

Book Review in *Your Voice*

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The Myth of Racist Kids: Anti-racist policy and the regulation of school life

by Adrian Hart

(Manifesto Club, London, 2009)

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I have always had a problem with the term 'racism' because I never know what it is supposed to mean. Even less do I know what 'institutional racism', a popular kicking-ball, may be. The latter concept originates with Sir William Macpherson, 27th chief of Clan Macpherson and former High Court judge, who in a report accused the Metropolitan Police of having this distressing condition.

Adrian Hart is a film-maker who was employed by Essex County Council to make a film about racism in schools. Josie Appleton of his publishers informs me that 'when he got there he found out there wasn't any'.

The book describes a new official policy, said to originate with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, of checking racism among pupils. It seems local authority schools are required to report incidents of racism to the Local Education Authority. The book has an illustration of an elaborate Racist Incident Referral Form designed for the purpose. This lists possible subjects of referral as:

- physical assault
- physical intimidation
- verbal abuse
- insensitive/inappropriate remarks/comments/jokes
- racist graffiti
- written comments/drawings (not graffiti)
- abuse of/damage to personal property
- non-cooperation/disrespect/ostracism
- other

For purposes of the scheme the Government advises use of the following definition, also derived from the Macpherson report: a racist incident is 'any incident perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person'. As a parliamentary draftsman used to framing definitions I can say that this is obviously faulty. It assumes there is a 'victim', whereas that may well be in question. The 'other person' may be malicious, ill-informed or otherwise untrustworthy.

Adrian Hart says a quarter of a million incidents have so far been reported under the scheme. His view is that the notion of racist kids is in large part a myth.

Francis Bennion, Chairman Emeritus.

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