



# MAKING PROGRESS?

Employment and  
retention of BAME  
teachers in England

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# Introduction

<sup>1</sup> We use the acronym 'BAME' with an awareness of the problematic nature of the term and its homogenising effects. Where possible we use the ethnic group of participants as self-defined; and for the workforce data we use this government term to describe all non-White British ethnic groups.

Racial inequality continues to be a problem for teachers in England. Despite a small increase in the proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME)<sup>1</sup> teachers over the last decade (Department for Education [DfE], 2018a) and the ongoing policy commitment to diversification of the teaching workforce (DfE, 2018b), a gap persists between the proportion of students and teachers from minority ethnic groups in England. Figures from 2019 show that 85.6% of all teachers are White British but just 65.4% of pupils are currently from a White British background; in comparison, 78.5% of the working age population of England were recorded as White British in the 2011 census (UK Government, 2019, 2020). As a result, minority ethnic pupils do not see themselves represented in their teachers, and all pupils miss out on the diversity of experiences and understanding, and potentially socially just and race-conscious teaching (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020). Some pupils, such as those from Traveller, Gypsy and Roma backgrounds, may never be taught by a teacher from the same ethnic group.

Efforts to recruit new teachers from BAME groups are important but these alone will not solve shortages. Nationally, retention is lower for BAME teachers than for White British teachers (Allen et al., 2016; DfE, 2018c). Scholars and commentators often employ 'a revolving door' metaphor to emphasise the problems of high turnover (i.e. moving schools) and high attrition (i.e. leaving the profession) of new teachers, both of which are particularly prevalent in schools in deprived areas (Allen et al., 2018). An approach focused on understanding the causes of minority teacher staffing problems in relation to institutional characteristics and the culture of the workplace has been useful to study the phenomenon (Ingersoll et al., 2019). Our research adopts this lens to investigate where BAME teachers tend to be employed and what happens to these teachers in schools that causes low retention rates.

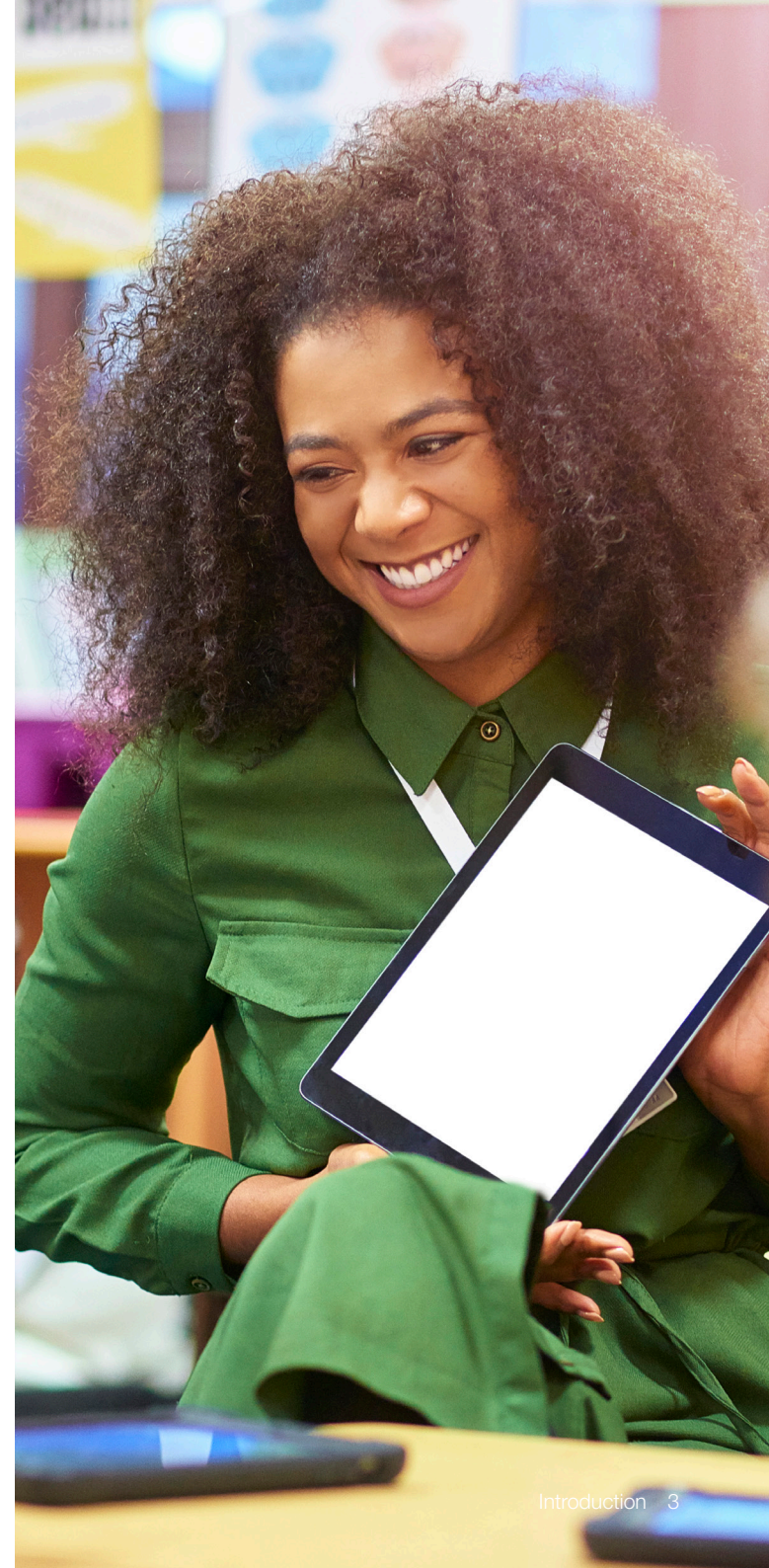
These are important questions to consider given the evidence that teachers from minority ethnic groups experience unique problems linked to racial inequality and racism in their careers (Haque and Elliott, 2017). International research has highlighted important differences in factors affecting the retention of teachers of colour (Achinstein et al., 2010; Ingersoll et al., 2019). In England, survey results for Teach London highlight some differences in retention factors between BAME teachers and non-BAME London teachers, with the former group prioritising issues in professional life and career development (Small et al., forthcoming, cited in Mayor of London, n.d.). However, research undertaken to date in the national context on factors which cause teachers to leave the profession lacks information about BAME teachers (DfE, 2018d; Worth et al., 2018).

The study reported on here had two main objectives:

[To investigate patterns of minority ethnic teachers' employment across English schools.](#)

[To explore the reasons behind low rates of minority teacher retention through the perspectives of teachers from different demographics and professional backgrounds.](#)

The study used the 2018 School Workforce Census and related administrative school census datasets to model the distribution of non-White British teachers across English schools. We also conducted 24 narrative interviews with teachers from different ethnic and professional backgrounds working in urban disadvantaged schools to explore factors shaping their decisions to stay in or leave teaching. This report presents the key findings of the research, its implications and our recommendations. Overall, our findings question the idea that the education system is 'making progress' in terms of race equality in the case of teachers from minority ethnic groups.



# Key findings and recommendations

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## Findings - Where do BAME teachers teach?

**BAME teachers work within a predominantly white profession, even in urban schools serving diverse communities.**

At the national level, only 16% of schools employ over 20% of their teachers from minority ethnic groups. The next most diverse group of around 15% of schools have between 10% and 20% of their teachers from minority ethnic groups.

**BAME teachers are concentrated in London schools and in ethnically diverse schools.**

On average, around 35% of teachers in Outer London and just over 40% of those in Inner London schools are from a BAME background – a much greater concentration than in any other region. Across England, there is a strong relationship between the presence of BAME teachers and minority ethnic representation amongst non-teaching staff within schools, as well as pupils.

**BAME teachers tend to work in disadvantaged schools, particularly in London.**

London schools located in the most deprived areas employ a high proportion of around 45% of BAME teachers (where deprivation is defined by the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index). Elsewhere this pattern also exists. London

schools with a high concentration of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) also employ significantly more teachers from BAME groups than schools with low numbers of FSM pupils.

**BAME teachers are open and motivated to teach in urban diverse schools.**

BAME teachers are motivated to opt for teaching in urban schools because they value diversity in the workplace and relate to pupils from non-dominant ethnic communities.

## Findings – What makes BAME teachers stay in teaching, or leave?

**Racism and associated inequalities are at the forefront of BAME teachers' minds in conversations about retention, not workload.**

Our participants highlighted how both overt and covert racism takes a toll on BAME teachers' wellbeing, progression and job satisfaction. BAME teachers had the same high levels of workload as all teachers, plus an additional 'hidden workload' of coping with racism.

**The ethnic diversity of senior leadership teams in urban schools with high-minority pupil intakes is important for the overall retention of BAME teachers.**

All of the teachers interviewed disapproved of the universal whiteness of senior leadership teams (SLT) in otherwise diverse schools. This issue plays a role in teachers' decisions to move schools because of a perceived negative impact on the organisational culture.

