

FROM INTENTION TO IMPACT

A CULTURAL HUMILITY APPROACH TO SAFEGUARDING BLACK GIRLS IN EDUCATION



MINDSET MATTERS
UK

Thank you



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**Impact
on Urban
Health**

Impact on Urban Health | For their continued belief in and support of our work. They have facilitated funding across three current research-focused projects led by Paradigm Project, enabling us to address educational and health inequalities in Southwark and Lambeth. We are excited to build on the relationships and connections that have formed through this partnership and look forward to collaborating further to drive enduring, community-centred change.

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Acknowledgements

Milk Honey Bees

We would like to express our sincere thanks to Milk Honey Bees, a creative and expressive safe space that supports Black girls and young women to flourish and thrive through healing, joy, and unapologetic identity. Their work uses creativity, advocacy, and sisterhood to challenge injustice and amplify the voices of Black girls in the UK.

We are incredibly grateful to Milk Honey Bees for allowing us to engage with their community, providing access to the girls they work with, and supporting the creative expression workshop as part of this research. Their role in helping us distribute the survey and ensure a wide range of voices and insights were captured has been invaluable.

We deeply appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with such an inspiring and purposeful organisation and look forward to continuing this important work together.



Acknowledgements

Ebinehita Iyere

Founder and Managing Director
Milk Honey Bees



Credit: Ahmed Kamara

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Ebinehita for her invaluable contribution to this project. From the outset, Ebinehita has worked closely with us, generously providing access to her team and networks and supporting the delivery of the creative expression workshop with the girls at the heart of this research.

Ebinehita's work has been an inspiration throughout this project. What began as a grassroots response to the lack of support and representation for Black girls has grown into a nationally recognised platform under her leadership centering the healing, joy, and voices of Black girls through creativity, care, and advocacy. Her commitment to truth, imagination, and systemic accountability aligns deeply with our values at Paradigm Project, and through this collaboration a powerful and purposeful relationship has blossomed.

We are honoured to have Ebinehita as an ally in this work and look forward to future opportunities to build, grow and create lasting impact together.

Acknowledgements



Dr Niquita Pilgrim

Co-Founder

The Cultural Connection

We wish to express our sincere gratitude to **Dr Niquita Pilgrim**, Chartered Psychologist, consultant, strategic advisor, and Co-Founder of **The Cultural Connection**, for her invaluable role as a peer reviewer of this research. With over 15 years of experience spanning frontline practice, policy reform, mental health, racial justice, and structural change, Dr Pilgrim brought a vital clinical and trauma-informed perspective to our work.

Her **peer review** feedback greatly enriched our recommendations and ensured they are firmly rooted in psychological insight, modular for practical implementation, and sensitive to the mental-health needs of our community. We are deeply grateful for her time, insight, and commitment to centring equity at the heart of this report.



Nadine Bernard

Founder

Aspiring Heads

We extend our gratitude to **Nadine Bernard**, headteacher in Lambeth and founder of **Aspiring Heads**, for her thoughtful **peer review** of this work. As one of the youngest Black headteachers in England and a leading advocate for advancing Black educators into leadership, as demonstrated through her award-winning social enterprise Nadine's strategic perspective has enriched our analysis and findings.

Her lived experience in education leadership, combined with her dedication to mentor and uplift Black teachers, provided invaluable feedback into systemic barriers, representation, and equity. We are inspired by her vision and thankful for her contribution to our report.

**"WE'RE STILL IN A SYSTEM WHERE
IT'S EASIER TO REMOVE THE CHILD
THAN TO
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STRUCTURE"**

**"IT'S LIKE YOU'RE
MEANT TO BE
STRONG ALL THE
TIME"**

**"I wasn't talking
back. I was just
standing up for
myself".**

**"How do you think
teachers could
improve their
cultural humility?"**

**"By learning more
about us and not
assuming"**

**"THEY MADE
ME FEEL
LIKE
EVERYTHING
I DID WAS
WRONG"**



Foreword



Ebinehita Iyere

At this moment in time, when the education system is being challenged to do better by those it so often fails, this research feels both urgent and necessary. As the founder of Milk Honey Bees, a space rooted in joy, healing and advocacy for Black girls, I have long witnessed how the education system misreads, mislabels, and too often, completely overlooks our girls. This report does not simply confirm what we know; it validates what Black girls have been saying all along: they are not truly seen, heard or supported in school environments that should protect and nurture them.

