

Speech by the chair of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, Dr Tony Sewell CBE

Thank you, David, and thank you Policy Exchange for organising today's event.

Today is the first in a series of events that commissioners will be taking part in to discuss our report with different think tanks – we welcome the opportunity to be hosted by British Future, Demos, and the Centre for Social Justice in the coming weeks.

This report is about how we really deal with the issue of race and social mobility. We know that education is the best vehicle for this.

Recent data shows attainment score for Black Caribbean was over 5 points lower than average White pupils or over a grade lower in each of the 8 subjects. At the same time the average scores for Indian, Bangladeshi and Black African pupils were above the White British average. The exclusion rates show a similar difference. In 2018/19 Black Caribbean pupils had a permanent exclusion rate of 25 in 10,000 compared to 7 in 10,000 for African pupils.

Extra hours education is something that my own community, the Black Caribbean community, pioneered and their example is one we think the government should seek to emulate. To this day, it is the resourcefulness of Britain's many ethnic minority groups who ensure their children get a rounded educational experience. Arabic, Arithmetic and Art are all features of the diverse landscape of supplementary education.

Phasing in an extended school day in disadvantaged areas first would give pupils a chance to learn an instrument whose parents cannot afford to pay or make friends for life by joining a rugby team they otherwise would not.

If we all agree that education is the key to unlocking potential then I am confident this is a recommendation which can command broad support, despite the notable challenges we identify in our report.

We also want government to invest in what works to help disadvantaged pupils to succeed, regardless of where they live.

One of the key reasons why students from Black Caribbean background fail is that the family is in need of better resource and support. No this is not a by-word to blame single mothers. Black Caribbean families are 60 percent single parents, Black African 40 and Indian 6. We have recommended that government improve support for families who are experiencing difficulties which can harm their children's future prospects.

It was by dropping the term BAME that allowed us to look at this data in a forensic way. We could now see that Black and White groups had differences

within, this was particularly stark when comparing Black Caribbean with Black African. So we recommend the dropping of the term.

In Education it is not just the quantity of time children spend in school that the Commission wants to boost either.

We want new, top-quality curriculum resources to tell the story of how Britain came to be the country it is today.

In the report I say: 'There is a new story about the Caribbean experience which speaks to the slave period not only being about profit and suffering but how culturally African people transformed themselves into a re-modelled African/ Britain.' This was vilely misrepresented as a glorification of slavery. We wanted to not only speak of the inhumanity of slavery but how African people managed to retain their humanity and resist slavery. People like Sam Sharpe who led slave rebellions. We wanted to look at the slave ledgers with awful names like Sambo, who was considered nothing more than an animal and use the data from Caribbean social historians, who tell a story of how these were real people who kept aspects of their African culture in religion, dress, dance and food preparation etc and managed to preserve their humanity. As Bob Marley says:

Old pirates, yes, they rob I
Sold I to the merchant ships
Minutes after they took I
From the bottomless pit
But my hand was made strong
By the end of the almighty
We forward in this generation
Triumphantly
Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?

The public culture of Britain is a rich, diverse mosaic of different traditions. Each intricate segment tells its own unique story. But step away and you see that they are each a part of an overall chronicle which binds them together and gives them all a new meaning. It will also reflect the good and the bad of Empire and how that legacy has materially built modern Britain. We also can think of the sacrifices made by Commonwealth soldiers in both world wars.

Linking the stories of different ethnic groups to a unifying sense of Britishness is an opportunity to remind children of our common destiny and foster more belonging to this country.

The report acknowledges that over 50 years things have significantly improved. Second that race is not the only factor in explaining racial disparities and third that some of the best strategies for change is when we find answers for everybody.

My life has been spent expanding the horizons of young Black people.

I am proud that the charity I founded has supported over 450 state-school students from ethnic minority and low-income backgrounds into STEM degrees at top universities.

It was taking these teenagers some who were written off by society, investing time, hope and energy into them, and then watching them grow and flourish into today's engineers and scientists that made me agree to chair this

Commission.

We want to appeal to everybody but specifically to those who have faced and continue to deal with the reality of racism. Our report speaks directly to you. Yes we did find the racism that you experience and our report outlines that reality. Yes the Commission has found evidence that concurs with your pain. Our report not only acknowledges, what we call lived racism but it delivers key recommendations.

So today I call on the government to accept our first recommendation to strengthen the hand of the equality watchdog to strike down racial discrimination. EHRC. Equality and Human Rights Commission.

We point out that affinity bias in hiring often means those from diverse backgrounds find it harder to reach the boardroom.

And we recommend action to tackle it.

We point out the that Black mothers are 4 times more likely to die in childbirth – new research that says Black women 40 per cent more likely to suffer miscarriage which as a man with a Black daughter and wife horrifies me.

And we recommend action to tackle it. The creation of the Office for Health Disparities

Our recommendations provide much of the prose for a new, open-minded, proudly multi-ethnic chapter of the British story.

One that doesn't shy away from what more needs to be done to address racial inequalities, this is by no way a finished project, what we have done here is given a number of recommendations to significantly move this forward.

Thank you.