**The racial literacy of all school leaders and their commitment to equity and social justice are important for creating a supportive organisational culture.**

Interviews suggested that the SLT plays the key role in creating multicultural capital within ethnically diverse schools, including by making a conscious effort to increase their

own racial literacy to end colour-blind or stereotypical approaches to BAME staff development. Participants also commented that there is a need to acknowledge how wider social inequalities are mirrored and reproduced in the school power hierarchies and underpin and drive BAME teachers' unequal career progression.

**Stalled opportunities for career progression are the key retention factor for experienced BAME teachers.**

Experienced BAME teachers interested in senior promotions felt unfairly passed over for such opportunities, leaving many in pursuit of opportunities outside of the state school sector. Most interviewees said that this glass ceiling was not obvious to them at the early stages of their career.

**The job satisfaction and retention of BAME teachers are affected by intersections of 'race' and racism with other aspects of identity such as gender, class, lighter or darker skin colour, and immigrant background.**

Additional and intersectional aspects of identities work in complex ways for different teachers, including those teaching different subjects or key stages, but particularly appear to disadvantage Black teachers.



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## Recommendations

### **Targeted government resources and support are needed to improve BAME teacher retention.**

As BAME teachers tend to work in urban schools with high-minority and more disadvantaged pupil intakes, it is crucial that government resources are put into their retention, both in order to manage teacher supply in these schools and to reduce the negative impact of high staff turnover on the outcomes of disadvantaged children.

### **A clear vision for school workforce diversity should be articulated in policy documents on teacher recruitment and retention in England.**

It is impossible to solve teacher shortages in England without a coordinated effort to recruit into teaching from all groups of the population. The commitment to diversity should be reflected in the policy initiatives such as the teacher retention and recruitment strategy and the early career framework reforms.

### **Consideration should be given to workplace diversity to enhance student teacher and early career retention.**

Initial teacher training (ITT) providers should consider placing BAME trainees in schools with diverse staff, especially amongst the senior leadership team. This is important for both short and extended school placements on different ITT programmes.

### **Ofsted should be required to evaluate the 'mix' of diversity among the pupils, teachers and senior leaders in a school.**

Fair representation reflecting the ethnic diversity of the local community should be a core value encouraged in state funded schools.

### **School leaders in diverse schools should be required to demonstrate the experience, training and skills that allow them to develop equitable learning environments that support diverse learners and BAME teachers.**

A better preparation of school leaders and a conscious effort by them to improve the racial literacy and diversity within the SLT is paramount for a favourable racial climate for BAME teacher retention.

### **The ongoing development of BAME teachers should be supported through high-quality mentoring, improved working conditions, and opportunities for career development.**

SLTs should be mindful of mentoring BAME teachers towards taking on stereotypic pastoral roles. An approach to the mentoring and retention of BAME teachers beyond the first few years in teaching could take the form of leadership programmes 'Lead First' or 'Lead London', modelled on the example of Teach First. These schemes require government funding and support.

### **Challenges related to BAME progression into leadership should be placed on the policy agenda.**

Having more BAME leaders in SLTs will also help overall BAME teacher retention, as per our interview evidence and research evidence that racial congruence between school leaders and staff improves BAME teacher retention.

### **All staff claims of racism (both overt and covert) should be investigated and reported, and all leaders should be encouraged to identify practices that have negative effects (unintended or otherwise) on BAME teachers.**

Having procedures in place will help ensure that school staff take racism towards BAME teachers seriously, and that any issues are acted on in a timely and professional manner.

### **Teacher education programmes should include racial justice in education as part of the curriculum for prospective teachers.**

Including racial justice as an important element in the teacher education curriculum will lay the foundations of a racially literate teaching workforce.



# Data and methodology

## School Workforce and School Census Data

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Our analysis used an administrative dataset, the 2018 School Workforce Census (SWC), supplemented with pupil demographic information from the School Census (both published by the Department for Education) to investigate patterns of minority ethnic teachers' employment across English schools.

The publicly available School Workforce Census details the following school characteristics of interest for the analysis in this report: the proportion of non-White British classroom teachers, as well as the proportion of non-White British teaching assistants, non-teaching support staff (i.e. school secretaries and other clerical and childcare staff) and auxiliary staff (i.e. catering and school maintenance staff).

The following school level census data were used for exploring the relationship between school characteristics and the presence of BAME teachers: (i) the proportion of pupils using English as an additional language (EAL), and two potential measures of deprivation, including (ii) the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) and (iii) the Index of Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), which gives a good measure of neighbourhood deprivation.

### Note on SWC data used

We report on findings for non-White British classroom teachers as a whole. We acknowledge the limitations of this approach, as the situation and experiences of different ethnic groups who will fall within that grouping will vary considerably. However, within the limitations of the funding for this research and the ongoing lockdown, it was not possible to obtain and analyse teacher level data. Because we used a publicly available dataset, there is a degree of suppression. Findings should therefore be treated with caution, although they represent clear trends.

### Analysis

A total of 21,746 schools were included in the majority of the analysis – some subsets were used for particular parts of the analysis. The analyses exclude schools from the City of London borough and Isles of Scilly (due to significant data coverage issues). For profiling, an ordinal categorical variable was created to represent schools according to their proportion of BAME teachers. The cut-point for the five groups are: 0%, up to 5%, 10%, 20% and over 20%.

To reveal the most important characteristics that appeared to drive the percentage of BAME teachers in a school, a modelling exercise through binary logistic regression was used. This allowed the identification of a subset of predictors that, when considered together, were most influential. To undertake this form of modelling, those schools with no BAME teachers were compared to schools with a high proportion of BAME teachers. The modelling was undertaken on several different samples to provide confirmation that any model seen was replicable across all data records.





## Teacher interviews

An approach using narrative interview techniques was used to illicit the experiences of teachers throughout their professional careers. Their stories and reflections were critical to understanding and analysing teacher retention. Drawing on critical race methodology (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002), we used discussion of the teachers' decisions to stay in or leave certain schools or in some cases the profession, to explore the impact of racism, and how 'race' interacted with other aspects of identity.

In total, 24 interviews lasting on average one hour were carried out during the 2019-20 school year. All but two of the interviews were with serving teachers, although some of the interviewees were doing only limited supply teaching at the time.

We also discussed potential solutions and ideas around retention with eight teachers from our sample during an online workshop where we presented our overall findings. Some of the recommendations come directly from that workshop.

## Of the teachers we interviewed:

### Ethnicity:

14

Black African or Caribbean teachers

5

South Asian teachers

3

teachers from Other Asian sub-groups

2

Mixed White and Black teachers

### School type:

9

primary teachers

15

secondary teachers

### Years of service:

11

early career teachers (5 years or less)

13

experienced teachers (over 5 years)

### Location:

18

teachers worked in London

6

worked elsewhere in England

### Gender:

18

female teachers

6

male teachers

# Findings

## Staff diversity within English schools

Using data from the School Workforce Census (SWC), Figure 1 depicts the proportion of schools with BAME staff in four main categories: teachers, teaching assistants, non-classroom based support staff and auxiliary staff. We found that just over half of schools across England employ one or more teachers or teaching assistants from minority ethnic groups.

- 54%** Schools with BAME Teachers
- 53%** Schools with BAME Teaching Assistants
- 42%** Schools with BAME Auxiliary Staff
- 32%** Schools with BAME Non-Classroom Support Staff



We established that 26% of schools have no BAME staff of any kind and 46% of schools have no teachers from minority ethnic groups. Only around 16% of schools employ over a fifth of their teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds. The next most diverse group of around 15% of schools have between 10% and 20% of their teachers from BAME groups. Only 18% of schools

have at least one minority ethnic staff member in all job categories. These data suggest that BAME teachers predominantly work within a white profession, which has implications for their retention and turnover in relation to the racial climate in schools discussed in the interview data below.

**26%**  
of schools have  
no BAME staff

**46%**  
of all schools have  
no BAME teachers

**16%**  
of schools have over  
**20%**  
BAME teachers

Figure 1. Proportion of schools with BAME staff in different roles



Figure 2. BAME teacher presence in schools by region, 2018

■ Proportion of schools  
 ■ Avg. % BAME teachers

## Schools where BAME teachers are employed

The charts in this section show the relationships between the most influential school level characteristics and the concentration of BAME teachers. The blue bars in Figures 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 show the proportion of schools falling into each of the categories. The red line shows the average percentage of BAME teachers found in schools in that category.

### The most influential characteristic of schools employing a large proportion of BAME teachers is their London location.

Teachers from minority ethnic groups are not equally distributed across schools in England. Figure 2 illustrates that schools in London have a much greater concentration of minority ethnic teachers than any other government region. On average, over 40% of teachers in Inner London schools and around 35% of teachers in Outer London schools are non-White British. London has around 12% of schools but accounts for 21% of schools in the country with at least one BAME teacher. The datasets we analysed indicate that 96% of London schools employed at least one non-White British teacher, twice the rate of schools outside of London.