What stood out most to me in the girls' responses was the emotional restraint they have been forced to learn. Their reflections on feeling unsafe to cry, unheard when speaking up, or punished for simply existing in their full selves are heartbreaking, but sadly not unfamiliar. These are not isolated experiences, these are systemic patterns that need to be broken.

Within all this, Black girls still showcase their insight, humour, creativity, and strength. I want to take a moment to truly thank and honour every single girl who took part in the sessions and surveys. Your voices are powerful. Your truths are valid. Your brilliance is undeniable. Thank you for showing up and for trusting us with your experiences. You are the reason this work exists, and you are the future we are fighting for.

My deepest thanks also go to Joel Dunn and Jade Ecobichon-Gray, whose commitment to cultural humility, and community accountability shines throughout this report. It has been an honour to work alongside people who do not just speak about equity, but live it in research and in practice.

To educators and decision makers reading this, I hope this report compels you to move beyond intention and into meaningful action. Cultural humility is not a one off training or a buzzword. It is a daily practice. It means examining your own bias, listening even when it is uncomfortable, and making space for co-creation with the very communities your decisions impact. Black girls do not need saving. They need systems to stop harming them. They need safe spaces, reflective adults, and institutions willing to change.

At Milk Honey Bees, we remain committed to Black girls, unapologetically. We will continue to advocate for them, to create with them, and to work with those who are genuinely interested in their education, safety, joy, and creativity.

This report is more than research. It is a call to do better, for and with Black Girls.

Ebinehita Iyere

Founder and Managing Director, Milk Honey Bees



Introduction

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

To truly meet young people where they are, educators must recognise the impact of their own cultural identities, biases, and assumptions, particularly in relation to how these intersect with a young person's cultural identity and the inequalities they may face. Drawing on frameworks of **cultural humility**, which emphasise **self-awareness, active listening, authentic allyship, and continuous reflection**, this study investigates the role of cultural humility in fostering **inclusive and empowering educational spaces**.

Our project builds on the pioneering work of Milk Honey Bees CIC and their 2023 report **See Us, Hear Us: On girlhood and growing up Black in Lambeth**. That report, which focused on the voices of Black girls (Our sample included one student who self-identified as Black Mixed-Race. While we refer throughout to 'Black girls,' we acknowledge that the experiences of Black Mixed-Race girls may differ in important ways. Future research should purposively recruit more Black Mixed-Race participants to ensure those perspectives are fully represented) in Lambeth, revealed stark findings about their experiences in school. Most girls ranked their school experience below 5 out of 10 describing it as "horrible" and used words such as "racist," "boring," "sexist," "unfair," and "stressful" to characterise their learning environments. Crucially, the report also highlighted the adultification of Black girls, a process rooted in racialised stereotypes that leaves them more vulnerable to discriminatory treatment and emotional neglect.

This context is central to our work. It underscores the urgency of developing strategies that move beyond performative inclusion and towards meaningful structural change. Our research responds to this call by investigating how cultural humility can shift the culture of educational institutions, enabling them to better see, hear, and support Black girls in all their complexity.

AIMS, SCOPE, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This report examines:

Educators' self-perceptions:

How educators' cultural identities and biases shape classroom dynamics.

