

‘Most of the time people don’t like my colour...’

Experiences of dual/multiple heritage and other BME children and their families in Cornwall

Believe in children



Barnardo's
South West

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A note on terminology

In this report we use the term 'BME (black and minority ethnic) visible by colour' to describe the children and young people.

This is because the report focuses on children and young people who 'stand out' as a result of their colour in predominantly white Cornwall.

Talking to children and parents it is clear that being visible by colour and standing out in relation to the predominantly white community is one important way in which they understand their experiences.

Photographs

The photographs were taken by Stephen Pover. They are not of the children and families featured in the report.

Foreword

Barnardo's is committed to meeting the needs of BME children and their families.

In the South West we recognise that many of our services are based in predominantly white areas and that this presents particular challenges for effective work with BME children who are visible by colour.

This study is part of a wider piece of work that involves interviewing equivalent families in Wiltshire and gathering information from all of our services in the region about this area of work.

The Cornwall consultations highlight the importance of recognising the complexity of children's backgrounds – particularly in relation to dual and multiple heritage. They highlight the strengths and achievements of these children and families, but also reveal that many children visible by colour in predominantly white Cornwall experience isolation and significant racism.

The target audience for the report is practitioners in Cornwall (teachers, childcare workers, social workers, youth and community workers and health workers).

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Executive summary

This report is based on in-depth interviews with families in Cornwall in which there is a BME child or young person who is visible by colour. We interviewed 14 children/young people and 11 parents. These children/young people and parents come from a total of 14 families.

The study is part of a wider initiative in Barnardo's to understand the experiences of BME children in predominantly white areas and the implications for service delivery for ourselves and other service providers.

Although the study does not claim to be totally representative of families in Cornwall where a child is BME visible by colour, it does claim to accurately reflect key themes in the lives of these children and parents.

There was a wide variety in the backgrounds of the children/young people. The children who had backgrounds uniform with both their parents were in a small minority. The large majority of the children/young people were either dual or multiple heritage. We believe this accurately reflects the complex backgrounds of BME children visible by colour in Cornwall.

We were left with a strong impression that children and young people wanted to talk about background rather than for it to be disregarded on the basis that 'we treat everyone the same'.

There were a significant number of lone parent families. The parents in these families (typically the mothers) were bringing up children who had partially different backgrounds to their own. This could mean lone white parents bringing up dual heritage

children. Also because of partner changes it could mean two white parents bringing up dual heritage children visible by colour.

There is much to celebrate in the children's and parent's description of their lives. The report presents a picture of families who in spite of change and pressures are resilient. The report also illustrates the successes and joys of the children and young people. A key underlying message is that it is important to focus on the strength of children/young people and their families as well as 'issues' they may face.

However, in spite of a number of parents reporting general acceptance of their children, the large majority of the families had experience of racism directed at their children and young people. Some incidents were isolated and had happened in the past, but others were current and by any standards serious. The clarity with which the children/young people could remember the events indicates their impact.

Bullying was frequently referred to. It may be that the experience and fear of bullying is particularly acute with these children because they know they stand out as being visibly different.

The children/young people and their parents said that the first years in school were particularly associated with racist bullying and name calling.

Racial harassment appeared to become more significant at times when children were experiencing other challenges such as poverty and family difficulties and separation.

Several of the children talked about unease and wanting more support when issues of 'race' were discussed in the classroom.

Typically the families were not part of a 'community' that included other BME families but had links with only one or several similar families.

A significant number of families talked about support needs. There was reference to the importance

of meeting with other BME children/young people visible by colour. There was also evidence of white parents wanting help in supporting their children.

The policy and practice implications of the families' testimonies for schools and agencies working with children and young people in Cornwall are drawn out in the conclusions of the report.



Introduction

This report describes the results of in-depth interviewing carried out in early 2010 with families in Cornwall where there is a BME child visible by colour. We interviewed 14 children/young people and 11 parents. These children/young people and parents came from a total of 14 families.

There is currently a lack of practice guidance about working with BME children in predominantly white areas.

The majority of current thinking around meeting the needs of these children/young people derives from work in diverse urban locations.

For instance, in the urban context, emphasis is placed on *working with BME communities*. However, in predominantly white areas such as Cornwall this is not likely to be an appropriate approach. There may be small groups of families sharing a common background but it is more likely that BME children visible by colour are isolated or in contact with only one or two families of equivalent background.

The purpose of the interviews was:

- to present information on the backgrounds of families in Cornwall in which there is a BME child visible by colour
- to listen to the children/young people and their parents to learn about their successes and the challenges they have faced
- to give guidance to our own services and those of other agencies who seek to address the needs of BME children visible by colour in Cornwall but who may have little information on which to base their work
- to contribute more generally to the debate about ethnic reach in

predominantly white areas by looking at networks of families in the county where there is a BME child/young person visible by colour.

BME children and young people visible by colour in Cornwall – demographic patterns

Accurately assessing the number of children/young people in Cornwall who are visible by colour is problematic because the 2001 census is now so badly out of date.

Some indication can be obtained from school BME figures, however these include children from minority European countries who would not be identified as visible by colour.

OFSTED (2009) reported that children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 4.7 per cent of pupils in primary school in Cornwall and 3.8 per cent of pupils in secondary school. This is significantly below national averages of 24.5 per cent and 20.6 per cent, respectively.

In primary and secondary schools in Cornwall there are higher percentages of children from 'Any Other White' and 'Any Other Mixed' backgrounds than any other 'non-white British' group (Cornwall County Council 2009; based on Schools Census 2007). This indicates the significance of the number of dual and multiple heritage children in Cornwall's schools.

Therefore, the overall picture for Cornwall appears to be of a relatively small number of children visible by colour, with a significant proportion of children of mixed backgrounds within this group.

Research and theoretical perspectives

1) BME children visible by colour in predominantly white areas

There is only a limited amount of information available about the experience of BME children visible by colour living in predominantly white areas.

There is a small amount of research indicating that BME children in predominantly white areas may experience high levels of racism. Barter (1999) for instance concluded that: 'In areas where there are few children from minority ethnic communities these children may be particularly vulnerable to racial abuse. The effect is heightened by the lack of access to support from other minority ethnic children' (p.1).

Scourfield et al (2002) reported on the findings of qualitative research into the experience of minority children living in the South Wales valleys. They reported on a considerable variety of children and young people's experiences, mediated by class and gender. A small number had experienced significant racism to the extent that their families had removed them from school.

The Young People in Cornwall Anti Racism Project (2004) painted a bleak picture of the day-to-day experience of young people from visible ethnic minorities in the county. They concluded that racism was a day-to-day reality for these young people and their families, that these minorities are treated as invisible by some agencies who do not recognise their needs and there are poor networks of support for families.