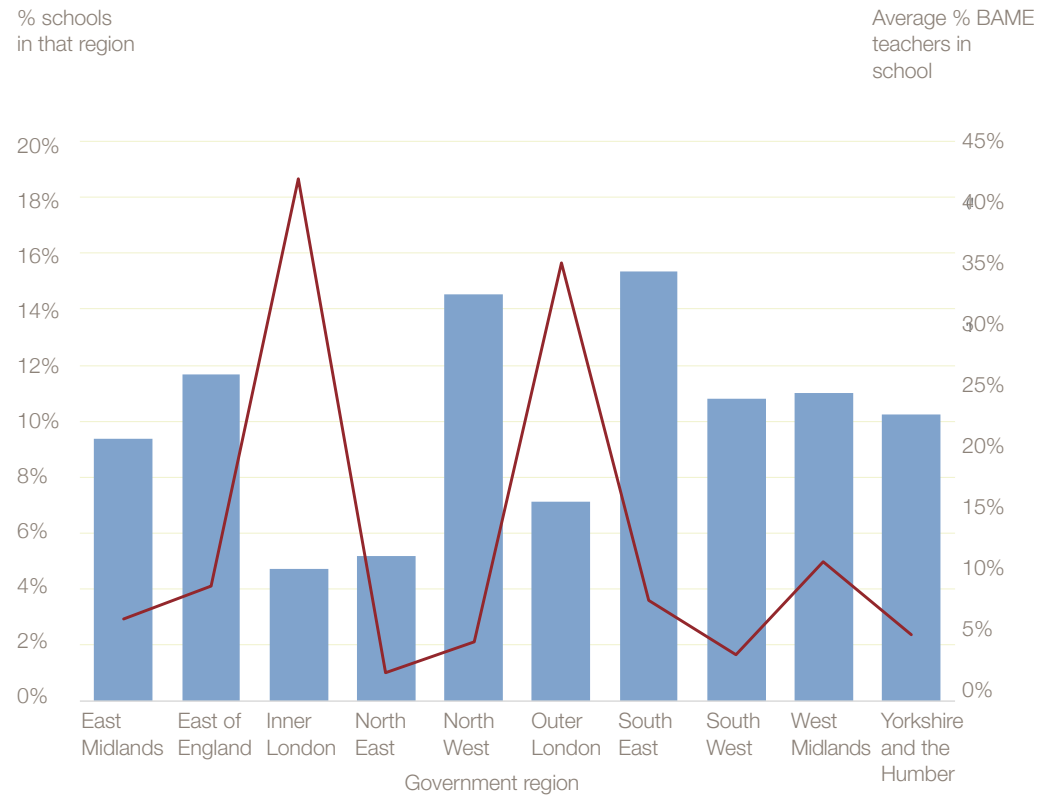


Figure 3. BAME teacher presence in schools by proportion of BAME teaching assistants, 2018

**Another predictor of schools having a high proportion of BAME teachers is the ethnic diversity of schools.**

Figures 3-5 show trends by ethnicity of other school staff. Typically, the concentration of BAME teachers in schools increases along with the proportion of non-teaching school staff from BAME groups (including teaching assistants, non-classroom based support staff and auxiliary staff).

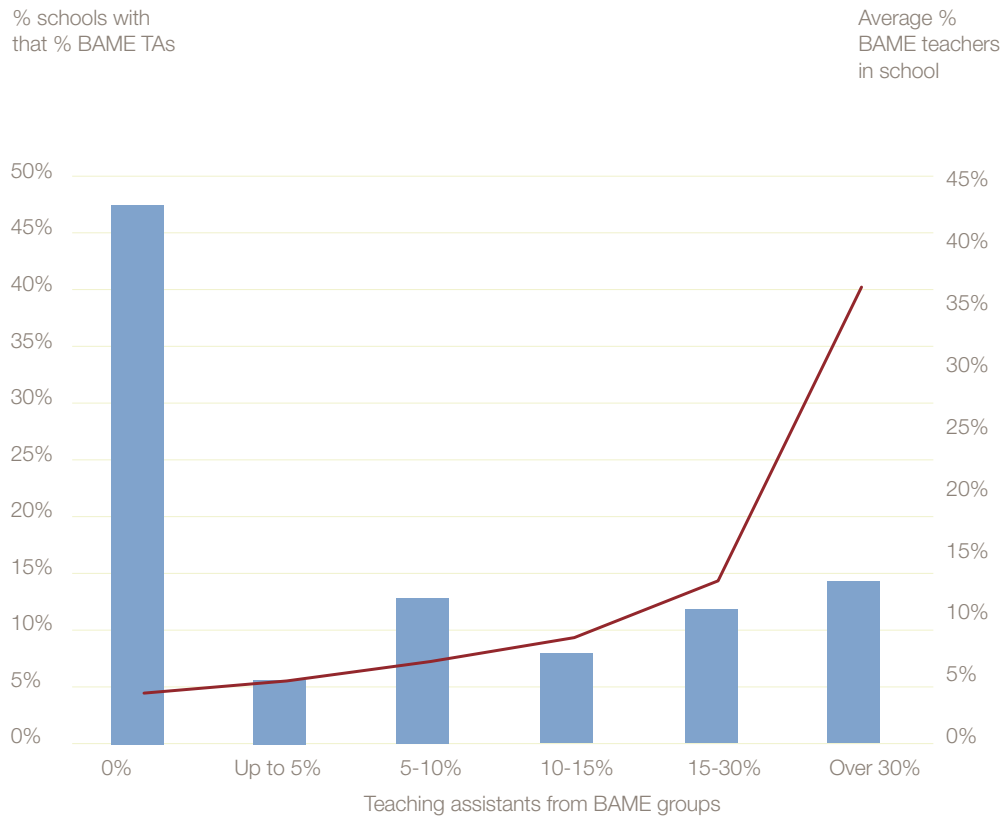


Figure 4. BAME teacher presence in schools by proportion of BAME auxiliary staff, 2018

■ Proportion of schools  
■ Avg. % BAME teachers

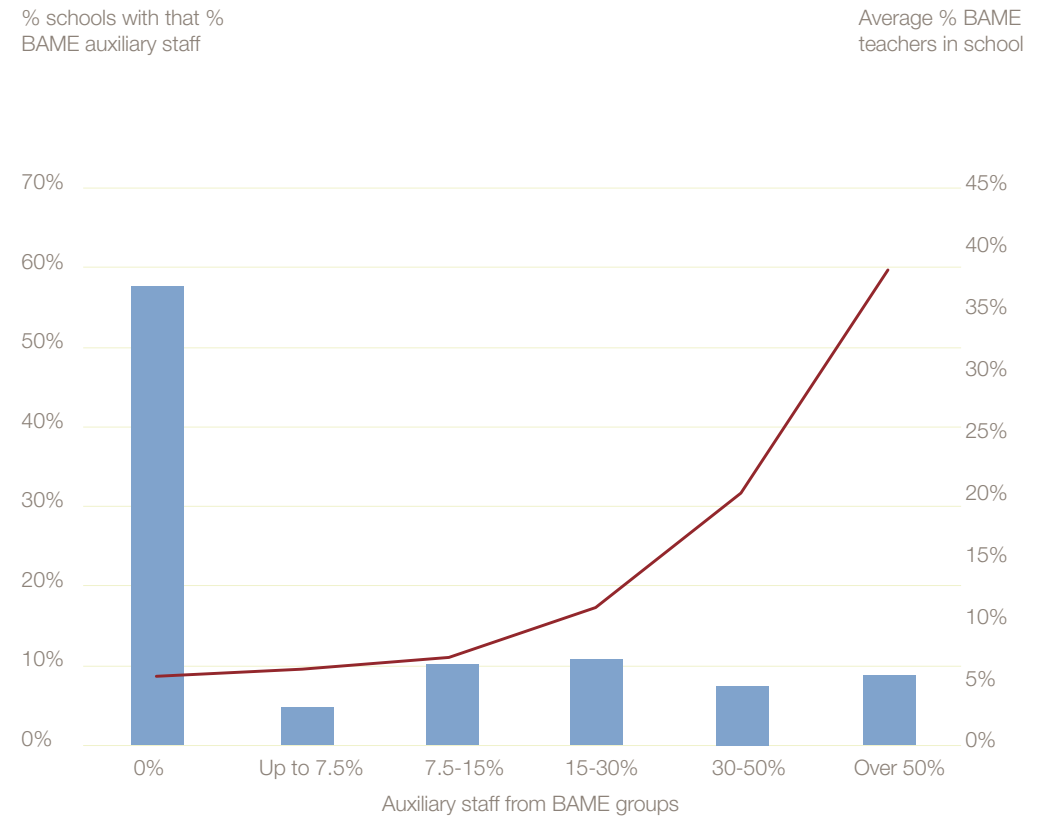




Figure 5. BAME teacher presence in schools by proportion of BAME non-classroom based support staff, 2018