Intersectional challenges

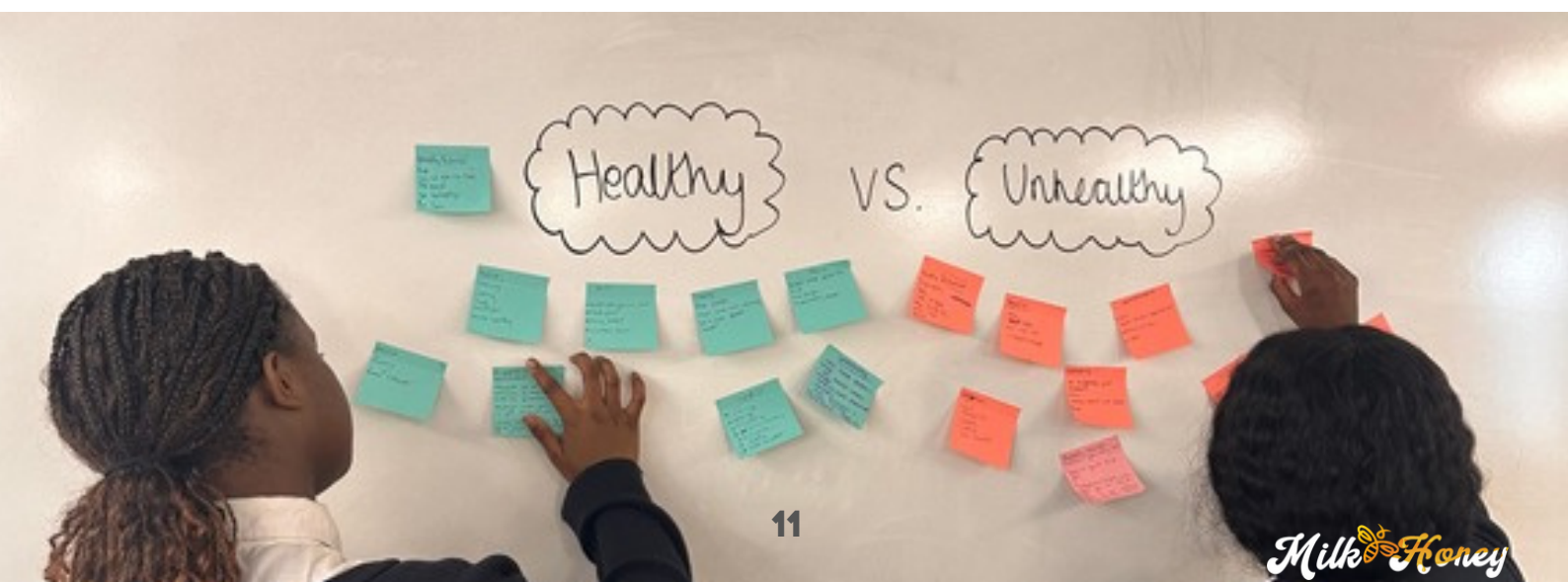
How multiple aspects of identity (race, gender, socioeconomic status, SEND) influence student experiences.

Cultural humility in action

Assessing the role of self-awareness, listening, and allyship in reducing educational inequality.

Laying the groundwork for future intervention:

While this research does not produce a direct intervention, it provides the foundational understanding needed for Paradigm Project and Mindset Matters UK to collaboratively develop a cultural humility toolkit. This future resource will support schools and educators to embed cultural humility practices in a way that is reflective, strategic, and grounded in lived experience.



ROADMAP OF THE REPORT

Introduction

Sets out context, aims, and our approach

Literature Review

Situates the study within scholarship on cultural humility, equity, and education

