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Education and Skills Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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26th March 2018,

Attainment and achievement of school aged children experiencing poverty

Dear Convener,

I am writing from the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER), a Scottish strategic anti-racism charity based in Glasgow. Our primary concern in relation to the committee's inquiry into the attainment and achievement of school aged children experiencing poverty is highlighting the unique experience of Black and minority ethnic (BME) children.

Poverty and Ethnicity

In Scotland, people from BME groups are nearly twice as likely to be in poverty compared to those from the white British group. Before housing costs, 30% of people from BME backgrounds were in poverty compared to 16% of those in the white British group; this increases to 36% of people from BME backgrounds living in poverty after housing costs versus 18% of the white British population.[1]

Furthermore, children from BME backgrounds are significantly more likely to be living in disadvantaged circumstances than white children, with 36% of BME children living in a household with an annual income in the lowest quintiles compared to 22% of white children.[2]

Given the substantial disadvantage faced by BME groups, work taken forward to mitigate the ill effects of poverty must consider the role of race and ethnicity.

Attainment and Ethnicity

Overall, while there are variations based on ethnic group, BME school leavers demonstrate higher educational attainment than their white Scottish and white non-Scottish counterparts.

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[1] Scottish Government (2018). Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2014-2017.
[2] Scottish Government (2013). Growing Up in Scotland: Birth Cohort 2 – Results from the first year.

Leaver attainment by ethnicity, 2015-2016

|	1 or more at SCQF level 4 or better (%)	1 or more at SCQF level 5 or better (%)	1 or more at SCQF level 6 or better (%)
White – Scottish	96.3	85.4	61.1
White – non-Scottish	96.1	85.6	62.3
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	96.4	88.9	72.2
Asian – Indian	98.7	94.2	76.5
Asian – Pakistani	99.0	92.1	73.2
Asian – Chinese	99.5	96.4	91.8
Asian – Other	97.8	92.2	76.9
African / Black / Caribbean	99.7	95.4	76.6
All other categories	94.3	82.9	61.7
Not disclosed / Not known	93.6	79.9	55.7

Scottish Government – Summary Statistics for Attainment, Leaver Destinations, and Healthy Living

In achieving at SCQF level 6 or better, BME school leavers outperform their white counterparts for every ethnic group, with particularly high achievement for Asian - Chinese, Asian – Other, African/ Black/Caribbean, and Asian – Indian groups.

Similarly, BME school leavers are more likely than their white peers to go onto positive destinations (e.g. further or higher education, training, employment).

Percentage of school leavers going to a postivie destination by ethnicity
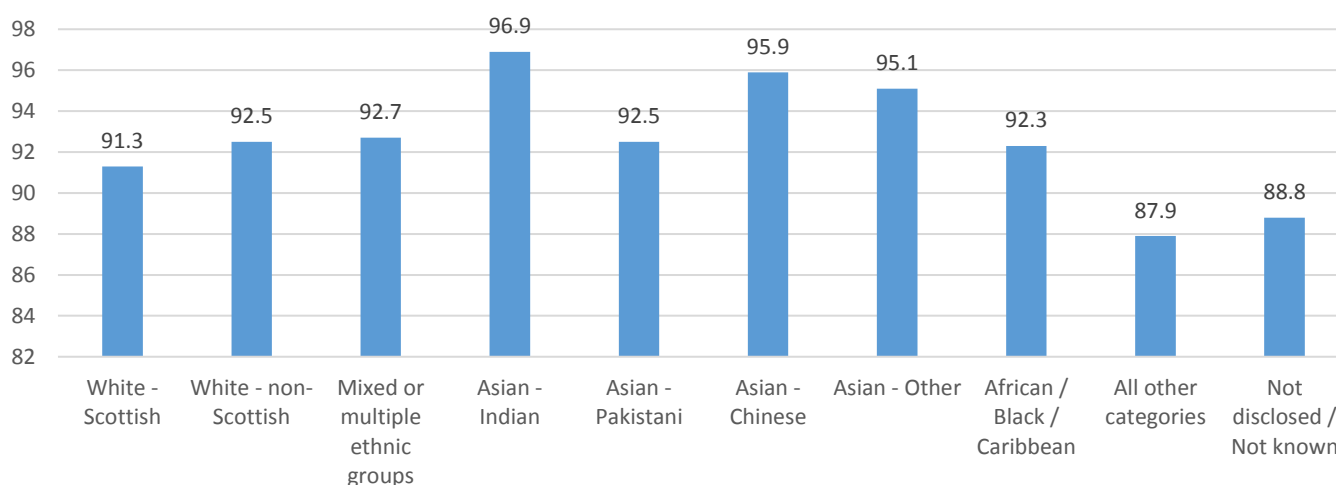
Scottish Government – Summary Statistics for Attainment, Leaver Destinations, and Healthy Living