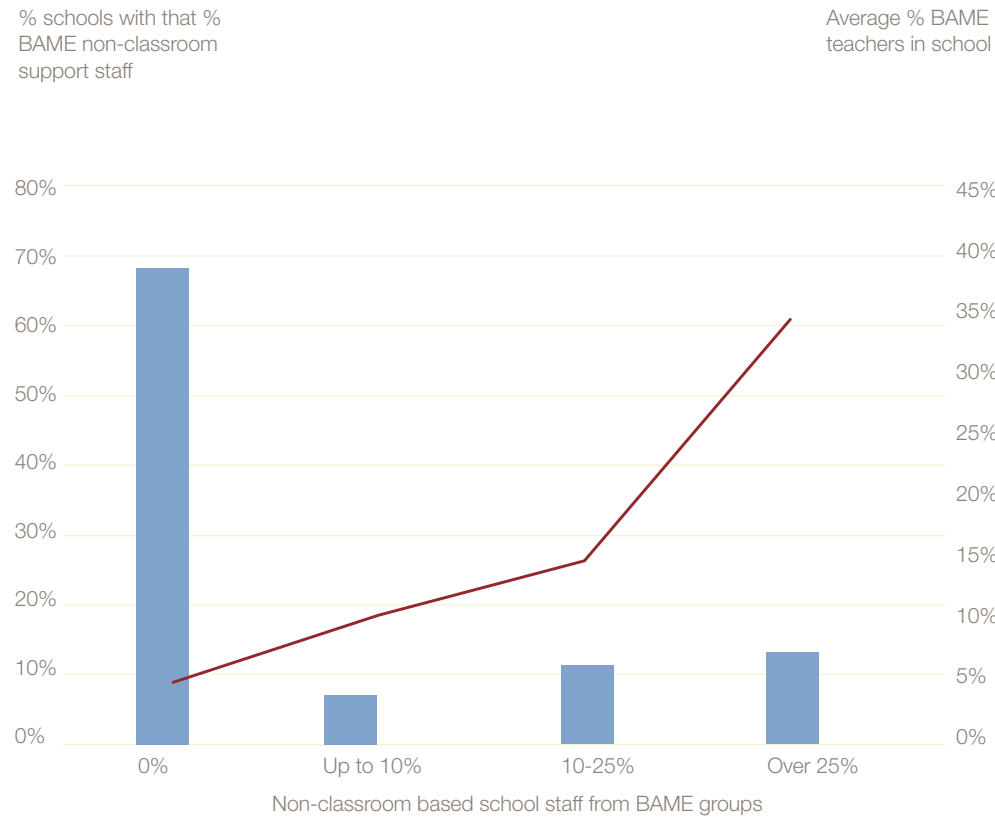


Figure 6. BAME teacher presence by proportion of EAL pupils in schools

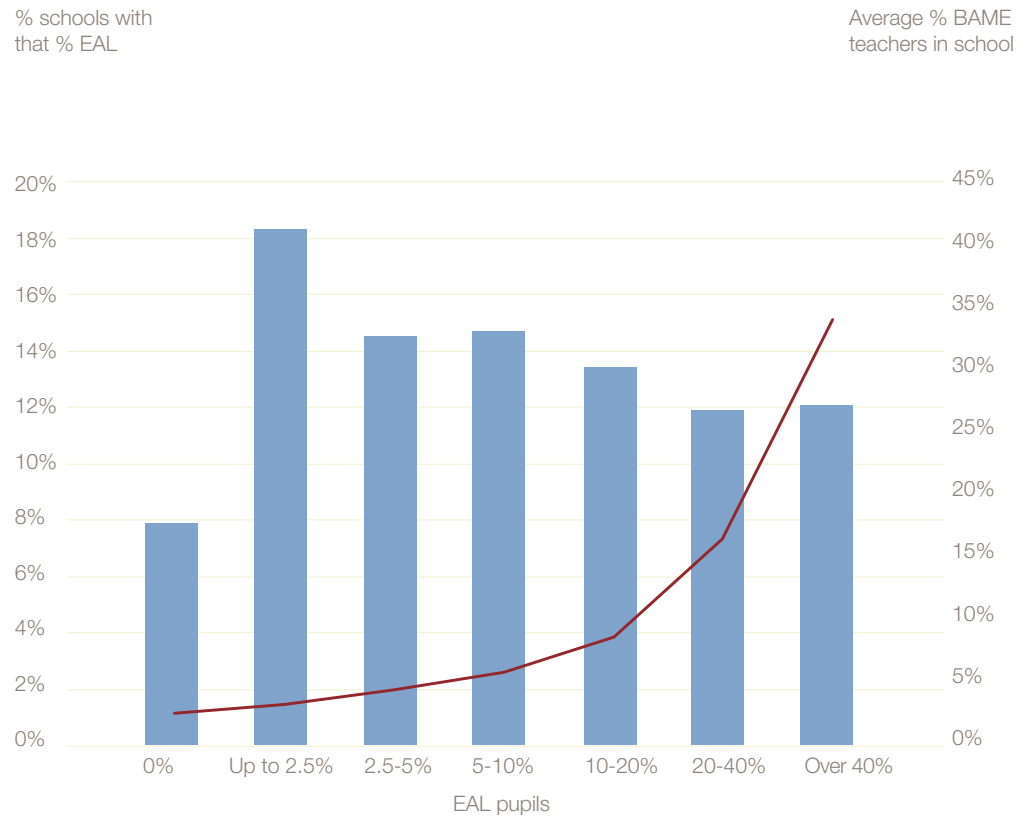
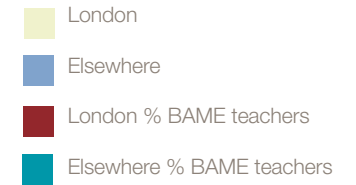


Figure 6 shows that the concentration of BAME teachers increases along with the proportion of minority ethnic pupils who use English as an additional language (EAL). For example, in schools containing over 40% of EAL pupils, over 30% of teachers are of a BAME background. Only 2.5% of BAME teachers are employed in schools without any EAL pupils.

Figure 7. BAME teacher presence by proportion of EAL pupils in schools, London and elsewhere



There is a very strong London effect in the overall findings. To address this, we disaggregated analysis of the specific relationship between the presence of BAME teachers and school intake characteristics between London schools and those elsewhere in the country.

The green and blue bars in Figures 7, 8 and 9 show the proportion of schools falling into different categories in London and across England. The teal and red lines trace the proportion of BAME teachers in those schools in London and across England.

The national pattern seen in Figure 6 holds in London and across England (see Figure 7). Schools with a relatively high proportion of minority ethnic teachers also have a large proportion of EAL pupils. Within London, just over 55% of schools have more than 40% of EAL pupils, and within these schools, around 45% of teachers come from a BAME background. Outside of London, the same pattern exists, but in comparison, just 7% of schools with over 40% of EAL pupils employ 22% of BAME teachers.

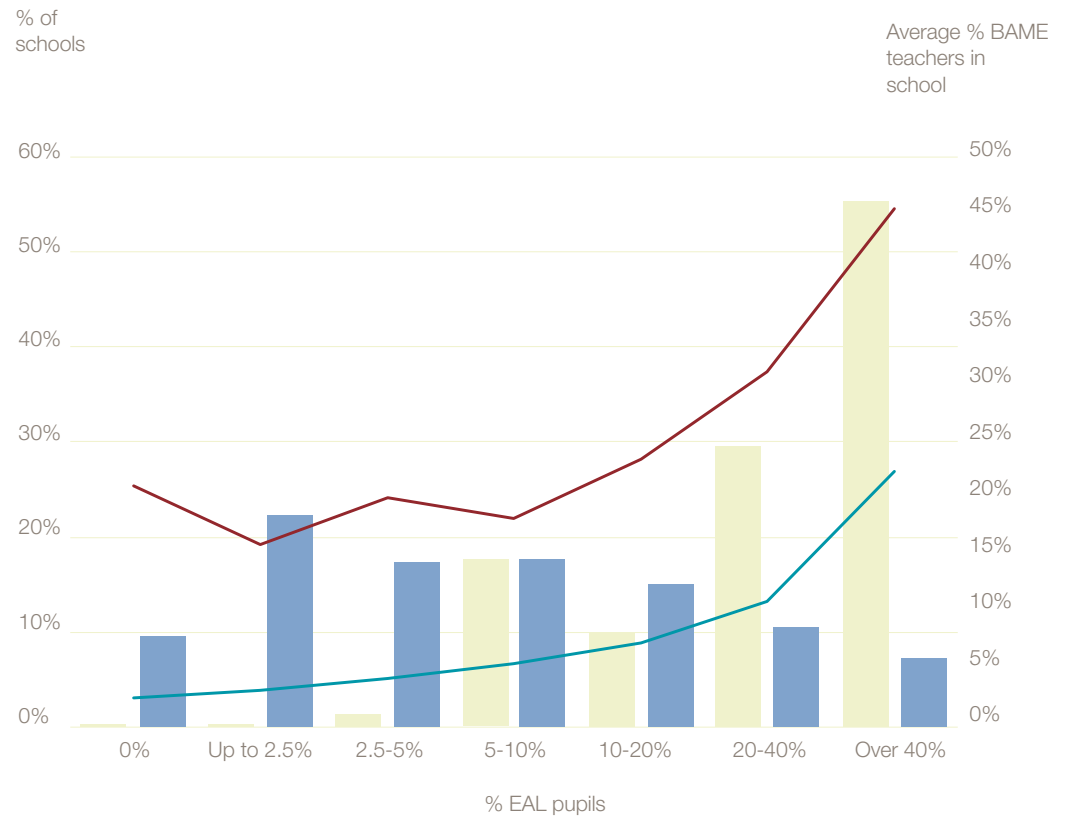


Figure 8. BAME teacher presence by proportion of schools in deprived areas, London and elsewhere