Findings

Presents themes drawn from focus groups, creative workshops, and surveys

Conclusion

Summarises insights and addresses study limitations

Closing Remarks

Looks ahead and underscores next steps

Executive Summary

Synthesises findings, implications, and recommendations

Methodology

Outlines our participatory design, data collection, and analysis

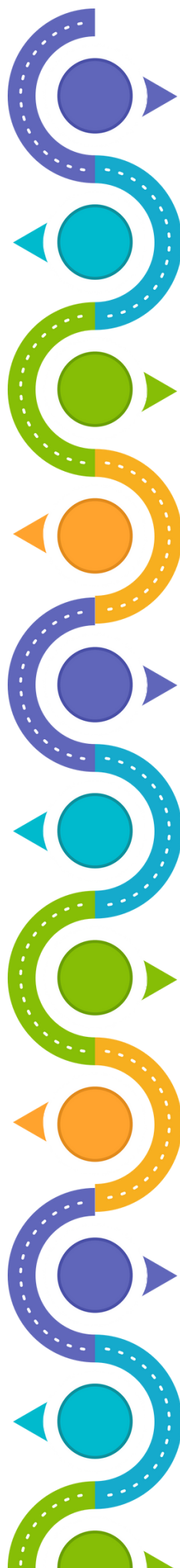
Discussion

Reflects on what the findings mean in broader educational and policy contexts

Recommendations

Offers targeted, evidence-based steps for practice and policy

References and Appendices



RESEARCHERS AND CO-AUTHORS



Joel Dunn

CEO & Founder
Paradigm Project

As an advocate for systemic change, my career is grounded in a commitment to upstream solutions and preventative strategies. I believe meaningful transformation must start long before crises emerge. Having personally navigated the criminal justice system, including serving time in prison, and worked on the frontline of youth violence, I am driven by a deep sense of responsibility to create change. These experiences reinforced my conviction that early intervention is crucial to breaking cycles of disadvantage.

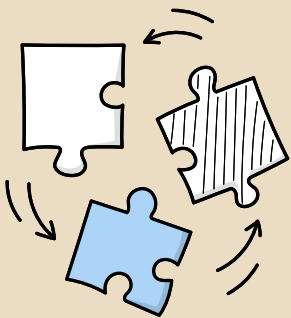
As founder and CEO of a grassroots charity, I bring a unique blend of lived experience, practical insight, and academic rigour. Currently, I am pursuing a PhD at the University of Cambridge, researching how to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. This positioning as a “pracademic” allows me to integrate theory and practice to drive lasting impact in education.



Jade Ecobichon-Gray

CEO & Founder
Mindset Matters

Jade Ecobichon-Gray is a Social Wellness and EDI Consultant, Cultural Humility Educator, and PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge, where she researches “Beyond Compliance – EDI as Transformative Education.” With a background in health psychology and over a decade of experience across social care, wellness, and diversity initiatives, Jade brings evidence-based insights and creative facilitation to systemic change. She specialises in transitioning organisations from one-off initiatives to sustainable cultural transformation, ensuring every person feels seen, supported, and able to thrive.



Our joint work

Over the past five years, Jade and I have collaborated on multiple projects, leading research, facilitating workshops, and designing interventions together. Our teamwork is underpinned by a shared commitment to equity, cultural humility, and community-driven impact. Together, we combine comprehensive research methodologies with embedded, real-world application to advance inclusive and empowering education for marginalised young people.

Unseen, Unheard, Underserved: The Urgent Call for Cultural Humility in UK Schools

KEY FINDINGS

Our research, drawing on student and educator surveys, and student and parent focus groups, exposes a troubling landscape:

1

A Chasm of Perception

While **86% of teachers** say they ask questions when unsure, **only 32% of students agree**; and although **89% of teachers** report showing genuine interest in students' cultures, **just 39% of students** feel seen, revealing a clear **"visibility gap"** that undercuts cultural-humility intent. This directly informs Recommendation 7 on embedding visible, enacted practices in every lesson.

2

Pervasive Discrimination and Silence

A concerning **42% of students** reported experiencing **identity-based discrimination** from a teacher, yet a profound silence in open responses indicates a lack of psychological safety and trust for disclosure. This points to systemic issues where harm is not acknowledged or addressed.

3

Adultification Bias

Black girls continue to be **disproportionately subjected to adultification bias**, leading to misinterpretations of their behaviour, harsher discipline, and emotional suppression, often overlooking their mental well-being.

4

Systemic Barriers to Praxis

Educators express a willingness to practice cultural humility but cite a **critical lack of protected time**, resources, and institutional support to embed it meaningfully. Parents, too, feel disempowered and often engage with schools only in times of crisis, perpetuating mistrust.

A Path Towards Transformative Action

The findings are a powerful call to action, urging a move beyond superficial "tick-box" diversity initiatives towards deep, systemic change. Cultural humility, rooted in relational accountability and shared learning, offers the framework for this transformation. By centering the experiences of Black girls, one of the most overlooked groups, this research provides invaluable insights that can inform and strengthen equitable systems for all marginalised learners.

