

The School that tried to end Racism

I have watched two episodes and am so impressed with the maturity and attitude of the pupils. They all seemed to have a healthy and balanced attitude to race, exemplified by the comment from one pupil, 'It's not the colour of skin which matters but how you are as a person'. I was concerned when pupils went on to be divided into two groups –white and black. I feared that the teachers were contriving a situation where racism could thrive –where it hadn't before. The groups went on to explore their own experiences.

When the white pupils were asked how they felt about being a white person, they were very hesitant in replying. It seemed that the question had never occurred to them before. It was just something they took for granted. They seemed subdued as they listened to the laughter and chatter from the black group next door. The comments within the black group showed they *had* thought about the differences before and had experienced prejudice.

Interestingly, Asian pupils expressed frustration at being in the black group as they had their own experiences as part of a different cultural group.

Consequently a third group was established.

Incidents which had left a lasting impression on pupils were shared in pairs then the recipient related the incident to the whole group. An example was given by one black boy whose bag was searched in a shop but not those of his white friends. Another shocking example was from a black boy who had gone out to a restaurant with his family and they were asked to pay up front. When they questioned why only them, they were told that 'people like them' had pulled a trick on the restaurant previously and left without paying. When they produce vouchers towards the cost of the meal, they were immediately told they were fakes. These were seen clearly as examples of an endemic racist attitude. Stereotyping is prejudice and leads to discrimination.

The question of privilege as an inherent right for some people was well presented by a simple outdoor exercise. Pupils were selected to stand in various positions for the beginning of a race, and then, by their responses to certain questions were repositioned. Some were placed in front and some further behind the starting line. Pupils were surprised at such random

unfairness, and outraged by it. Teachers used this to explore the rationale behind 'privilege' and the results of its inherent unfairness in society.

The strategies used to develop pupil's awareness also included a visit to the National Portrait Gallery where pupils were shown various portraits of famous people all except one being white. I am not too sure that this was a particularly useful exercise, but that may be my prejudice.

If the aim of the project is to promote awareness of racial prejudice in the pupils, it seems to me that they have succeeded. It is a positive step in a direction which promotes inclusion and fairness for all. We all want to live in a non-racist society where all people have equal opportunities and rights. All credit to Glenthorne High School for pursuing this programme. And all credit to its superbly balanced non-racist pupils.

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