**There is a relationship between the prevalence of BAME teachers and disadvantage among pupil intake.**

The likelihood of schools employing BAME teachers increases if they are located in deprived areas, with these locations determined by the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). As shown in Figure 8, this is more pronounced in London where in 39% of schools with a

neighbourhood IDACI score in the highest bracket, around 45% of teachers are from a BAME background. Similarly, more minority ethnic teachers work in those London schools that have a higher proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) (Figure 9). However, elsewhere this relationship with FSM is much less pronounced.

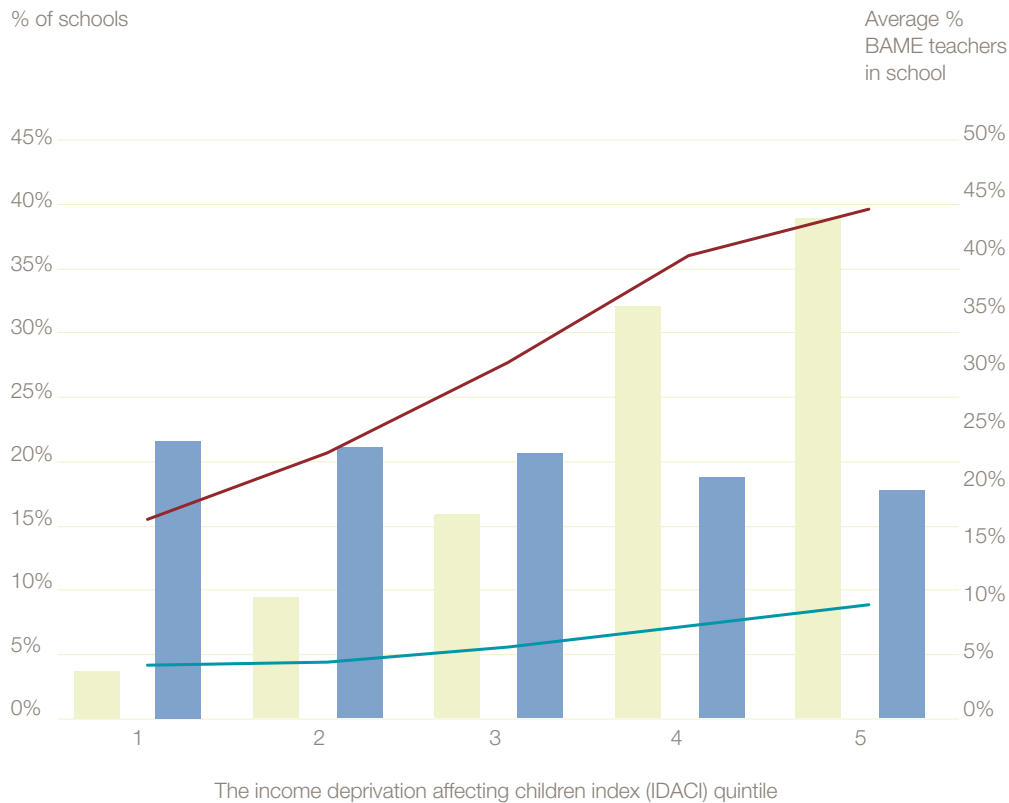
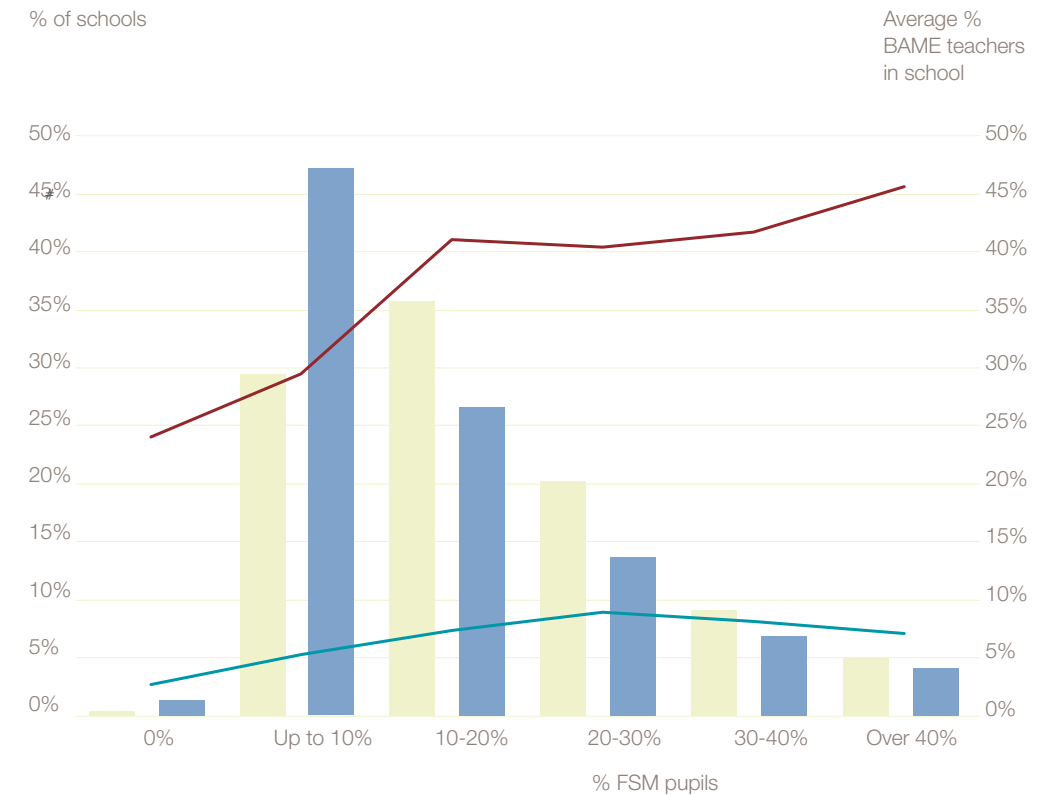


Figure 9. BAME teacher presence by proportion of FSM pupils in schools, London and elsewhere

- London
- Elsewhere
- London % BAME teachers
- Elsewhere % BAME teachers

These findings represent to our knowledge the first exploration of where BAME teachers work, and how this relates to school characteristics. This also provides context for the qualitative analysis of interview data in the following section.





# Factors shaping teachers' decisions to stay or leave

Our qualitative research found that some of the factors influencing BAME teacher retention are the same factors influencing teachers of majority background in England. Unsurprisingly teachers were happiest in those schools where they felt valued, respected, had autonomy, connection with, and support from, colleagues and senior leaders, and clear paths for career progression. Yet, as detailed below, some decisive retention factors *only* apply to BAME teachers who work in urban diverse or disadvantaged schools, and the 'weight' of different factors vary for different groups of teachers.

## High workload and 'hidden workload' factors

Workload has been identified as the number one factor in the retention of the overall teacher workforce in England (DfE, 2018d). As we might expect, we found that BAME teachers had the same high levels of workload, not least because the majority of the interviewees worked in London or other urban schools in deprived areas where there may be additional demands on teachers' time. As this early career teacher in a London secondary school, who was also a middle leader, noted,

... we know that our students can't afford tuition or don't have that support at home. For them to be able to compete and get the grades 7 to 9 they're going to have to do more work at home independently or in school. I think that does put pressure on teachers to be able to get the results  
(Kamu, Bengali, secondary)

However, the data also revealed a conundrum, namely, that our conversations with most teachers about their job satisfaction and retention were not dominated by workload issues. Instead, the interviews gave us a clear sense of how structural inequalities blighted the careers of our participants – as we discuss in more detail below. As such, workload was a secondary retention factor: "if you don't have inequality issues, then you can focus on other things" (Kiara, Indian, primary).