2) Dual and multiple heritage

The position of dual and multiple heritage children in the UK has received some research attention in recent years.

Much of this has revolved around policies in relation to transracial adoption or fostering. In the 1980s and 1990s a dominant perspective evolved that the dual heritage child is in all important respects a black child because that is the way she or he is regarded by society. The approach was that in order for the dual heritage child to develop emotional health and a positive self-image, she or he needed to identify themselves as a black child. It was argued that in a racist society this was the only way in which a child could effectively survive.

This position has been increasingly challenged by theorists who argue that to do justice to the reality of children's lives, it is necessary to understand the complex ways in which these children might think about their backgrounds. It has been argued that dual and multiple heritage children can relate to the complexity of their background and still develop an emotionally healthy identity.

Okitikpi (2005) notes 'The social work profession's approach towards children of mixed parentage has tended to owe more to a simplistic interpretation of the children's racial identity and their cultural affiliations rather than an informed understanding or appreciation of their interracial background and their self perceptions' (p.1).

Patel (2009) argues for workers who come into contact with dual heritage children to recognise the 'multiple,

complex and diverse ways in which they actually saw themselves' (p.85).

Adding to the complexity of understanding and responding to the needs of dual and multiple heritage children in predominantly white areas are the complex interactions between racialised identity, class and gender (see for instance: Ali, 2003). Perceptions of these children will not only be influenced by perceptions of their origins but also of their class position and their gender.

Overall the key message from these different theoretical perspectives

for practitioners is the clear need to communicate with children about their life experiences and how they identify with the different aspects of their background.

It is also important to acknowledge the context, i.e. the setting in which the child is growing up. This will include an examination of family settings (recognising that the background of the child may be different from the parent/s), neighbourhood settings in which the child may be the only BME child visible by colour, and the school setting (which may have a very small number of BME children).



The Cornwall Consultation

Conducting the research interviews

Conducting this research presented a number of difficulties, probably reflecting why there has been a lack of similar research conducted in Cornwall already. The main difficulty was making contact with appropriate families. There was obviously no established data on which to base a sampling frame.

The families we eventually talked to were contacted in a variety of ways. This involved contact through our own services and the services of other agencies, contact through community groups and also through the personal contact networks of one of the report authors (Aurora Talbot).

A significant number of the families we contacted did not want to be interviewed. One reason for this may have been the parents' desire not to focus on their child's racial background but rather support them to 'blend in'. Other reasons we received included not wanting to revisit painful experiences of racism and also the fear that revisiting 'racial' and therefore parental background would evoke painful memories of relationship breakdown.

Other responses included 'it may not be safe' for them and their children if they said anything about difficulties and successes, that 'nothing will change so why make it difficult for ourselves' and 'we see ourselves as a white family so it doesn't concern us.'

We do not claim that our sample of families is entirely representative of all families in Cornwall where there is a BME child who is visible by colour. However we do believe the perspectives we heard and the issues that were raised reflect key themes

in the experience of BME children in Cornwall who are visible by colour.

All of the interviews except two were carried out by one of the authors (A.T.) who is of Asian background, part of a dual heritage family and has lived in Cornwall for many years. We considered it important that the interviews were conducted by a person visible by colour. In order to obtain authentic descriptions of the children's experiences it was necessary for the interviewer to be perceived by those interviewed as having shared the same experience of being visible by colour in a white society.

The interviews were conducted in the participants' homes and informed consent was obtained from both the parents and the children/young people who were involved. This informed consent covered the purpose of the interviewing, confidentiality, and how the report would be published and used.

The interviews varied in length, with some of the parents' interviews taking over two hours. The children/young people's interviews were generally shorter, although some still lasted over an hour.

All interviews were semi-structured so there could be some flexibility in terms of following up answers by asking subsidiary questions.

We also used questions that allowed the parents and children/young people to express their feelings and hopes. One of these questions that worked well with the children and young people was the 'dream' question: 'If when you went to sleep you had a dream about the things that would make your life better for you at school what would be in that dream?'

Obviously ways of talking to the children had to reflect their ages and capacity to articulate their situation.

In general there was very positive feedback from being interviewed. For instance, one boy told us: 'That has definitely made me think about it. Although I'm a very bubbly person I do seem to hold a lot in. It's good being able to speak to somebody'.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. All quotes used in this report are exactly as they were spoken by those interviewed.

Offering support

One of the ethical issues that research consultations of this kind raise is that the interviewer may have to step outside the role of researcher and respond to expressed needs and difficulties. It may be that these children and young people were talking for the first time with a black adult about issues they were facing in relation to background.

The difficulties of two of the families were such that the interviewer, after discussion and obtaining the permission of the child to convey information to the parents, supported the family to make a referral for support. These referrals were related to bullying.

In another family, the interviewer spent considerable time giving advice to one of the parents in relation to equalities issues she was facing in her workplace.

Maintaining confidentiality

Because there are a relatively small number of families in Cornwall with a BME child/young person visible by

colour, we have taken care to ensure that none of the families are identifiable. In order to achieve this we have in some cases not given full details of events and family situations described.

Because of the small numbers of these families in Cornwall, giving exact descriptions of the family backgrounds would have rendered them identifiable. In such cases we have not given precise descriptions. In several family or child/young person descriptions we have changed identifying material to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. But in doing this we are confident we have not changed the authenticity of the family narrations.

During the interviews, references were made to specific locations at which racist incidents occurred. This underlines the importance of analysing context. But due to the danger of identifying families these locations have not been named.

Acknowledging complexity

We are aware that we are examining a highly complex area of family life in Cornwall. This complexity is a result of:

- very varied family backgrounds
- varying family structures – for instance a dual heritage child will have a different experience being brought up by a lone white mother compared with a dual heritage child being brought up in a two parent household where the parents reflect the child's background
- complexity of gender – the experiences of girls and boys who are visible by colour may be different.
- living in different parts of Cornwall, for instance urban, rural or semi rural areas, may have an impact on the experiences of

BME children visible by colour. Our interviews showed that there are areas of Cornwall which are perceived to be more accepting of families and children visible by colour than others.

And of course another overriding area of complexity is that the closer the researcher gets to real families the more difficult it is to untangle background from all of the other family strengths and pressures.

In spite of these complexities we believe that through our detailed interviewing we have produced accurate family narratives around the experience of these children.



Background and definitions of background

The children and parents interviewed come from a variety of economic backgrounds. Two families have parents in professional roles, one family owns a large business and two families own small businesses, five families have a parent in paid manual or semi-skilled employment and five families are dependent on benefits.

The table below contains descriptions of the 14 families from whom we interviewed 14 children and 11 parents. In total there are 32 children in these families.

