. The remainder made general comments only. Given that the term *diversity* appears in the PSD curriculum it was perhaps surprising that only 30 per cent of the reports commented specifically on school policy in respect of diversity and that a further 28 percent made only general remarks. In 32 per cent of reports diversity appeared only in the title or titles of PSD provision. The remaining ten per cent of the reports included no comment on diversity. The term ethnic or ethnicity occurred in 54 per cent of reports solely in commenting on the demographic composition of the school. Thirty nine per cent of the reports did not include any comment on ethnicity at all. Five per cent (that is reports on 5 schools) made observations on policy and practice, two others made rather general = comments.

A comparison between primary and secondary schools would be interesting but with only 12 secondary school in the sample such comparisons would be hazardous. One secondary school is 8.3 per cent of all secondary schools in the sample. All we can say is that secondary school reports appear less likely than primary reports to mention ethnicity and diversity and more likely to mention equality. But this finding should be treated with caution. Only one secondary report mentioned diversity in the context of specific impacts on school policy.

A word search and count gives us a rather arid view of the reports. What sort of narrative comments do the inspectors make? In thirty one cases there were positive comments about some or all aspects of equality and diversity, five of these relate to secondary schools. Here is one positive comment on a primary school in whose report the words equality and ethnic do not appear, 'The school takes into account and values the diversity of pupils' backgrounds.' Other comments include:

- There is a clear emphasis on acknowledging, respecting and celebrating pupils' diversity and promoting respectful attitudes towards others.
- There is a clear emphasis on recognising, respecting and celebrating diversity, while promoting the prevention of oppressive behaviours such as homophobia, bullying and racism [this comment occurs *verbatim* in reports on two different schools]
- Staff recognise and celebrate diversity successfully, for example through the celebration during collective worship of the different languages spoken by pupils at the school.

- There is a clear emphasis on recognising, respecting and celebrating the diversity of pupils' backgrounds and within society as a whole.
- The school's policies, plans and procedures promote equality and social diversity robustly.
- The school has effective equality and equal opportunities policies and pupils are integrated successfully. All staff recognise the diversity of pupils' background and support them well
- The international committee helps to highlight multicultural issues and a separate section of the library celebrates ethnicity. Strong international orientation.

In a secondary school report that does not include ethnic or ethnicity the inspector remarks, 'The school has a wide range of relevant policies to promote equality and diversity and they are implemented effectively.' Other comments in secondary school reports include

- Equality and diversity are promoted effectively.
- The school promotes equality and diversity very well. This enables pupils from a wide range of backgrounds, cultures and religions to work exceptionally well together and to respect each other's views and lifestyles.

One primary and one secondary school get negative remarks on an aspect of equality, diversity and ethnicity and there were a number of ambiguous comments. For example what do we make of the observation on a church school that it promotes a Christian culture? Simply doing its job, or failing to recognise the value of other cultures and religions? Was a primary school or an inspector off-message in commenting that 'staff treat all pupils equally'? A small number of comments on equality simply observed that there was equal access to the curriculum or the school building. A couple of reports said that schools promoted positive attitudes through collecting for charities; if this is *all* the schools do then they do not have effective equality and diversity practices.

On the question of poverty; of the forty seven reports which were searched for the word two mentioned it as a study theme, six as a school issue (pupil deprivation *etc*) and one made an inconsequential passing comment. In other words, poverty did not appear in 81 per cent of the reports.

My initial fears that equality issues were not being addressed in school inspections have been reduced but not eliminated. If we were to take the most negative interpretation of these findings - an interpretation which might be thought unsympathetic or even hostile - then 94 per cent of Estyn reports on primary schools did not make substantive comments on equality, nor 70 per cent on diversity and 95 per cent made no substantive observation on matters relating to ethnicity or ethnic relations.

One has to recognise the pressure on schools and inspectors, all are in the business of education and all are constantly reminded of the need to 'drive up' standards in core subjects and of moving Wales up the PISA league table. The pressure is relentless. Nevertheless schools need to comply with their public duties under the 2010 Equality Act. Furthermore, there are good educational grounds for compliance with the legislation; the talents of young people from ethnic minorities or with other protected characteristics may be lost to the wider community if they do not feel they are valued, or lose confidence in the face of prejudiced attitudes and unequal treatment. Good equality polices should help improve schools' performance by realising the full talents of all pupils. Young people are growing up in conditions of heightened hostility to migrants and refugees right across Europe and – conspicuously - in sections of the UK press. Almost every day the diversity and equality agenda is being addressed full on, in a manner inimical to the interests of our young people. There is every need to start early in equipping pupils to resist these negative and damaging forces and certainly not to let them become contributors to a prejudiced population through educational neglect.

### *Concluding comments*

Where do we go from here? We could enlarge and fill out this preliminary review by examining just how schools address the equality agenda by reading the self-evaluation reports that are prepared for inspections. This would be a difficult task because unlike the inspectors' reports the self-evaluations are not available on line. It is likely that LEAs hold copies, but access to the reports would require the negotia-

tion of permission with each LEA separately and possibly, in some cases, an enquiry under the Freedom of Information Act. Even if access was no problem there would be more than 100 reports on schools to be read from the LEAs not chosen in the original scan. FE colleges would need to be added to the research for the sake of completeness, especially in those authorities where colleges make a significant contribution to sixth form education.

As an alternative the simple word search used in this scan could be applied to the schools inspected in 2015 in the LEAs not selected so far. This would entail about one week's work but it is unlikely that any significantly different findings will be made - although there is always the chance of finding a one-off horror story or another example of outstandingly good practice.

Reading the reports in full would take longer but given the words already chosen in the scan and their use to extract narrative material it is unlikely that this undertaking would yield results commensurate with the effort required. Only a major research project to acquire self-evaluation reports and read them alongside the Estyn inspection reports would throw adequate light on the commitment to equality within schools and colleges in Wales.

A yet further alternative that would give us something of the dynamics of equality policies would be to read a sample of the documents produced by schools in the revision of their Strategic Equality Plans. This would provide an insight into the way in which the Plans have been implemented, the lessons learnt and the extent to which lessons learnt have been incorporated in revised policies. But again, there might be problems in acquiring the necessary documents from schools.

The cost and time in acquiring and reading the full Estyn reports might well outweigh the value of the results. Reading Strategic Equality Plan revisions would probably produce outputs of greater value but the time and effort needed would be even greater than that required to read inspection reports. One positive outcome of either approach would be to alert everyone to the fact that this aspect of education was being monitored effectively.