Experienced teachers in our sample said they had learnt to manage their workload: "[I]f you can get past the first four or five years and you are able to look at teaching for what it is and compartmentalise the job into a way that you can make your work/life balance work, then it's not about workload anymore." (Michelle, White and Black Caribbean, secondary). Besides, as Mark pointed out, all teachers irrespective of background "have got the same workload". He argued that "the [retention] issue would be opportunities" and added:

I look at the people at my school that have been promoted above me or given opportunities to learn, and they're all White British which I find interesting.  
(Mark, Black African, primary)

Along the same lines, Noor described how diminishing aspirations to become a school leader drove her to take a career break after 14 years in teaching:

It has nothing to do with workload. It has everything to do with me being a person of colour and the issues that mattered to me, and the voice that I wanted to have as a leader made people uncomfortable.  
(Noor, Pakistani, primary)

Gita (Indian, secondary) pointed out that her head of department gave her "an excruciating amount of work", but emphasised that "the work wasn't really the issue for me, I could do the work". What drove her out of several schools was the "toxicity that was geared towards me". This toxicity took the form of microaggressions targeted at her ethnic identity, her non-dominant cultural perspective, and at the South Asian students in schools where she worked.

We interpret these findings about the burdensome necessity for teachers to endure experiences of both overt racism and repeated covert racisms in the form of microaggressions, and position themselves within the relations of injustices as a 'hidden workload'. The following sections detail the impact of various 'hidden workload' factors on the retention of BAME teachers.

## School diversity factors

Returning to the school diversity predictors of BAME teacher employment identified in quantitative data analysis, we recognise that minority ethnic groups tend to reside in high-diversity urban areas in England. This may partly explain why these teachers gravitate towards diverse schools in their communities. However, our interviews indicated a preference for diverse schools where teachers purposefully sought out such schools and enjoyed working there, as evidenced in wider literature (Davidson et al., 2005). An early career Black male teacher told us: "I've basically said to my fiancé, I'm probably going to move out of London [to live] but I want to work in London, because of the demographics" (James, secondary). Referring here to student demographics, this comment appears to support the literature on the humanistic inclinations of minority ethnic teachers to make a difference in the lives of young people from low-income and culturally and linguistically non-dominant communities (Achinstein et al., 2010). Asked about their reasons for staying in otherwise unsupportive schools, a number of teachers referred to unique and satisfying relationships with minority ethnic students: "I realised that I had a great rapport with students from ethnic minority, especially with Black students" (Simon, Black African, secondary); "I do feel like I owe it to kids to be in the room and have my perspective" (Mariam, Black African, secondary).

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Staff diversity was even more important than student diversity for the retention of BAME teachers. Participants linked more diverse school contexts to reduced ‘racial stress’ (Hancock et al., 2020) in their professional lives, with implications for retention. For example, in the words of one primary teacher, having even a small support network of colleagues “that look like me, having the same experiences as me” was key for her decision to move to a London school. Another Black female primary teacher emphasised that she accepted her position in one particular school outside of the area she lived in “simply because that school is multi-cultural”. The following statements from the interviews are representative of the participants’ reflections on the importance of staff diversity:

I was at school today actually for my first day and you could just see everyone and they’re so friendly and it’s like majority Asian. There’s quite a few Black people and it’s like ‘this is nice’.

(Charlotte, Black African, primary)

So for me, when choosing a school, yes, it does matter what their culture is and how they view ethnic minorities and if you walk around on interview and don’t see that reflected in students or staff then I probably will be less likely to go and work there.

(Farid, Asian, secondary)

It appeared that the (under)representation of minority ethnic educators in school leadership teams is also of significance to BAME teacher retention. For example, Jade, an early career teacher (Black Caribbean, secondary), was “encouraged” to find that in her school with a majority Asian intake “out of about five or six [in SLT], two of them are Asian”. That was in stark contrast with her Teach First placement in London where school leaders were all white. Another London teacher, Farid, quoted above, explained that having only “one person from an ethnic minority out of the twelve or fourteen [on the leadership team]” was a typical representation across six schools he had worked at in East London. Despite living and working in a diverse community, Farid did not see opportunities to attain a leadership position and was close to giving up and leaving teaching.

There were some examples of school leaders, including White headteachers, cultivating a positive racial climate in their schools through proactively diversifying their workforce. An experienced teacher, Naomi, described the most “respectful” and “caring” London school she had taught at in ten years. Specifically, she noted how a White British headteacher’s commitment and actions around staff diversity helped retention:

So, not only Black [teachers], she had Asians, she had whites. She said she needs to have a mixture so that the children can see representation in different mix. [...] It did, it worked very well. And she was very fair. We had a very good relationship but then, as I said, the school deteriorated after she left. (Naomi, Black Caribbean, primary)

A number of other participants believed through experience that schools leaders from minority ethnic groups were able to promote an environment in which BAME teachers were more likely to flourish.

## Case study

Olivia is a primary school teacher, who is leaving teaching within five years of qualifying. She is of Black Caribbean heritage. After her PGCE, she enjoyed working in a very diverse London school in terms of intake, staff and management, but she was only able to stay for one year due to problems with her mentor. She went on to do some supply work in Bristol, but found that lack of school diversity there was a significant issue for her. For instance, Olivia said she was “sent to really insensitive schools as a supply teacher”, including “where the children came and looked at the hallway while I was waiting to sign and show my documents, announcing ‘There’s a brown woman’.” Other schools questioned her suitability to work and some turned her away, resulting in her moving back to London. In her words, “the racism, for me it was too much”, particularly as she felt she lacked any support network. Working in an area without diversity, she felt that “I’m not going to make it in Bristol. I’m not going to end up anywhere that I want to be. I’m not going to be given a chance.” However, in Olivia’s new London two-form entry school with “97% black African and Caribbean” intake, the universal whiteness of six members of the senior leadership team, who were also quite young, was very striking for her. This lack of diversity in school leadership was the key factor in her decision to take a career break in the following year.

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## Racial literacy of the senior leadership team

There were indications in the data that school leaders were taking actions for diversifying their teaching workforce. For example, several young interviewees applied, or were encouraged to apply, for posts specifically advertised for BAME teachers. However, the retention of BAME teachers was affected by the interaction of teachers' preference for diverse schools and the absence of 'multicultural capital' (Achinstein et al., 2010) in the schools where they worked. They leave, as exemplified below, because of perceived low expectations or negative attitudes about minority students, lack of support for culturally relevant and inclusive teaching, colour-blind approaches to dealing with students and staff, and limited dialogue about 'race' and equity in the school.

BAME teachers, especially those early in their careers, experienced distress in relation to drawing issues of racism experienced by pupils to the attention of SLTs. This was particularly the case when the SLT was deemed to lack racial literacy or to condone and display such behaviours themselves. Olivia (Black Caribbean, primary) spoke about how upsetting it had been hearing her headteacher speaking in a derogatory way about children in the school and in a way in which this head would not have spoken had she been in a "white middle class school". Charlotte (Black African, primary) described an incident where another teacher made

racist assumptions about a Black pupil and she could not complain to the SLT because they shared the same attitudes and "would just look at me like I'm crazy". A secondary teacher, James, spoke of the hidden racism apparent in certain school policies. He gave the example of prohibited haircuts, which usually targeted the styles favoured by Black students, and how it was left to Black teachers to draw attention to this.

Michelle (White and Black Caribbean, secondary) explained how she had felt compelled to denounce the racism she observed at one of her schools, and how this led to her moving schools. She gave an example involving the headteacher: it had been a rainy day and a group of ten mainly Black boys, who would have normally been outside playing basketball, were sitting around a large table talking noisily. When she had gone over to them they had been doing their maths homework. The headteacher then made an appearance and immediately assumed that they were misbehaving. Michelle indicated that having to challenge the SLT in situations like this, even though she was a relatively senior member of staff, was wearing and that she was beginning to be seen as a problem: "I was raising a problem and therefore I was the problem". She indicated that while she felt compelled to say something in such cases, it subsequently limited her chances of progressing within the school.

It is ironic that some teachers felt inhibited or attracted negative reactions when they advocated for BAME pupils, given that one of the overriding expectations of these teachers was that they take on the pastoral responsibilities for minority pupils. Our interviewees often described how their ethnicity (commonly in intersections with gender) affected the roles they were offered (Callender, 2020). John, a Black man, found that "Black men as a whole, or ethnic minority men" are stereotyped into working with 'difficult' children. He went on to say that this meant teachers did not get a chance to focus on the "academic" side, as they were given the more "challenging" classes. For some teachers, this meant that their opportunities for promotion became limited. However, some other teachers in our sample were interested in following the pastoral route. In all cases, therefore, senior leaders should be aware of these tensions and must be open and proactive in having conversations with BAME teachers about their career aspirations and progression.