Family structure
White father and Asian mother living together with their dual heritage, twin daughters aged 13 (interviews were conducted with the twin daughters)
Multiple heritage lone mother living with her two multiple heritage daughters aged 13 and five (interviews were conducted with the mother and the 13-year-old daughter)
Mother and father from Southeast Asia living with their three-year-old daughter (interview with the father)
Dual heritage lone mother living with her two dual heritage (black African-white British) children – daughter aged three and son under one (interview with mother)
Chinese lone mother living with her dual heritage (Chinese-white British) three-year-old son (interview with mother)
White Cornish mother and white British stepfather living with four children aged 12, 10, five and four. The eldest of the children is multiple heritage, the others are white (interview with mother and 12-year-old multiple heritage boy)
Chinese parents living with 14 and 16-year-old Chinese sons (interview with the 16-year-old son)
White British lone mother sharing care with black African father living locally and their two dual heritage sons aged 15 and 11 (interviews with mother and two sons)
White British mother living with Southeast Asian husband and three dual heritage daughters aged eight, four and one (interviews with mother and eight-year-old daughter)
Dual heritage mother living with white husband and three dual heritage children aged 17, 13 and five (joint interview with parents and short 'interview' with five-year-old son)
Black African mother and father with one-year-old black African daughter (joint interview with parents)
Lone white British mother with three dual heritage (white-black African) sons aged 11, nine and four (interviews with mother and 11 and nine-year-old sons)
Lone dual heritage mother with three dual heritage children aged 13, nine and eight (interviews with mother and 13-year-old son)
Lone black-African mother with 12-year-old dual heritage son and dual heritage (black African-white British) eight-year-old daughter (interviews with mother and both children)

From the above table the complexity of the children's backgrounds is clear. In 11 of the families the children are either dual or multiple heritage rather than sharing a uniform background with both parents.

The analysis also shows the variety of family structures. In seven families the children are growing up with a lone parent. All of the children in these families are dual or multiple heritage so their backgrounds are only partially represented at home. One of these children did however maintain strong links with the father through a shared care arrangement.

In two families a lone white mother is bringing up dual heritage children and in a third family a white mother and a white stepfather are bringing up a dual heritage child. All of his half siblings are white.

This latter family formation of two white parents bringing up a dual heritage child is now, as a result of family separation and change, not uncommon in the UK.

The following statements from three of the parents illustrate the complexity of the way in which the parents define their families and their children.

Multiple heritage mother of 12-year-old son: 'He (son) calls himself black now. I said to him a lot of people will still say you're Asian, but he says "Well I'm not". He identifies himself with me. If anyone asks him where his colour comes from he says it's from me. He dismisses that he is part Asian. He doesn't admit to it freely at all.'

Mother: 'Mum's white Russian and dad black Caribbean. I'm adopted, so all I know are the very bare bones of my parents. My adopted parents are both white.'

Father: 'We're Asian, not black, brown. We're not too black, not too white.'

Overview

In the above analysis we have stressed the complexity of family backgrounds and structures. By far the largest group of children in the families we talked to were either dual or multiple heritage children. We believe this reflects the general situation in Cornwall in relation to BME children visible by colour and is a key factor in understanding their experiences.

The increasing number of dual and multiple heritage children is a key demographic change of recent years in all types of areas. But in areas such as Cornwall where there are not large communities of BME families, the proportionately large number of dual and multiple heritage children may be much more marked than in more diverse areas.

The children/young people: being who they are

In the interviews the children and young people reflected on their backgrounds.

It is impossible to summarise these and come up with a neat description of how those mainly dual and multiple heritage children and young people saw themselves.

Based on an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) their self definitions are likely to be the result of the complex interplay of experiences linked to family, community, peer relations and school. They will also be the result of what their parents have told them about their background and how

the parents have defined the significance of 'race' in their lives.

Also of importance in terms of the way they think about their 'racial' background may be the way in which certain events or incidents have played out in their lives. An incident of racist harassment or bullying although it might be regarded as a 'one off' by others (including teachers etc) may have a profound effect and 'stay with' the child.

Without trying to categorise them, we simply present below some of the statements the children and young people made about who they are and their understanding of their backgrounds.

Nine-year-old dual heritage boy: *My family is quite a couple of people. 'My Dad is dark. My Mum is quite light.'*

Eleven-year-old dual heritage boy talking about his black father who he does not see: *'I talk to my friend about my Dad – he's black, mixed. Mum is white and Cornish. No one has asked me at school about my background. It upsets me.'*

Eleven-year-old dual heritage boy: *'Different, multicultural maybe. Because my mum was born in Cornwall and my dad in... (African country).'*

Fifteen-year-old dual heritage boy: *'I've only ever really had to answer it on a form. I put myself down as white and black African.'*

Five-year-old dual heritage boy: *'Well some people are brown. I'm just a little bit brown as you can tell. But normally I'm pinkish and whitish and creamy. ...(brother) is really brown.'*

In some of the interviews it was clear that there could be change over time in how the children perceived themselves and that their self perceptions could be different in different circumstances.

It may be that the remark by a young dual heritage child: *'It depends what mood I'm in'* is a casual comment that is possibly self deprecating. At another level it may be pointing to an accurate statement about background and how it can change with feelings and context.

And in the responses of the children there was evidence of the way they were reacted to by others and how they in turn reflected on this:

Thirteen-year-old multiple heritage girl: *'Some people are a bit funny to start off with and once you get to know them they get to realise you're not any different and you don't feel any different from anyone else really. I don't know, if they can see something like one of your unconfident things like if you have a spot on your face they might pick on you for that. Like for the first day they meet you, but then you forget about it. In primary school it was little petty things, but it's nothing serious.'*

And talking about how others react to him a 12-year-old dual heritage boy says: *'You probably get noticed a bit more, but you don't necessarily want that do you? I think people are interested a bit in my background but it does get a bit annoying.'*

And finally it is important to remember in our analysis that children's perspectives on who they are will also be a result of the way in which they see the people in their lives have responded to them. Here for instance is an 11-year-old dual heritage boy talking: *'Just my dad, he just lets me down. He*

was over here [UK] for six weeks and he never came to see me once. He went to see ...(sister) down the road, but he didn't come and see me. I just thought he was coming to see me and he didn't. I only found out because my sister saw him in ...(local supermarket).'



Successes of the children and young people

An important aspect of the way in which we approached the interviewing was to look at the strengths and successes of these families as well as the issues they might face. Exploration of the experiences of BME children and young people visible by colour too often carry with them an expectation only of difficult experiences rather than the joys, exhilarations and successes of children's and young people's lives.

