Racial Justice, Equality and Diversity:   
*Practice in Schools*

**School Context:**

St Francis de Sales Junior School in Tottenham is a three-form entry Catholic Voluntary Aided school for pupils aged 3 to 11 years old. Executive Headteacher, James Lane, is also the head of school in another borough which works closely with St Francis de Sales. The proportion of pupils who come from minority ethnic backgrounds is very high, with the largest groups being those from Black African, Black Caribbean or ‘Any Other White’ backgrounds. Around 75% of the pupils use English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is above the national average at 38%. The proportion who have special educational needs or disability is broadly average at 25%. Pupils who join the school tend to stay on roll throughout their primary education. Only a few join the school later than would usually be expected.

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| **What have we done:**  In 2019, leaders started a cycle of reviewing the curriculum with the aim of ensuring it is relevant to the needs and context of the school population. The murder of George Floyd led the school to reflect that the curriculum could better reflect the diversity of the pupils and their families. Work began in September 2020 to improve, contextualise, and ensure relevance of the curriculum through co-construction of an approach to curriculum development.  In order to carry out this important work, headteacher James Lane decided to collaborate with ten other local primary schools to pool knowledge and resources in the development of good practice. For James, it was pivotal to model the notion that knowledge comes from far and wide, and this is what motivated the idea to collaborate in this way. The group engaged Professor Paul Miller from the Institute of Equity in Education and Society (IEES) to support them through the process, with a focus on evidence-informed practice.  Professor Miller led four capacity-development workshops for school leaders, two of which were open to staff with curriculum leadership roles in participating schools. Included in the four workshops was training in how to ‘identify and tackle bias in the curriculum’ and how to use a tool designed by IEES, called the Inclusive Curriculum Framework Inventory to assess and index the perceived degree of inclusivity in a subject curriculum. Deputy Headteacher, Claudia reflects:  *These sessions were so informative. They used some really engaging slides and clips of interviews with people. And that gave us thinking time to really consider how we could implement it in our schools.*  A key understanding for the schools, says James, was that their starting point actually needed to be different from what had been originally anticipated. The schools were hoping to start with an audit of the curriculum, but through this work, they realised they needed to start with an audit of the school communities they serve, hand-in-hand with an in-depth understanding of their own learned biases with regards these communities. | **Valuable learning from this process:**  The main reasons behind changing the curriculum was to reflect the community the school serves and to give children a wide range of cultural opportunities that they may not otherwise experience. A yearly review of the curriculum now takes place – informed by the school’s diversity review – and the content covered, especially in Geography and History, is designed to be less Eurocentric, and better represent the diverse nature of the school and multicultural Britain. Resources were also reviewed with a renewed focus on suitability for the more diverse curriculum, and this work is ongoing as opportunities arise to explore issues with critical thinking at the heart. James names mentions for example:  *Leading up to Black History Month, there’s an opportunity to make sure we address issues in ways that aren’t tokenistic and that are part of the daily diet of education.*  The governors and leaders are energised and committed to using the review process to give a voice to the full range of stakeholders, to respond to any identified needs, and to showcase where they are in their journey with openness and willingness to explore other possibilities. Subject leaders and staff are going into regular curriculum design meetings far better equipped and more knowledgeable, having an awareness of ‘the other’ and being mindful about representing different groups positively and responsibly.  Subject leaders and the Deputy Headteacher, with dedicated regular time to meet to review, revisit and revise the History and Geography curriculum, know that as well as meeting the needs of the National Curriculum, it is now more relevant to the school context. Greater emphasis is now placed on the diversity of the texts used throughout the curriculum to enable children to see themselves reflected in different elements. Pupils have the opportunity to develop their knowledge of each other’s heritages and also have many opportunities for celebration - the school is starting to see the results of this focus in children’s engagement and outcomes.  Parents speak positively about the school and the way the curriculum is delivered. The school feels it is very strong in how it responds to parents and carers and that conversations and questions can be addressed with confidence from both parties. This is as a result of realising that staff needed to create scaffolded experiences for families as well as for the pupils, when introducing material and subject matter that can be new, emotive or challenging. |
| **Our next steps:**  Subject leaders will continue to develop their own knowledge of the Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum and disseminate this to all staff. They will work with the EYFS lead to regularly review the curriculum, ensuring that the new cohort of children coming into the school are well represented and supported. Across the school, a number of areas are priority, including extending the range of music to include music which originates from or is performed by Black artists. Similarly, leaders and subject specialists will continue to research more diverse scientists and other role models for pupils so that they are reflected in the curriculum. Post-Covid, there are opportunities to repair lost connections with parents and build engagement through events and celebrations of diversity across the school.  The headteacher, James, has identified that a clear next step would be to re-group with the other schools in the collective to evaluate what happened next for each school, what the impact has been, and to potentially write this up. There is much to be learned from the many ways to approach curriculum design with a focus on context.  **Useful links/resources:**  [School leaders leading curriculum inclusion: Re-culturing pedagogy, re-imagining the student experience - Paul Miller, James Lane, Karen Jaeggi, 2022 (sagepub.com)](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/27526461211069133) | |