These examples of small acts of racism consciously or unconsciously perpetrated, as well as essentialising assumptions about BAME students and teachers, support a concern by participants that schools leaders cannot address race-related complaints unless they "know the difference between new racism and old racism" (Noor, Pakistani, primary).





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Finally, the adherence to meritocratic and colour-blind practices more often than not privileges White British teachers and disadvantages BAME teachers, especially in the senior promotions process. One teacher who had aspired to be a leader problematised the belief expressed by the management of her academy chain trust at a conference for future school leaders that “you appoint on merit and merit alone”:

[W]e need to understand that if you are from a different background, a BAME background or a minority background you, you have certain limitations and certain things that have happened. When we level the playing field, then everyone has equal access then we can talk about merit.  
(Noor, Pakistani, primary).

As outlined in the previous section, teachers highlight a lack of representative leadership in diverse schools as being detrimental to their job satisfaction.

## Focus on experienced teachers

Our interviews identified some differences between new and experienced teachers. Among the early career teachers we interviewed, putting aside other issues detailed above, professional development was named as an important retention factor. They said, for example, that they would leave “if I don’t feel supported and feel able to stretch myself to learn” (Jade, Black Caribbean, secondary), “if [getting] my headteacher qualification isn’t supported” (James, Black African, secondary), and “if I am not teaching sixth form” (Mariam, Black African, secondary).

These findings mirror the national situation where lack of professional development is named by departed teachers as one of the key retention factors (DfE, 2017d).

However, as the tenure of our participants progressed, they developed a particularly keen eye for discerning the place of white privilege in school power hierarchies. Teachers who had been in the profession for over ten years highlighted their concerns about barriers to securing rewards and promotions, which they said were not obvious to them at the beginning of their career.

I never picked up tensions and I felt the same amongst the staff but looking back now, I can see the glass ceilings that I didn’t see.  
(Fatima, Mixed White and Black African, secondary)

There’s a lot of diversity within the school, but the leadership team has not [kept up], which for me, again, I think if you had this conversation with me, five, ten years ago, I would have been completely oblivious to it.  
(Amal, Other Asian, secondary)



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Notably, we observed that the majority of participants who had been in the school system for a number of years were successful in obtaining middle leadership roles. For some it took less than five years to secure mid-level appointments such as heads of year and pastoral units, subject leaders, curriculum coordinators, and heads of department in secondary schools. However, they often felt stuck in those posts. Those teachers who were interested in further career progression into senior leadership roles emphasised that their racialised status prevented them from entering what they perceived as all white, and predominantly male, senior leadership circles.

*It's opportunity to move within the organisations, it's become a serious issue, all my friends, well Black friends at least, we all get to assistant head levels and that is it, no further, not one of us have moved on to either deputy or head. I've moved down but this can't be a coincidence.*  
(Mark, Black African, primary)

As Wallace (2020) poignantly discusses, although the inclusion of BAME teachers in entry- and mid-level leadership roles 'may change perceptions of the power of Whiteness in schools and to wider publics, it does not change the institutional arrangements that preserve White privilege' (p. 359). Feeling unfulfilled, undervalued or undermined in their effort to advance within schools, despite obtaining various facilitating qualifications, some experienced teachers indicated that they had considered, or were considering retraining as school inspectors, becoming an educational consultant or a supply teacher, teaching abroad, or studying for a PhD with a view to moving into the teacher education field.

The concerns expressed by our interviewees are reflected in the wider literature and national statistics. In 2018, White British people accounted for 92.9% of headteachers, and 89.7% of deputy or assistant headteachers. It has been demonstrated in the US, for example, that the odds of minority teacher turnover are smaller when there is 'race'/ethnicity congruence between teachers and school principals (Nguyen et al., 2020; Bartanen and Grissom, 2019).



## Case study

Kiara is a primary teacher from an Indian background, who has been a class-based teacher for 13 years. She progressed onto a 'TLR' (a teaching and learning responsibility, which is an additional payment to reward leadership and management responsibilities) as a curriculum lead and year group leader. She stayed for seven years in her current school in the Midlands, which had a predominantly disadvantaged pupil intake, because of "the pull of the children". However, she then felt the school did not offer her further opportunities to develop, although "there's always been a promise of moving up, a promise of furthering my career". Kiara also felt that other colleagues who were "much less experienced or even giving towards the progress of the school" were sent on much more "recognisable" leadership courses and were "promoted because they're in friendship groups"; leaving her feeling disillusioned. She felt that the "dangled carrot" of promotion kept her in the school, but then she felt stuck, financially and professionally, because "it's not that easy [to move] once you get to a certain level".



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## Focus on intersectional factors and identities

Although the primary focus of this study is highlighting how BAME teachers' experiences of retention are different from those of White British teachers, a further aim was to highlight how different groups of teachers are intersectionally marginalised in the school system. While we alluded to racialised gendered expectations earlier, this section provides a brief outline focusing on how participants' experiences in schools were shaped by combinations of 'race'/ ethnicity with class, the subject they taught, skin colour, and migrant background and accent.

There were comments about how 'race' and class intersected and how they impacted on securing employment and promotions. Farid, a science teacher, commented that "the British [class] culture is still very strong, especially in the education sector". He reflected that his working-class background and lack of 'cultural capital' put him at a disadvantage, precluding him from further advancing his career:

So maybe when they look at the senior leadership team in education, they're looking for people who speak a certain way. Your English might be great but if you don't sound a certain way, then they feel like you should not be put in front of people in public, in front of parents.

(Farid, Asian, secondary)

For Farid, the pressure to conform to middle class standards was an obstacle. However, for Black teachers who were middle class, the advantages were not always there. As Jade, a Black Caribbean secondary teacher said, "It didn't matter if I was middle class if no one knew who I was. I'm a Black woman". For Alexis, a primary teacher, her middle-class upbringing resulted in raised eyebrows and remarks based on how "well spoken" or "well-travelled" she was, but she still felt (and indeed was told) that she did not fit.

These class and 'race' intersections work in complex ways for these teachers, but particularly appear to disadvantage Black teachers. As Alexis commented, "It's a different playing field for Black teachers".

Further intersectional disadvantages arise for Black teachers who had migrated to England. This teacher explains his frustration with 'never being enough', despite his qualifications, because he is seen as a 'foreigner' as well as a Black male:

I'm not sure if it's conscious bias or unconscious bias. My accent really throws [people, but] I honestly can't be bothered to change, that's hard work and as a foreigner, I get it three ways. I'm Black, I'm a male, I'm a foreigner in a primary school, which is like this is not going to go down well. Initially I thought it was my qualifications, maybe I wasn't qualified enough, so I did the Masters. I thought, okay the Masters, maybe that's a leg up, no it's not enough. I thought I'll do the doctorate, well I'm not sure that's going to be enough to be honest, I doubt it.

(Mark, Black African, primary)

This intersectional marginalisation prevents this highly experienced teacher from making use of his additional cultural capital to secure a senior promotion.





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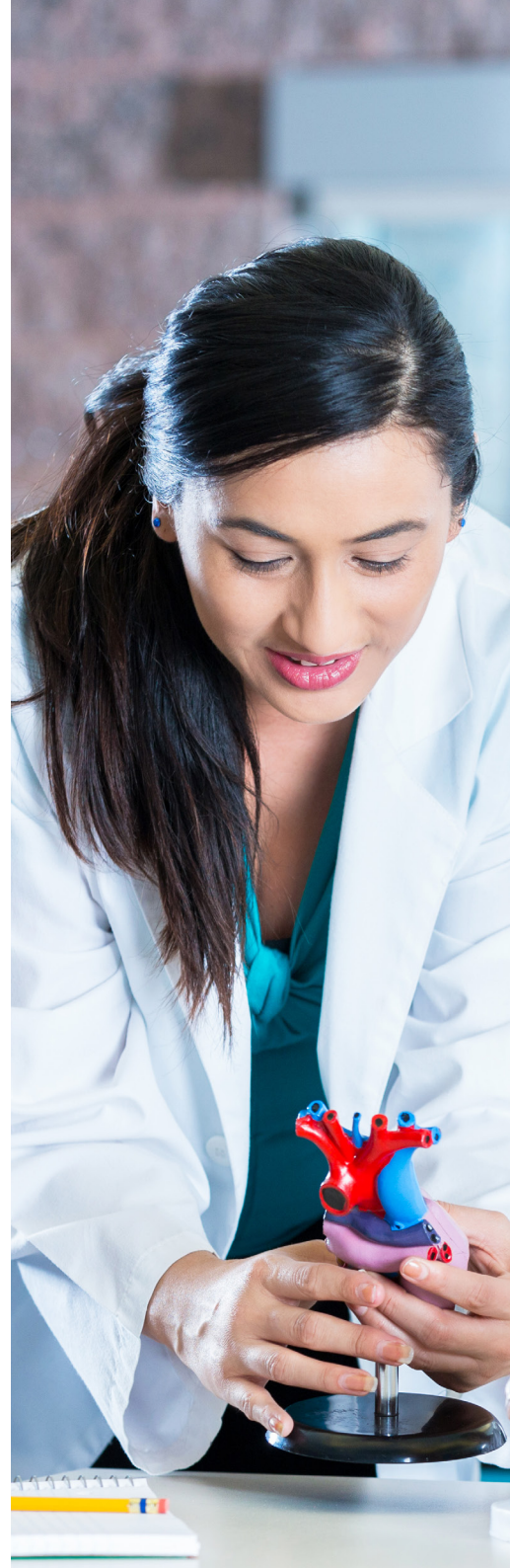
The issue of 'colourism' was mentioned by two Mixed White and Black teachers. They both stated that they had different experiences within schools than their darker skinned colleagues, based on the implications which come with the cultural meanings attached to skin colour. One secondary teacher commented that she thought she was promoted at the beginning of her career, because "I think, complexion wise, I don't think I was perceived as a threat" (Fatima). Michelle, an SLT member in a secondary school, described a number of setbacks in her pursuit of leadership opportunities, as well as her difficult position of having to navigate and accommodate the white fragility of other school leaders. She explained that she cannot be "all about Blackness" in her pastoral role. However, she emphasised that her lighter skin colour afforded her opportunities and helped to reduce others' perception of her as threatening.