We therefore had early questions in both the parents and the children's interviews about the successes of the families and the children. Also we asked the children and young people about what they enjoyed and what made them happy as well as what made them sad.

The parents could all talk about many successes and the strengths of their families. The following are examples:

Multiple heritage lone mother: 'I think the main strength I have got is that I've brought up my children more or less on my own, so I've had to be totally independent. I had to be the children's advocate as a single parent, as I haven't had the solidarity of a father figure for them. I've been an all round parent for them, my roles have been dual I suppose.'

Chinese lone mother: 'I think it's the culture. I think I give [dual heritage son] a strength that is different from others because of my culture. You know the way I act and things. The way I deal with a lot of things. My behaviour, when it comes to my diet, everything is different and that makes [son] different.'

White lone mother of dual heritage sons: 'Support from family, my own

determination and seeing beautiful results. Seeing the successes of the children and having those emotional tears when they do really well. The pride and feeling 10 feet tall.'

White mother living with S.E. Asian husband and dual heritage children: 'I think as a family, because we have got connections to two places, that's a really positive thing. I think that's good for the children's understanding and awareness in general. I think also you kind of stick together and look after each other maybe more than you normally would. It's just fantastic having that mixture of culture really. Because it's not just about coming from a different place, it's having different languages and different memories and a different culture. I think that's quite rich really.'

The parents also talked positively about their children:

White lone parent of dual heritage sons: '[Eleven-year-old son] is very confident on the outside but very sensitive. He's confident and capable. Amazingly I was worried about him going to secondary school but he got the star pupil for the whole year out of 270 children, I cried!'

White mother (living with white stepfather) of 12-year-old multiple heritage son: 'All his reports come back saying he is very kind, generous, good natured, very thoughtful child. It's always been very good praise, but maybe he could try a bit harder and not mess around so much in class.'

Multiple heritage lone mother of two multiple heritage children: 'I think

[13-year-old daughter] if I talk about her appearance, the most obvious thing is that you know automatically she's mixed race – her skin colour, her hair colouring. 'She loves interacting with other children, she's very social, the best thing is that she likes school. She likes science, and she likes participating in a lot of things in and out of school. All in all she's quite an outgoing girl. She loves music. I think she does everything that a typical girl at the beginning of her teenage years should be doing really.'

Although inevitably sometimes positive statements were linked with anxieties:

White mother of dual heritage daughters: '[Eight-year-old daughter] is quite sensitive. She's a bit lacking in confidence. She's struggled at school with children bullying her. I think it's just a girl thing to be honest. It's majority girls and I think because of how she is – she's just very quiet and gets on with her work – she's an easy target.'

When we talked to the children there was much evidence of strong and supportive families. For instance one 13-year-old dual heritage girl told us:

'I think it's nice to have a firm family. I think that we tend to do stuff together. Sometimes even if it's just watching telly it's nice.'

And a 12-year-old multiple heritage boy told us:

'They're just a good family. They do all the regular things they're supposed to do, tell you what you can do and can't do and keep you safe.'

But of course there were descriptions of the difficulties that any child might face. For instance a 13-year-old multiple heritage girl whose parents had separated when asked what her dream was said:

'Making a wish that I could have my Mum and Dad back together, none of this ever happened and we were all like we used to be, snuggled up on the sofa together watching telly and we were all just one happy family.'

The children and young people in general were very positive when talking about their successes and achievements. This came out clearly with questions about a time when they had done something they were really proud about:

Thirteen-year-old multiple heritage girl: 'I think it was in year seven, I had a maths test. Maths wasn't my best subject, but when I had my test in year seven I got one of the highest scores in the class and I was really proud of myself.'

Eleven-year-old dual heritage boy: 'Well just last year I got the highly commended award for the whole of the year, and only a boy and a girl got it for the whole year. It was for all our achievements for the first half of the year.'

Fifteen-year-old dual heritage boy: 'Really my sport. I'm quite good at the academic side of things but not so much P.E. and sport and science. I've got a pretty supportive family.'

Eight-year-old dual heritage girl: 'The first time when I went to school

I was really nervous. People bigger than me were telling me that maths and stuff like that were really hard but I was really proud when I did it all and stuff.'

Nine-year-old dual heritage boy: 'I'm quite proud of when I went on holiday and me and [brother] won a dancing medal together. We done sort of like line dancing.'

Eight-year-old dual heritage girl: 'I'm really proud of my running. We had this sports teacher in my school and she would get us to set up in the

swimming pool down the road and we would set a race and jumping and things like that.'

Several of the children however presented a mixed picture of their lives. Here for instance is a 12-year-old multiple heritage boy talking:

'No I don't do competitions. I haven't done anything. My best subject at school is science, it's easy. History. I'm no good at sports. I don't go out much. There's no one up here [on the estate where he lives].'



Contact with other children and families

We asked the families whether they spend time with other families who have a member/s who have similar backgrounds.

Contact with other children/families where there are members who are BME visible by colour is likely to be important in terms of identity development and support.

Also agencies often attempt to develop strategies of 'making contact with the black community' in order to engage with BME children and families. It is therefore important to enquire

into the nature of this 'community' in Cornwall.

The reality however is that because of the relatively few families in Cornwall with a BME child visible by colour, contact may be very limited. The infrequency of seeing other people in Cornwall with a similar background was illustrated by one of the mothers we interviewed who is black African who said: 'In Cornwall when you see a black person it's like you see your cousin!'

Answers were complex but the following table gives a summary of responses to this question.

Children have occasional contact with Asian maternal grandmother in another part of UK and several dual heritage friends at school
One child kept in touch with a family she knew when she was younger who had a child visible by colour and the mother had contact with an African colleague with three children
Family has another friend from father's original country
Mother and family have contact with approximately 20 people in families where a member is visible by colour
No regular contact reported
Contact with dual heritage nephew and another family with a dual heritage child
Family members in Cornwall
Children have contact with dual heritage children at school
Involved with the 'Colourful Women's Network' that brings together women and children from diverse ethnic backgrounds
Contact with friends from father's country of origin who go to the same church
Contact with one friend through whom she has met others, but does not see them often
Contact with a family with another child visible by colour
Family keeps in contact with families from dual heritage mother's original country, mainly to celebrate traditional family events
No information

There was a range in the above responses. Several of the families had fairly extensive contact, for instance one of the parents told us:

'I've got my friends and my neighbour. I have a friend from Kenya and one from Zimbabwe and another from Zambia. We used to work together with the girl from Zambia and then the Kenyan and the one from Zimbabwe and every few months we have a gathering. We get together and we cook and we have a chat.'