This particular dataset, however, overlooks the experiences for some particular ethnic groups. Gypsy/Travellers, for example, are here included in the white non-Scottish categories, which obscures evidence which demonstrates that this group has some of the lowest attainment levels in Scotland.[3] The amalgamation of African, Black, and Caribbean ethnic groups into a singular category also conceals the lower attainment among Black and Caribbean groups, masked by the exceptionally high attainment of African groups.[4]

Setting these exceptions aside, however, the evidence demonstrates that despite higher rates of poverty, BME groups consistently achieve high levels of attainment and continuation to positive destinations.

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[3] The Scottish Government (2017). Improving educational outcomes for children and young people from travelling cultures: consultation paper.
[4] Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (2014). State of the Nation: Education.

In contrast to their white peers, BME school leavers and graduates are most disadvantaged not in education, but in the years following formal education. White ethnic groups, who have overall lower rates of attainment, enjoy higher rates of employment following education. For people aged 16-24, white groups are significantly more likely to be in employment (52.1%) than their BME counterparts (24.9%).[5] The employment rate for white groups is 74.2%, compared to 58.5% for BME groups, with BME individuals twice as likely to be unemployed as people from white communities. [6]

Overall, despite their high attainment, minority ethnic individuals still face discrimination, barriers, and inequality in employment and income, which perpetuates the poverty experienced by these communities.

Emerging Issues

CRER notes that, as the committee considers the impact of poverty on young people at school, the unique experience of BME children may be lost in the focus on attainment and achievement.

While overall, BME groups make up 4.0% of the Scottish population, this is changing, especially for children and young people. Over 7.4% of those aged 20 to 24 are BME, alongside 7.3% of those aged 0 to 4 at the time of the 2011 Scottish Census. [7] This growing population should have their experiences and realities included in discussion on attainment and the effects of poverty on children and young people.

There is something particular happening within BME communities that allows children to achieve at school and continue onto positive destinations, despite growing up in poverty. To gather a full picture of the situation, we ask that the committee remember that race plays a role and consider looking further into this issue.

CRER is also concerned that a focus on raising educational attainment will leave BME groups behind. The challenge for BME children and young people is not achievement at school, but in accessing equal opportunities in the workforce. Consideration should also be given to the educational and employment patterns of BME young people transitioning from secondary school to further and higher education and employment, as this is where these groups are the most disadvantaged.

For Scotland to be the best place to grow up for every child, including those from BME backgrounds, the focus must extend past education attainment to a holistic picture of educational and employment journeys, which considers the unique experience of BME children and young people who live in poverty.

CRER is hopeful that the Education and Skills Committee will take this into account and look further into the experiences of BME children and young people, within and outwith this specific inquiry.

We would be delighted to have the opportunity to discuss this matter with you further.

Yours sincerely,

Rebecca Marek
Parliamentary and Policy Officer
Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights

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[5] Scottish Parliament Information Centre. SPICe Briefing: Ethnicity and Employment.
[6] Scottish Census 2011.
[7] Scottish Census 2011.