Finally, some secondary teachers faced assumptions based on their 'race'/ethnicity and the subject they taught. For example, Gita, a secondary English teacher, thought there were doubts about her suitability to teach English:

*The thing is: I'm walking into a classroom as an English teacher with an Indian identity, you know. That kind of throws up quite a few problems, doesn't it?*  
(Gita, Indian, secondary)

In contrast, Kamu, a male science teacher of a South Asian background, felt he was respected and accommodated as the only minority Muslim teacher in his initial all-white working-class intake school in Essex. His degree from a Russell Group university, Teach First placement and being a teacher of a shortage subject also contributed to the school's welcoming attitude. His school, for example, reshaped his timetable so that he could have Fridays free for worship. He received a rapid promotion with teaching and learning responsibilities in his first year. Kamu went on to become a science lead practitioner within two years of finishing teacher training, notably in this instance, in an all-minority 'outstanding' school in London.

Assumptions about ethnic groups and subject choices could be both positive and negative, dependent on how they 'fitted' with stereotypes. A Black African primary middle leader who was completing a part-time doctorate in maths education encountered surprised remarks in relation to choosing maths education as his thesis, such as "Oh, I thought you did something else really". Teachers who did not match the stereotypes found countering such microaggressions an additional burden.



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## The accumulative impact of racism

As detailed throughout, and in line with existing literature, some teachers ended up leaving urban disadvantaged schools due to the accumulative impact of 'racial battle fatigue' (Pizarro and Kohli, 2020). This can be defined as 'the psychological, emotional, physiological, energy, and time-related cost of fighting against racism' (Smith, 2009, cited *ibid.*, p. 969). This was particularly notable in interviews with several social justice-oriented teachers who had been for some time concerned about the fairness of decisions in schools. For instance, Noor described how years of her effort to trouble the racial status quo in school leadership took a profound toll on her mental health, wellbeing and retention. She felt (and was indeed advised by a colleague running an inclusion and diversity programme in the district) that leaving the school was her best option, as "sadly things are not going to get any better":

*They're not changing, it's absolutely structural racism if you raise anything. I decided, for me that I was never going to be a leader. I couldn't fight it on my own and I had to make a different path.*  
(Noor, Pakistani, primary)

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Several additional teachers also felt that articulate, outspoken, unionised, top of the pay scale BAME teachers were 'feared' the most and subjected to covert (and at times overt) racism. However, as argued elsewhere (Bristol and Goings, 2019), we have provided evidence that having to be alert to, and navigate, racial boundaries in the workplace expends considerable psychological energy even on the part of teachers who avoid confrontation. In conclusion, Alexis' experience captures the precarious position of minoritised teachers, even in the current teacher retention crisis faced by English schools.

## Case study

Alexis' ten years in primary teaching highlight the precarity some Black teachers experience in their professional life. On the teacher-education course, she felt that five minority ethnic students were always an afterthought, "very last minute", in terms of arranging placements.

In hindsight, she did not get even a quarter of support and mentoring during her placements compared to what she was giving student teachers as a mentor during her career. In her NQT year, she got "the most difficult class with high behavioural needs, with the high SEND needs", thinking at the time "you got this class because they know you can handle it, because they trust you". Additionally, senior leadership was unsympathetic and even antagonistic, to the point that her NQT year was terminated early by the NQT manager in her local authority. This led to a spell of supply teaching, after which she was able to secure a maternity cover post in a private school. She taught there for over a year and described staff as "lovely" and parents as "supportive". The "owner" however refused to make her contract permanent. It was not unexpected after he was "racist towards me, [...] towards another Chinese teacher in the meeting". In the next school, she was pressured to take on a Year 6 class due to an unfilled vacancy, whereas her contractual role was to teach SEND children as part of her National Award SENCo course. She had to live with the consequences of refusing to comply for a number of years, as the

headteacher kept giving her a damaging reference: "I was applying for jobs, I was getting interviews but I was then being offered one-year contracts or I was being offered a lower pay scale than I should be getting". This is in addition to constant racist remarks from other staff and an off-putting advice from one headteacher "to toughen up" in response to her one-off complaint, "because it's difficult to prove it". Her wellbeing was ruined: "If you've gone through a year of racism [...] having to put on a fake smile it's very demoralising and very tiring". To break this cycle, Alexis made a difficult decision to move abroad to teach in a British international school, leaving behind friends and family. Having joined a Black teachers' network on her return to London, she learnt that other teachers related to her experience of insecurity due to racism.





# Research synergies and implications for future research

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International research literature on the retention of teachers from minority ethnic groups highlights the pattern of employment in urban diverse schools located in low-income areas (Ingersoll et al., 2019; Ryan et al., 2009). We have described a broadly similar pattern in England with the prevalence of BAME teachers in urban and ethnically diverse schools in terms of staff and pupils. We also saw in interviews that school demographic characteristics matter to minority teachers, but diversity of student intake alone is not enough to keep them in schools long-term. There was a clear perception that diverse schools in urban areas without diverse school leadership, or with leadership that adheres to colour-blind policies could be hostile, stressful and disrespectful workplaces (see also Kohli, 2018; Bristol, 2018).

Interestingly, unlike for White British teachers (DfE, 2018d), workload was not at the forefront of BAME teachers' minds in the conversations about retention, while battling racial inequalities was in itself a 'hidden workload', which led to burnout, turnover and attrition (see also Wallace, 2020; Pizarro and Kohli, 2020; Hancock et al., 2020). Lack of career progression, highlighted elsewhere as an obstacle for BAME employees (CIPD, 2017), mattered most for experienced teachers, with a frustrating lack of advancement beyond middle leadership roles emerging as the key retention factor. We suggest that the lack of minority ethnic senior leaders in schools creates a vicious cycle. BAME teachers at various stages of their career leave urban schools where the leadership team is not representative of student intake and staff diversity. On the other hand, US research on relational demography in teacher retention finds that teachers give higher ratings to school leadership, school climate, and their own job satisfaction in years in which they had a race-congruent principal (Bartanen and Grissom, 2019).

For the most part, research has not attended to the impact of nuanced inequalities that matter in the professional lives of teachers from different ethnic subgroups and subject backgrounds. Our analysis, informed by ideas drawn from Critical Race Theory, shone light on how 'race' and racism intersect with other layers of social subordination, such as gender, class, phenotype, (sur)name, immigrant status and accent, to explain individual experiences and career decisions of BAME teachers.

We suggest that more research be conducted on the retention of BAME teachers in England with the focus on:

## Investigating the retention of BAME teachers over time and within ethnic subgroups

It is important to note the lack of empirical research using nationally representative data on what happens to BAME teachers once they are employed. Investigating trajectories of individual teachers to determine drivers of minority teachers leaving the profession and moving within the state sector will contribute to informing policies around staffing urban schools with high quality teachers and retaining them. Such analysis will also help explore, and potentially raise, equity concerns with respect to the relegation of these teachers to schools with lower levels of multiple capitals. The trends must be examined within specific ethnic subgroups to account for different histories of disadvantage in the BAME population.

## Investigating successful retention as a situated endeavour

Common retention patterns across schools and across minority ethnic subgroups can be informative, but local school context matters. There remains a gap in research on successful retention practices of BAME teachers in specific schools. We suggest that much could be learnt from documenting and disseminating practice deemed to be promising and transferable in retaining BAME teachers. Qualitative case study research could explore how the frequently mentioned retention factors – school culture or racial climate, diverse or white school leadership, relationships among colleagues, or the combination of these – work together to encourage BAME teachers to stay.



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