And another said:

'Yes we meet up about six times a year or more. If one of us has a birthday we all go out for a meal and in between we do what we call 'cook ups' where we all take it in turns to go to each other's houses. There are about 20 of us and we are all black ethnic minorities. Some do bring their white friends with them, but it's typically black married to white people.'

But the majority of the families only had limited contact.

Chinese mother with dual heritage child: 'No not really. I'm just too busy.'

I don't have any time. I am one of the exceptions I think. Most Chinese people have a lot of Chinese friends but not me.'

Lone white mother with two dual heritage children: 'We have, but the family we used to see quite regularly who were Ghanian have moved to [out of Cornwall]. [Son] has another friend... but we don't tend to meet up as families because of what went on at school particularly... I wouldn't actively seek out other families because they are dual heritage or whatever. We would just make friends with whoever we were comfortable with.'

White mother with Southeast Asian husband: 'We've just met another ...[Southeast Asian] person in Cornwall, the first one. He [husband] knows some Malaysians and they speak the same language ...but nobody close to us I'm afraid.'

Again it is a complex picture. But the majority of families talk about having only limited contact with other families where members are BME visible by colour. There is little evidence of the families belonging to a 'community' of similar children or parents.



Experiencing racism

The children talked about their strengths and achievements. They did however give us extensive information about the darker sides of their lives and their experience of racism.

The following analysis is based on the children/young people's responses to questions about what makes them feel unhappy, whether they feel safe, whether they have ever been picked on because of being from a background visible by colour and whether bad things had happened at school as a result of being visible by colour.

At least 10 of the 14 families reported racist behaviour directed at their children. A further two talked about bullying but it was not clear if this had a racist element.

The following are examples of the children/young people who clearly referred to racist incidents in their lives.

Eleven-year-old dual heritage boy:
 'I would say occasionally I don't feel safe – very occasionally because if I go up town just to go out, there's a park where all these people I described as confrontational hang out, and I've had abusive things shouted at me just to make me feel uncomfortable but it's not as much any more... I just tried to blank it out but it annoys me and upsets me... I don't understand why they do it. People that used to live next door... I've been called 'black trash' before and they accused me of calling them 'white trash' but I'd never even heard of either word before then. I was about nine.'

Eight-year-old dual heritage girl: 'When people say bad things to me, when they're calling me names like blackie and all that, I just don't like it. I don't know why they want to do it.' Later she says: 'It makes me feel sad and mad.'

One aspect of this was the fact that a significant number of these incidents had happened when the child was in the first years of schooling.

A multiple heritage lone mother indicated the significance of the early years at school when she talked about her two daughters currently aged 13 and five:

'It might not have affected [13-year-old] because she's older, but [five-year-old] is affected in a sense she's different from her classmates and other children of her age. She goes to [name of school] which is a predominantly white background school with just a handful of ethnic origin there. She'll say to me "Mummy I'm dark" and she said a few weeks ago that boys in the playground were calling her a brownie. So that she's aware that her skin colour is slightly different. It's weird because when [13-year-old] was that age, she was very much aware because she used to get teased a lot at school... She had a good few months of quite unpleasant experiences. At that point [13-year-old] and one other girl were mixed race and that was it. Whereas now, in [five-year-old's] school there are quite a few mixed race pupils, so I think it's more – I won't say the words 'accepted' or 'tolerated' – but it's deemed more the norm.'

And the children talked directly about what happened in the early years of school:

Fifteen-year-old dual heritage boy:
 'When I was in year five in primary school, I'm not sure if it was because of race, but they just seemed to pick on me all the time so I guess it was. One of the days it just got a bit out of hand and they pushed me to the floor and started kicking me and stuff.'

Thirteen-year-old multiple heritage girl: 'Well it was my first year in primary school, year three, and I had a couple of girls coming up to me and saying things like "You've come out of the toilet" or "What happened to you, did you get burnt or something?" and it made me feel really angry and emotional about it.'

And a five-year-old dual heritage boy told us:

'Well people fight me and I say stop it and they don't even stop it. I keep saying stop it. I do nothing, but when they stop it I go up and tell the teacher. They punch me like bullies, a couple of people are bullies in the playground. They've been pushing me and punching me and that really hurt my back.'

It was very noticeable how many of the children talked about bullying at school.

For instance here an eight-year-old girl gives a powerful image of 'her bullies' sticking to her. She is talking about a forthcoming school outing: 'And there's my bullies that are bullying me are going.'

But this girl did not necessarily associate it with racism:

'Not because I'm different. I don't know. Sometimes you don't know why they bully you. They just do it for no reason. They just normally call me horrible names, just things like that really, they just do things like bullies would do. They call me pighead and stuff like that.'

When towards the end of the interview we ask this child if she had a dream what would be in that dream she says:

'Well this wouldn't make it better or worse, or anything like that, but it would sort of stop me getting bullied. Being popular because the bullies are always the popular ones.'

And the 16-year-old Chinese boy also talked about bullying but said it was not related to colour:

'Well sometimes I did get bullied but that wasn't because of my colour. It was because of the way I am. People saw me as a nerd or whatever.'

Although we are indicating some of the complexities of interpretations of the extent of racism, it is clear that for some children racism was a very significant aspect of their experience. To illustrate this we focus in more detail on one family who have experienced significant racism. To maintain the anonymity of this family we have changed some details of family structure and location and all names are pseudonyms.

Liz Gray is a white lone mother living in one of the county's largest towns. She has two sons – Seb aged 11 and Robert aged nine. Both the sons are dual heritage and Liz defines them as white/black African. The boys have no contact with their father who lives in another part of the UK.

Talking about nine-year-old Robert, Liz says: 'Robert gets bullied a lot at school and he came home one day and asked me "Why did you have to have us with daddy. If you'd had us with somebody white I wouldn't be bullied all the time."'

Talking about both the boys she says: 'My children aren't accepted around here, not at all. It comes from the adults. They've been called all sorts of names like n....., p... and b.... b..... Robert was

pinned in the corner of the park, in the corner and had bleach poured all over him. He's got a scar on the back of his neck where it burned him. The police came out and they logged it but they went away again and that was it. There was no counselling or support.

Talking about 11-year-old Seb, Liz says: 'Seb was about seven when the bullying started. He was bullied by a boy who was expelled from three different schools. It wasn't 'til I actually spoke to his parents. 'The school didn't help at all. Not at all. Nothing. But I had a guarantee from his mum that it would never happen again and now they're actually friends.'

When we talk to Robert, the picture is consistent with what Liz has told us. Robert tells us: 'Most of the time people don't like my colour. They bully me and tell me nasty things and make fun of me. I come back up to the house and sit down. I don't talk to Mum all of the time. Sometimes I just go up to my room and I just sit down and read a book.'

