

## **The School that tried to end Racism**

I think I should explain that I suggested viewing these programmes as a subject for an interesting discussion because the school is in the borough where I live and is one I know. It is also a very similar school to the one my grandson attends, popular and with a wide ethnic diversity of intake.

I think that with any TV documentary programme one has to be aware of the agendas of the programme producers and in this case that of the academics conducting the research as well as the content of the activities and questionnaires used. Over all I thought the children were excellent, articulate and thoughtful, although the focus was chiefly kept on just a few of the 30+ pupils involved in the study for most of both programmes.

I thought the initial division of the children into white and non-white too crude to deal with the more intricate aspects of discrimination in the U.K. It was interesting that this was challenged by the children themselves in the second programme, who insisted on having a third group. The viewer was led to assume the "white" group were all native born English children. This is highly unlikely. Our borough has a large population from EU and non EU European countries, which may have accounted for the lack of involvement shown by some children in that group.

When the children were asked about their ethnicity and family origins in their separate groups, and later when all together in a "show and tell" session, those from the ethnic minorities spoke enthusiastically and knowledgeably on the subject. They proudly displayed items such as a national dress, a prayer mat, a certificate in a parental language. When the same opportunities were given to those in the white group they looked confused and seemed reluctant to say anything. One boy tentatively said he supposed he could describe himself as ginger haired and European and when he produced a policeman's helmet and explained that one of his ancestors was Sir Robert Peel who founded the police force it drew some very worried looks from the audience. One girl brought a Bible to "show and tell" because she was a Christian but when she displayed a flag of St. George because she supported England at sporting events one of the academics watching the group on a screen in another room immediately said to her colleague "I associate that with the National Front." This group appeared to have little knowledge about their heritage and embarrassed by discussing it.

My grandson would have understood and sympathised with the boy who believed he had been ejected from a shop unfairly and being very upset by the experience. He too has been harassed in shops and stopped in the street by police both when he is out wearing his own clothes and when on his way home in school uniform.

I think the children who took part did learn some valuable truths and hopefully came to understand one another better from the experience. I believe the academics achieved the result they aimed for to justify their research. Glenthorne is a good school and its pupils are typical of Sutton schools in general.