BOLD RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A MORE EQUITABLE FUTURE

To bridge the gap between intent and impact, we propose seven ambitious yet realistic recommendations, with a strong emphasis on mental health and wellbeing:

- 1. Expand & deepen context-specific research across UK cities.** Secure funding to replicate our mixed-methods approach, including creative formats and repeat surveys in diverse regions so interventions reflect the varied experiences of Black and mixed-heritage girls nationwide.
- 2. Co-create a cultural humility toolkit and framework.** Bring together mental health practitioners, educators, parents and students to develop a modular, trauma-informed toolkit grounded in lived experience for recognising microaggressions and practising counter-storytelling.
- 3. Mandate protected time for reflective practice and supervision.** Advocate for policy requiring schools to allocate dedicated CPD time for peer supervision, guided journaling and mental health check-ins focused on cultural humility.
- 4. Embed cultural humility in training and policy standards.** Work with government bodies and training providers to integrate cultural humility and trauma-informed care into Initial Teacher Training, National Professional Qualifications and inspection frameworks using student and parent feedback as core performance indicators.
- 5. Prioritise teacher and parent wellbeing through reflective spaces.** Establish facilitated reflection circles for teachers and for parents, followed by joint forums, to build trust, share strategies and co-design supportive practices.
- 6. Build safe, youth-led reporting and reflection mechanisms.** Implement an anonymous online platform and youth advisory panels so students can confidentially report discrimination, influence practice and see tangible responses.
- 7. Embed structural accountability via a prototype Community Advisory Group.** Constitute a Community Advisory Group to audit equity, co-design recommendations, publish quarterly updates and host an annual forum to align initiatives, prevent duplication and secure ongoing commitments.

By embracing these recommendations, educational institutions can move beyond rhetoric to cultivate truly inclusive, compassionate, and empowering environments where every child is respected, understood, and empowered to thrive.

Literature Review

THE SILENCING AND ERASURE OF BLACK GIRLHOOD IN UK EDUCATION

Understanding the educational realities of Black girls in the UK is significantly hampered by the striking lack of research in this area. While the experiences of young Black boys in education has received growing attention in recent years, with a particular focus on exclusion, attainment gaps and institutional racism (Andrews, 2018; Department for Education, 2020; Gillborn et al., 2017; Joseph-Salisbury, 2020), Black girls are too often, and have for too long, been left out of the conversation, often describing their experiences as one of both hyper-surveillance and a lack of support (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015), meaning their experiences, challenges and aspirations become invisible. This is often driven by misogynoir, A term coined by Moya Bailey (2010) which refers to the specific and often invisible ways that Black women and girls experience discrimination rooted in both racism and sexism.

As articulated in Milk Honey Bees' 2025 Expanded See Us, Hear Us report, this silence in research spaces is not neutral. It is a form of harm. The report states:

"There is little research or advocacy for Black girls with regards to how they relate to these issues. Marline Francois argues that the absence of such research and discussion in education and support spaces only further silences Black girls. It leaves them deprived of the care, vocabulary and tools needed to articulate their experiences." Morris-Jarra & Iyere, 2025, p.6

The above quote captures the heart of the issue, and one that our research, inspired by, and produced in collaboration with Milk Honey Bees, sought to explore. It could be argued that it is not that Black girls lack the language to name their realities, but that their vocabularies, insights, and ways of knowing are often absent from, or actively excluded within academic and mainstream educational spaces. This form of epistemic exclusion denies not only the legitimacy of their pain, but also the visibility of their wisdom, aspirations, and agency (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020; Arday & Mirza, 2018; Love, 2019). As hooks (1994), Morris (2016), and Crenshaw (1991) argue, such marginalisation is not accidental, but a structural outcome of systems that were never designed to hold space for Black girlhood in all its complexity.

As critiqued by reports produced by Milk Honey Bees (2023, 2025a, 2025b), much of the available scholarship on Black girlhood is rooted in North American educational contexts, particularly the United States (Morris, 2016; Brown, 2013; Butler, 2020). While this work holds value in helping us understand key challenges, it cannot be neatly transposed onto the British education system, which operates within its own distinct structures of inequality, immigration histories, and racial and social politics. (Morris-Jarra & Iyere, 2025) Applying US-based frameworks without interrogation or adaptation risks replicating the very dynamics we aim to challenge, namely, the silencing and erasure of the specificities of Black girls' experiences in a UK context, and more precisely, within a London-centred landscape. It is also essential to recognise that regional variation exists across the UK, and the educational realities of Black girls in London may differ from those in Liverpool, Glasgow, or Cardiff. If we are to build more equitable and culturally humble educational environments, we must begin by asking: where are Black girls in our current research landscape? And more importantly, why haven't we been listening to them?