And when Robert is asked the question about a dream where things are better he says: 'People not bullying me and they be nicer' and 'My friends would pass to me in football and let me play with them.'

But again it is important to acknowledge the complexity of views around background and present situation. At another stage of the interview when Robert is asked what makes him unhappy he says: 'When people are nasty to me about my colour. Because I'm a bit different to my friends and most of the time I like being my colour. I've got a friend and he's like me and he likes doing most of the things I like doing and he keeps me happy.'

There was also some evidence of the parents not being aware what was happening to their children. For instance a lone dual heritage mother says about 13-year-old dual heritage son: 'I think he deals with stuff and doesn't tell me about it so like I say, you'd need to talk to him really.'

And when we talk to the 13-year-old he says:

'Three people in my school are always popping racist jokes and stuff like that. It's fine. I just don't talk to them, and they don't talk to me. They say 'p...' and 'black boy' and stuff like that. I'm just like 'whatever' and then they stop because I don't care about it...

'Yeah, the three boys make everyone not like me, they get everyone to all jump on top of me. They pick me up and dump me. I don't report it. It's not worth reporting.'

But several seconds later as he grapples with the pain of this he says:

'I'm going to the headmistress tomorrow. I've always said I'll go, so I'm going to do it. I can't be bothered with it any more. It's rubbish.'

And one boy made the important observation that when there are difficulties in other parts of their lives then racism can come to the fore:

Twelve-year-old dual heritage boy: 'When I first started at school I used to get loads of racism. Well not loads of it, just one or two things. When you fall out with friends or when family members fall out with each other. That doesn't happen very often though. You do get little small things that happen... It wasn't like seriously picked on for my background but

I would get the occasional person calling me this and that. Like n..... and whatever. That's about it really. It was when I first started at school. It wasn't people that I hated, or that I'd done anything to. They just did it for some reason.'

Overview

A lasting impression is the high number of families where racist harassment had taken place. Also some of the young people talked about bullying but said this was not around colour. It is not our intention to question the understandings of these young children/people but it is of course very possible that 'race' was involved in the bullying.

The child in the community

In this section we examine the parents' responses to a question asking: 'Do you feel you and your children are accepted around where you live?' Of the 11 parents or sets of parents we talked to, six answered yes, two answered no. Three others gave more complicated replies. One said the children were accepted around the immediate area, but not in the local large town. One white mother said that her black husband was not accepted but that her children were. One white husband said he was but his wife was not and that one of the children was accepted but the other was not. The following are examples of the parents who said their children were accepted locally:

Multiple heritage lone mother: 'Yes definitely. I don't have any problems at all. This is quite a big estate. [Elder daughter] goes out to play and I know where she is.'

Chinese lone mother: 'Oh yeah definitely. His daddy is very integrated to society and everyone likes [son]. I think he looks a bit different to other kids, and [son] is very sweet, very cute.'

White mother with dual heritage child: 'Yes [son] is just treated... like the rest of the boys on the estate. If one gets told off, they all get told off.'

Two examples of the parents who answered no are:

White lone mother with two dual heritage sons: 'No, because I've seen it on a day-to-day basis in the past. It was a lot of things and difficult to put into one thing. It's the name calling in the street, it's the dad who said that [son] shouldn't play with his daughter and keep away... it's boys and girls calling them names. It would be different in [large local town] I think, because it's a lot more cosmopolitan. I think it's just small town Cornwall. I think on the immediate estate they are accepted, on our estate here... they are respected but not accepted if you know what I mean.'

Dual heritage mother with three dual heritage children:

'Round here there are no issues but in the wider community I think there are. There's no specific times, but there are times when you go places at times and you feel uncomfortable. It's more seasonal, summer is worse.'

And this white mother talking about her husband said:

'Yeah, I do. I think it's fine for the children. It's more my husband that's the problem mainly. He has had to deal with a lot of racism.'

The picture therefore is a mixed one with the majority of the parents saying their children were accepted in the local community. But it does seem clear that some at least of the families did experience racism in their communities. This could at times be directed to the parent visible by colour rather than the child/ren in the family.

The child in school: how the school 'handles race'

We have shown above that the school setting was one in which a significant number of the children and young people had experienced racism and bullying. In this section we look at the children and parents' views of how the schools had handled 'race'.

The children were sometimes the only child visible by colour in a year group at school or alternatively one of a very small number. For instance one 12-year-old dual heritage boy told us:

"I've been to three primaries. The first one I was the only one, the second one there was three of us and the one after I think there was just me again."

And a 13-year-old dual heritage girl talking about the number of children in her school from a 'mixed background' said:

'Off the top of my head I think there is one in our year, a couple in years seven, nine and ten and I'm not sure about year 11.'

It should be emphasised that many of the children were perceived to be doing well at school. The following for instance are statements by parents talking about their children's progress.

Multiple heritage lone mother of two multiple heritage daughters aged 13 and five: *'[Five year old] seems settled into her school, I had a consultation just before Christmas and she's on target with everything she should be learning. [Thirteen-year-old] got that achievement of excellence at [name of school] and when she got presented with it and she had to go up and collect the award and flowers in front of the school, that was lovely.'*

White lone mother of three dual heritage children: *'Yeah [11-year-old son] gets on well at school, he's actually one of the top in his class, a bit of a brain box on the quiet! [Nine-year-old son] doesn't like change very much, so when he starts in a new class it takes him a while to get settled, but once he's settled he's fine.'*

It is also important to indicate positives in the way that the children/young people responded to questions about their background and their schools. For instance one multiple heritage 13-year-old girl said: *'I get a lot of nice comments about my skin colour from teachers and students. I get teachers asking me what I am, and they say "Oh that's nice, that's different".'*

But some of the parents expressed concern about how incidents of racism and bullying had been handled. We asked whether the family had experienced difficulties related to background at the school. Piecing together the information from what both the parents and the children/young people told us it is clear that the children/young people in the majority of the families had experienced some difficulties related to background at school. It was also clear that there were very mixed reactions to whether the school had dealt with it effectively.

Multiple heritage lone mother:

'Yes definitely. More so with [13-year-old multiple heritage daughter]. It all stemmed again from when she was being bullied for maybe just over a year. It sort of died down and then it just escalated and escalated. She couldn't walk out of school without being called some horrible name. I always said to her that if they call her names I know it's hard but you need to ignore it. And that she must tell a teacher if it gets physical or they threaten you. She was getting physical threats and there was a little violence as well. At that point when she did get threatened and she was actually hit by another pupil the teacher didn't seem to take it very seriously. I think she was trying to imply it was six of one and half a dozen of the other.'

White lone mother of two dual heritage sons:

'Yes there have been issues with both children and I don't know about staff, but there was one occasion where a member of staff had been inappropriate. 'I think the school have just brushed it under the carpet, and not admitted it's a problem because if they do they have to deal with it and admit they are being inappropriate.'

