Nigel Genders, The Church of England’s Chief Education Officer, responds to recent reports around teaching resources for Racial Justice.
In the past week, reports have emerged surrounding guidance used by schools, including Church of England schools, to educate on racial justice, writes Nigel Genders, The Church of England’s Chief Education Officer.

Contrary to the reports, there is no single approach to addressing racial justice in Church of England schools.

Decisions on the best resources for different age groups and contexts are taken by each school with advice from their diocese. And we trust the judgement our teachers and school leaders to do this.

However, in the face of polarised commentary, there is sadly a risk that schools could lose courage in their commitment to teaching racial justice at a time when it has never been more important.

There is clear evidence that racism exists in our society; children and staff experience racism in schools and communities every day. This might take the form of direct incidents of racist abuse, harassment, and discrimination, or it can be manifested indirectly, in the form of prejudiced attitudes, a lack of acceptance of cultural diversity and ethnically discriminatory practices.

The recent Young and Black report by the YMCA revealed that 95 per cent of young black people report that they have heard and witnessed the use of racist language at school. 49 per cent of young black people feel that racism is the biggest barrier to attaining success at school. The report ‘Educational outcomes of Black pupils and students’ shows that in England, young people from Black ethnic groups are less likely to obtain high grades, end up in a highly-skilled job, study further or have career satisfaction.

These statistics may come as a shock, especially to those who haven’t experienced racism, and a natural response to that is to feel uncomfortable.

Faced with that discomfort – society can go one of two ways. It can deny there is a problem and complicate the issue, or it can work together to address the problem. In schools, we can obfuscate, or we can educate!

In Church of England schools we are committed to addressing the issue. Not by building up some people at the expense of others or by suggesting children are personally responsible for past injustices; rather we must face our past and by doing so build a more just society for all. This includes learning about the enduring impact of slavery and the reality of institutional and systemic racism.

The wider Church’s work on racial justice is not an attempt to reflect demographic trends in society, to be politically correct, or to engage in a culture war but rather is fundamental to what we believe as Christians.

Through our ‘Leaders Like Us’ programme, we are also aiming to build a diverse, culturally competent teacher workforce by doubling the number of UK Minority Ethnic (UKME) Head Teachers in all schools in England over the next five years, and we are working with schools and dioceses to develop more resources that speak to issues of equality, diversity, belonging and inclusion.

All of this runs through our Vision for Education, across our schools and beyond. Our mandate comes not from identity politics but from our identity in Christ. That all people are created equal, and in the image of God, and it is our call to love one another.
“Our mandate comes not from identity politics but from our identity in Christ.”

Nigel Genders