

## Leaflet for parents

### **What parents need to know about the collection of ethnic background data on students in schools**

This leaflet is intended to explain why schools collect data on the ethnic background of their students and how the data will be used.

#### **Why are schools collecting this information?**

This is one of the data items that schools must report as a statutory requirement to the Department for Education (DfE). This is reported through the School Census each term.

#### **Is this exercise only for ethnic minority groups?**

This is for all students. Everyone belongs to an ethnic group. Data can bring to light surprising results about how different groups perform and achieve. Ethnic monitoring can help schools, local authorities and Government identify the needs of all students, whatever their ethnic background, and make sure they receive the support they need to achieve their full potential. Without effective ethnic monitoring on a local and national basis, the particular needs of any group could remain unknown.

#### **Who will use this information?**

Schools and Local Authorities will use the information to find out whether particular ethnic groups are not achieving as well as they might and whether additional support is needed.

The DfE needs information to help them plan and allocate resources to raise standards of all students. It also helps the DfE to see how far schools and local authorities are successfully meeting the needs of particular groups of students. There is evidence from research that some ethnic groups do not do as well as others and that patterns of achievement vary between boys and girls. Accurate national information will help to keep track of changing patterns in education, helping the Department to identify trends and plan more effectively.

#### **Who else will have access to information about my child?**

Schools, local authorities and the DfE are all bound by the Data Protection Act. This means that they cannot reveal information held on your child to a third party. Safeguards are in place to make sure that it will not be possible to identify individual students in any published statistical data.

#### **How will the information be used?**

Analysing this information can help schools monitor and improve their own practices and also celebrate the success achieved by their students. Schools will be able to use this information to

- see how well different groups perform in examinations.
- monitor exclusions and attendance to make sure that no single group is missing out on school.
- make sure that they are treating all students fairly.

**Do I have to give this information every year?**

No. This information is usually collected when children start school. Computerised records mean that it should not be necessary to ask for it again, although from time to time you may be asked to check the information for accuracy. This will provide you with an opportunity to change the entry if you wish. You can also ask to see the personal data the school holds at any time and ask for information on ethnic background to be removed or changed.

**Why has my child's school asked him/her to provide this information?**

The Information Commissioner (formerly the Data Protection Registrar) has advised that young people aged 11-15 are mature enough to decide their own ethnic identity. You may wish to discuss the issues raised in this leaflet with your child before they complete the form. Young people aged 16 and over can make their own decision. Individuals have the right to ask to see the personal data the school holds on them and ask for information on ethnic background to be removed or changed.

**What do parents and students gain from this?**

Potentially everyone gains. Schools can better understand and identify the needs of individual students and groups of students. They can also plan and target resources and support more effectively. Parents and students gain if schools have more reliable information about the achievement of their students and any barriers to success. DfE can better understand local needs and target resources more effectively.

**Why are you not collecting information on religion?**

Many schools do collect information on religion. DfE recognise that the national ethnic categories do not address every aspect of an individual's sense of identity. There is a limit to the amount of information that can be collected on a national basis. The national set of categories that the DfE is introducing is therefore confined to one that tells us about ethnicity.