This mother went on to say:

'They need to stop being so worried about not doing it correctly and therefore just not doing anything at all!'

But again this has to be put against the positive statements of some parents. For instance:

White British mother with three dual heritage children:

'Yes it [bullying] did. I suppose it was good. I went to the school and I was quite happy with how they dealt with it and it gave the opportunity to talk about that with [eight-year-old daughter] and kind of prepare her with knowing what she should do if that happens and letting her know that's not right. The school spoke to [daughter] about it and spoke to the children who were involved about it.'

It was apparent from some of the children talking that they did not in fact inform staff about racist incidents because they thought nothing would happen, or it would put the focus on them.

Thirteen-year-old dual heritage girl:

'There have been a few racist names going about. I don't want the teachers to be involved. I don't like talking to teachers. I'll talk to them happily but not personally if you know what I mean.'

Sixteen-year-old Chinese boy:

'Yes, it used to be so bad I wished I was white. Sometimes I talked to my parents about it. I didn't talk to the school about it. I was very shy back then, probably because I was being picked on. I didn't want to talk to anyone about it.'

And one young person felt that the school staff would not acknowledge there was a racist component in the bullying he was experiencing:

'I get a little bit annoyed, because they don't deal with the main problem, they deal with the fact there was a fight, but not with the main problem that there was racism.'

The interviews also raised an important issue in terms of how teachers should approach discussions in class which touched on 'race' when there were such small numbers of BME children visible by colour in the school.

At least two children answered in terms of their unease in the classroom at being in such a minority when issues relating to 'race' came up:

Twelve-year-old dual heritage boy:

'Not really. I think it's sort of difficult to come up with things in class sometimes. Like if the thing you're going to say involves your colour it's a bit hard. Like you're the only one in your class so sometimes it's hard to say. Like sometimes we'll be talking about Africa or something like that and you get chosen to speak it's a little bit harder to say. If the school was a bit more inviting for black people – and not just the school, Cornwall really as well.'

And another child told us:

'Yes because there have been lessons in history when we were doing about the black slave trade and then it makes me think if I was back there then would that have happened to me? It's quite

disturbing and I'd like to express my feelings and explain to someone why I feel so discomforted about that.'

Overview

There was considerable reference by parents and children to racist incidents at school. Some of the parents responded that they had been 'handled' well but others were much less positive.

Also it was apparent from some children that they didn't think it served any purpose telling staff about racist incidents.

In some of the children's words there is also a sense that they are playing down the significance of these racist incidents as a way of 'blending in' and surviving.

And finally several of the children talked about the unease they felt when issues of 'race' were discussed in class because they were in such a minority. This presents a real dilemma to schools, wanting to raise issues of race but being aware that children who may be part of a very small group of children visible by colour may feel threatened.



Parents receiving and wanting support

We asked the parents about what support they were currently receiving and whether they felt they wanted support. Again it was difficult to isolate issues of race from other issues when the parents and children/young people talk about receiving and wanting support.

Of the 11 parents or couples who were interviewed five said that either themselves or their children were currently receiving professional support or had received such support in the past.

It appeared that none of this support was specifically directed at issues the child/young person or family might have experienced as a result of being BME visible by colour. The support included children receiving help at school when the mother separated from their father, a mother going regularly to Women's Aid, a mother receiving help from a CPN (community psychiatric nurse), a mother receiving help from a family support worker and another mother receiving help from an NHS 'trainer' for depression.

We then asked the parents if at the present time they would like any extra professional help for their children. Five of the parents said yes, although one of these responses related to family poverty issues with the parent saying that her child needed a grant for swimming lessons. Of the remaining four, one said the child was receiving and continued to need pastoral support from school. Another white mother with dual heritage sons answered in terms of her boys having someone they could talk to about the experience of being dual heritage, and included herself in needing support in this area:

'It would be nice just to speak to people occasionally who have experiences like you – someone with an understanding of how it is to be in a mixed family, because my perspective is completely different, someone who understands their perspective, because their dad does, but we don't always talk the same language. 'He's also said to me that I can't possibly understand. That's frustrating, because I can't, but telling me I can't doesn't do anything to help. The heartache when you see your child go through something like that is just, I mean I can feel it now. It tugs.'

She goes on to say:

'It's very difficult sometimes because if you discuss issues as a white parent with your white family it doesn't always help. Because obviously [they] just get overprotective over the children and then that can have a negative effect. Not negative but maybe it can be too much for them. They just get overwhelmed by it.'

And another white parent with a 12-year-old dual heritage son told us her concern was:

'Not knowing how to deal with [son] when he's upset because someone says something racist to him. That to me I struggle with.'

And another white lone mother bringing up dual heritage children told us:

'I can feel very isolated as a single white mum with children of mixed heritage, because I am interested in education but sometimes it's really tough for me to know how it feels.'

Later in the interview she says:

'I think it would be great for me to have been involved with [people] who were with children of mixed heritage when they were little, when they were toddlers, and

they could have grown up with it. Because you would have other parents who you could talk to and discuss issues with and they could act like a buffer zone so you can pick up the phone... a support group really as a white parent.'



Conclusions and messages for policy and practice

In this final section we look at the implications of the children's and parents' narratives for policy and practice development. There is good work already going on in Cornwall, but our aim is to develop approaches that focus on talking to children visible by colour in this predominantly white area.

There is much to celebrate in the children's and parents' descriptions of their lives. We have presented a picture of families who in spite of change and pressures are resilient. We have also illustrated the successes and joys of the children and young people. A key underlying message is that it is important to focus on the strength of BME children/young people who are visible by colour and their families as well as 'issues' they may face.

At the same time, our interviews highlight key issues for policy and practice. These are considered below and are particularly important when put into the context of professionals living and working (and perhaps having been born) in Cornwall and having very little experience of other cultures.

There is a real danger that the notion that 'we treat everyone the same' is seen as an adequate response to dealing with issues of race. We need to hold firm to the position that children and families are not all the same, and while treating everyone equally, professional practice needs to respond sensitively to disparate needs and backgrounds.

Who are the children/families?

Message

There was a wide variety in the backgrounds of the children/young people. Those who had backgrounds uniform with both their parents were

in a very small minority. We believe this accurately reflects the varied backgrounds of children visible by colour in Cornwall.

We were left with a strong impression that children and young people wanted to talk about background rather than for it to be disregarded on the basis that 'we treat everyone the same'.