INTERSECTIONALITY AND THE COMPLEX REALITIES OF BLACK GIRLS

Because our analysis draws on a single mixed-heritage voice, further targeted work is needed to ensure those experiences are fully represented. An intersectional lens is essential when exploring the lived realities of Black girls in education, since failing to consider overlapping identities risks overlooking crucial nuances. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) defines intersectionality as the way in which overlapping systems of oppression, such as racism, sexism, classism and ableism, converge to create distinct and compounded forms of marginalisation.

For Black girls in the UK, these intersections can result in unique challenges within the school environment that are not captured in research that only explores race and does not account for gender. Research by Joseph-Salisbury & Connelly (2021) supports this observation, with Black girls also contending with gendered expectations around behaviour, dress, hairstyle and emotional expression. Additionally, they may also face pressures related to perceived notions of respectability, linguistic expression or their presentation of cultural identity, particularly when these are viewed to be at odds with Eurocentric norms around femininity.

Furthering Crenshaw's (1991) notion of intersectionality, we must also recognise that these experiences are not evenly distributed. Class background, racial heritage, skin tone, immigration status, hair texture, religion, and sexual identity, can all shape the degree and nature of discrimination that Black girls may face. It is therefore vital that we resist the urge to view their experiences solely through the dual lens of race and gender. Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality (1991) serves to educate us that educational inequity does not operate in silos. Recognising multiple layers of identities, means we are better positioned to identify the specific barriers Black girls face and co-create solutions that reflect the complexity of their lives, not just their labels.

ADULTIFICATION AND THE "STRONG BLACK GIRL" STEREOTYPE

One of the most pervasive and harmful forms of bias affecting Black children in education is adultification, a term used to describe how Black children are perceived as older and less innocent than their peers. While Davis and Marsh (2020) focus specifically on Black boys in UK safeguarding contexts, similar patterns have been widely reported by Black girls, particularly in relation to hyper-surveillance and a lack of care (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). This phenomenon often results in Black girls being perceived as older (with associated expectations of maturity), more self-reliant, and less innocent than their peers.

"It is possible that teachers, consciously or unconsciously, expect Black girls to behave in a more adult manner and express irritation or disappointment when these girls exhibit behaviour typical of their actual age. This expectation aligns with the broader societal trend of adultifying Black girls, where their childhood is not fully recognised or respected, and they are pressured to conform to adult norms and responsibilities prematurely." Morris-Jarra & Iyere, 2025, p.16.

While this concept has long been discussed in Black feminist scholarship, it rose to mainstream prominence following its application in a research-based framework which explicitly centred on Black girls in the U.S. education system. Epstein, Blake, & González (2017) found that this misperception had real, enduring, and damaging consequences which included higher expectations for behaviour, lower levels of empathy and protection from those in authority and disproportionately harsher action related to discipline. Adultification is not just about misperception leading to negative action, it is about wellbeing and psychological safety, it is about stripping Black girls of their right to be vulnerable, emotionally complex, and cared for with the same compassion that is extended to their peers.

Studies from the Runnymede Trust and Institute of Race Relations show how adultification bias plays out in everything from safeguarding referrals to school exclusions (Joseph-Salisbury & Connelly, 2021; Williams, 2020). Yet despite its prevalence, this issue remains under theorised in mainstream education policy. Interventions tend to be reactive, seeking to address behavioural ‘problems’ rather than interrogating the racialised frameworks through which Black girls are read and responded to.

The stereotype of the ‘strong Black girl’ works to compound this dynamic, while strength and resilience can be a source of pride, and an aspect of identity, they shouldn’t be required conditions for dignity or support. The expectation of strength often placed on Black women (Woods-Giscombé, 2010) is also reflected in the experiences of Black girls in UK schools, where they are frequently denied the space to express fear, vulnerability or confusion, and are instead perceived as socially mature and emotionally resilient (BLAM UK, 2023). In the classroom, this might look like a teacher misreading a distressed Black girl as defiant. In disciplinary procedures, it can translate to harsher sanctions. In pastoral care, it can result in silence, pain may be difficult to express if strength is presumed.

CULTURAL HUMILITY - A FRAMEWORK FOR TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE

Cultural humility has increasingly been proposed as an alternative to the static, finite model of “cultural competence” in professional development, particularly in sectors shaped by interpersonal care and institutional power. First introduced by Tervalon and Murray-García (1998) within the field of healthcare, cultural humility is defined not by mastery of other cultures, but by a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation, redressing power imbalances, and holding space for co-learning. Unlike cultural competence, which risks reinforcing othering through checklist-based understandings of identity, cultural humility is a process rooted in relationships and reflections, emphasising accountability over assumed expertise (Foronda et al., 2016; Abdou et al., 2022).

Although most existing literature on cultural humility stems from the United States and Canada and is largely concentrated in healthcare and counselling contexts (Wright et al., 2023; Clark & Sharma, 2021), the framework offers critical insights for the field of education, particularly when considering how schools engage with the intersecting identities and experiences of Black girls. As research continues to highlight the role of adultification bias, cultural misrecognition, and institutional racism in shaping Black girls’ school experiences (Epstein et al., 2017; Joseph-Salisbury & Connelly, 2021; BLAM UK, 2023; Milk Honey Bees, 2023, 2025a, 2025b), cultural humility offers a mode of practice capable of challenging the biases, policies and systems that underpin and contribute to these harms.

Studies have found that when educators engage in cultural humility, they begin to interrogate their own cultural lenses, social positioning and assumptions, becoming more attuned to how power circulates in their interactions with students (Habashy & Cruz, 2021). In this way, cultural humility is not simply about professional sensitivity. It is about systemic consciousness. It enables educators to see how institutional norms, such as behavioural expectations, disciplinary practices, and curriculum content, can marginalise or erase minoritised students. This is particularly important in relation to Black girls, who often find themselves misread as “aggressive,” “resilient,” or “strong” rather than supported as children navigating structurally embedded racialised and gendered harms (Blake et al., 2017; Milk Honey Bees, 2025b).

Furthermore, cultural humility aligns closely with the principles of restorative pedagogy. It encourages educators to view themselves as learners alongside their students and to see relationships not as neutral exchanges but as sites where power must be consciously and continually negotiated (Freire, 1970; hooks 1994; Abdou et al., 2022; Clark & Sharma, 2021). This positioning destabilises the notion of the teacher as the sole authority and instead opens up space for mutual respect, active listening, and community-informed practice. These conditions are necessary if schools are to become environments where Black girls feel seen, heard, and supported.

While UK-specific research into cultural humility in education remains limited, related work in social care offers important insights into how the framework is being adapted locally. An evaluation of cultural humility training delivered to practitioners in Newham, co-developed by the authors, Mindset Matters UK and Paradigm Project, reported significant shifts in participants’ self-awareness, understanding of power, and approach to relational practice with children and families. Practitioners reflected on how the training encouraged them to move beyond performative inclusion efforts and toward deeper, more accountable forms of engagement (Mindset Matters UK & Paradigm Project, 2024).

“The type of activities we did really birthed insightful and deep discussion - I learned a lot. I really enjoyed the session and have had several in-depth conversations with several people since”

Cultural humility training evaluation report: Reflections from practice in Newham (2024)



These developments suggest that cultural humility can serve as a powerful reflective tool in professions where relationships and safeguarding are central and provide a foundation for future applications within educational settings.

Despite growing interest, UK-specific research on cultural humility in education remains limited, and there is little consensus on how to operationalise it at scale within schools. The literature suggests that for cultural humility to be meaningful, it must go beyond occasional professional development sessions and become embedded in school policy, leadership, and pedagogy (Fisher-Borne et al. 2015; Brooks, 2021; Habashy & Cruz, 2021). This aligns with the objectives of the present research, which positions cultural humility not simply as a training tool but as a guiding framework for co-developing strategies that affirm the identities, agency, and lived experiences of Black girls in UK schools.