Policy and practice implications

- It is necessary to start from where the child is and explore with her/him in an age-appropriate way their understandings of their background.
- It is particularly important to listen to the dual or multiple heritage child in terms of how she/he identifies the different components of their background.
- It is important to map out with the child who in her/his background contributes to positive identity. It is important to recognise that in predominantly white areas there may be no one who the child can identify with in terms of background.
- It is important not to have a predetermined view of how the child experiences being visible by colour or 'problems' or 'issues' she/he might encounter as a result of being visible by colour.
- It is important to recognise children may choose to be invisible and to 'blend in' but supporting them to articulate how they see their background.
- It is important to recognise that because of the different ways in which children and parents respond to background there may be significant under-recording of the number of dual and multiple heritage children/young people in Cornwall.

Message

There were a significant number of lone parent families. The parents in these families (typically the mothers) were in a position of bringing up children who had partially different backgrounds to their own. Because of parental separations this could mean lone white parents bringing up dual heritage children. Also it could mean two white parents bringing up dual heritage children visible by colour.

Practice implications

It is important to support parents to acknowledge different elements in their children's understanding of themselves.

Experiencing racism**Message**

In spite of a number of parents reporting general acceptance of their children in their communities, a large majority of the children had experience of racism. Some incidents were isolated and might have happened in the past, but others were current and by any standards serious. The clarity with which the children/young people recall past events indicates their impact. There is a danger that name-calling for instance may be regarded as a 'one off' or 'trivial' part of the normal 'give and take of childrens' lives'. But from the children's perspectives it is very clear that these are not events which can be quickly forgotten but may be seen as key indicators of how the outside world defines them.

Racism occurs in community settings as well as in schools. But the children and parents' testimony has particular relevance for schools in Cornwall.

Policy and practice implications

- Robust mandatory training in

cultural competence is required for personnel in schools, particularly in reference to mixed families visible by colour in a predominantly white area. It is essential that school governors receive this training.

- Increased emphasis should be placed on all pupils and their parents being aware of policies and procedures for dealing with racist behaviour and the support available.
- Better links should be made between schools and support groups and contacts. No child and her/his parent experiencing racism should be without the offer of support from a trained advocate who shares the experience of being visible by colour in predominantly white Cornwall.
- In the case of racist incidents there should be more emphasis in schools on empowering the child/young person to say how they would like the situation resolved. The child/young person should be asked if she/he wishes a parent/carer to be involved or whether he/she would like support from a peer mentor. All children/young people and their parents should – as of right – be given the opportunity to access support from a race equality advocate who shares the experience of being visible by colour in predominantly white Cornwall.
- All incidents of racism impacting on children/young people should be followed up six months after the event to ascertain what progress has been made and whether there are current support needs for the children/young people and their parents.
- Tackling racism in Cornwall's schools should not be seen as only about reacting to incidents of racism. It is also about being proactive, so that all children/

young people and their parents are made aware on an ongoing basis of the seriousness of all aspects of racist behaviour including name calling. It should also be about embedding positive perspectives on diversity and the many different backgrounds of children – including those of dual and multiple heritage visible by colour – in Cornish schools.

Message

There was a very high reference to bullying. It may be that the experience and fear of bullying is particularly acute with these children because they know they stand out as being visibly different.

Policy and practice implications

It seems that in many situations there is a tendency for practitioners to focus only on the bullying and not see the wider possibility of racist intent. This is consistent with the recent Cornwall Ofsted (2009) conclusion that 'the analysis of bullying incidents by age, gender, faith, cultural background or sexual orientation is not comprehensive and as a result, partners do not have sufficient information to accurately evaluate the impact of their work'.

Message

The children/young people and their parents said that the first years in school were a time when they particularly remembered experiencing racist bullying and name calling.

Policy and practice implications

Teaching staff in primary and junior school settings need to be strongly focused on challenging racism, irrespective of the number of BME children visible by colour in their schools.

It is the combination of robust reporting systems and the day-to-day words and actions of staff in direct contact with children that is important. Children need to be supported to identify 'wrong' actions and 'wrong' words.

Message

Racial harassment appeared to become more significant at times when children are experiencing other challenges such as poverty and family difficulties and separation.

Policy and practice implications

Staff working with BME children visible by colour need to be aware that when children are facing other challenges, the impact of racism may be exacerbated and will need to be addressed.

Message

At least two of the children talked about unease and wanting more support when issues of 'race' were discussed in the classroom.

Policy and practice implications

When teachers are discussing slavery etc they need to be clearly aware of the impact on the individual children visible by colour. These children may be the only ones in the class and therefore experience feelings of unease. Talking and support at an individual level may be needed.

Making links with a community?

Message

Typically the families were not part of a community that included other families visible by colour but had links with only one or several similar families (often with only a child of similar background). There may be a small number of 'communities' in Cornwall with families who are

similarly visible by colour, but numerically of more significance are the BME children visible by colour who are relatively isolated from other similar children. Also because of differences between children's backgrounds and the backgrounds of some of the parents who are bringing them up, contacts based on a presumed 'community' of parents are often likely to be ineffective.

Policy and practice implications

Approaches based on working with specific communities in Cornwall for the purpose of making links with families will only have limited success. Other more individualised ways of making contact need to be developed. This is particularly important for agencies such as Sure Start children's centres that have a brief to extend their reach and to make links with black and minority ethnic families such as were part of this study.

The need for support

Message

A significant number of children and families talked about support needs. There was reference to the importance of meeting with other BME children/young people visible by colour. There was also evidence of white parents wanting support in managing the 'racial identity' of their children.

Policy and practice implications

There is a need for support groups for BME children who are visible by colour and their parents. The purpose of such support groups is:

- to allow children visible by colour and their parents to meet and mix with other such families
- to explore the joys, challenges and success stories of bringing up a child

visible by colour in Cornwall

- to support children who are visible by colour to be positive about themselves and their background and in the case of dual heritage children to successfully integrate the different aspects of their background
- to support white parents who are bringing up a child visible by colour in Cornwall.

Wider challenges

All of the above policy and practice messages have to be placed in the wider context of staff in schools and child welfare agencies developing cultural competence and working to eradicate racism in a proactive rather than a reactive way. The messages of this report are therefore not just related to the needs of individual children who are visible by colour.

There are many ways in which this can happen and good work is already going on in Cornwall. It can involve working with local communities to support diversity and increase learning around different cultures and different backgrounds. It can involve offering children first hand experiences of different cultures. It can involve supporting all children to challenge racism in their own communities.

This is important for the individual children/young people visible by colour in Cornwall and their families but it is also important for all young white people in the county. Although Cornwall has a strong identity and its own culture and traditions, the young white people of Cornwall will take their place in our highly diverse society.

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*'Most of the time people don't
like my colour...'
Experiences of dual/multiple
heritage and other BME children
and their families in Cornwall*

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