Methodology

OVERVIEW

Our mixed-methods approach combined qualitative and quantitative elements to explore cultural humility in schools serving Black girls in Southwark and Lambeth:

- **Two online focus groups:** one with educators and one with parents, designed to support accessibility and respect participants' time.
- **Creative expression session:** Milk Honey Bees facilitated a session with Black girls using moodboarding and mind mapping, introduced by a recorded message from Ebinehita Iyere, to capture early reflections on identity, racism and school experiences.
- **Two surveys:** one for students and one for educators, gathering quantitative data on attitudes, experiences and systemic factors shaping cultural humility.

The surveys were conceptually informed by two key studies: The Cultural Humility Scale for Students (Foronda et al., 2020) and Exploring the Cultural Humility and Practices of School Psychologists in Virginia (Brooks, 2021). While not replicated directly, these tools guided our item development, particularly in framing cultural humility as a process of self-reflection, openness and responsive practice.

All qualitative discussions were transcribed and creative outputs digitised. Survey data were collated and synthesised with qualitative findings through thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes across both strands.

FOCUS GROUPS

- **Parents:** Recruitment took place via trusted local parent networks to overcome mistrust and engagement barriers. Acknowledging the demands on parents, especially those with young or SEN children, we offered a £50 voucher to compensate for their time, which helped ensure genuine and committed participation.
- **Educators:** We cast a wide net across school communities, safeguarding leads, SEND coordinators, governors, DEI officers via LinkedIn and professional contacts. While many participants were non-classroom-based, the demographic was primarily Black or minoritised. Though not planned, this outcome emphasised that those most affected by inequity were eager to share.

CREATIVE EXPRESSION WITH MILK HONEY BEES

- **Rationale:** Art-based and participatory methods provide depth and emotional access that pure talk-based approaches may miss. Moodboarding enables participants to articulate feelings visually and reflectively in a safe, open manner. Such methods are particularly effective for engaging marginalised and underserved communities, offering unique insights that traditional verbal methods might not capture (Farmaki & Kandylaki, 2025; UCL, 2025.).
- **Process:** Led by Milk Honey Bees, who centre joy and healing and align with Paradigm Project's value of play and creativity. The session began with an open discussion, moved to mind-mapping, and concluded with a collaborative digital moodboard capturing experiences and themes.
- **Ethics and support:** Activities were designed to be participant-led and trauma-informed, with autonomy built into session flow. Post-session debrief and wellbeing checks were provided to protect participants from distress.

SURVEYS

- **Student survey:** Distributed through Milk Honey Bees' partner schools, targeting Black and Black-Mixed-Race girls and their peers, exploring school climate, identity, belonging, and discipline experiences.
- **Educator survey:** Shared via contacts at Southwark Council, including senior advisers and school networks. All respondents were invited to attend focus groups and workshop participation to ensure integration across data sources.

MIXED METHODS

By combining quantitative reach with qualitative depth, we utilised a mixed-methods design enabling convergence (triangulation) and complementarity between datasets for richer, more reliable insights. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena by integrating statistical data with thematic interpretations, thereby strengthening the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Jogulu & Pansiri, 2011; Murphy & Maguire, 2011).

DATA ANALYSIS

- **Transcription and data familiarisation:** All audio and creative session content were fully transcribed. This initial phase involved immersing ourselves in the data to gain a broad, high-level overview and noting initial impressions and patterns.
- **Thematic analysis:** We employed an inductive thematic analysis approach, where themes emerged directly from the data rather than being predetermined by existing theories (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). The process followed a systematic, multi-stage framework:

1. **Initial Coding:** Both researchers (JD and JEG) independently read through the transcribed qualitative data and assigned initial codes to meaningful segments. This involved identifying key ideas, concepts, and recurring patterns within the text.

2. **Code Refinement and Theme Generation:** Following independent coding, the researchers engaged in collaborative discussions to compare their initial codes, resolve any discrepancies, and group related codes into broader, overarching themes. This iterative process involved scrutinising the data multiple times to ensure that themes accurately represented the content and to identify underlying connections and narratives.

3. **Theme Review and Definition:** The generated themes were reviewed against the original data to ensure coherence and validity. Each theme was clearly defined, and its boundaries were established to ensure distinctness. This stage also involved naming the themes in a way that captured their core essence and relevance to the research questions.



DATA ANALYSIS

- **Team coding and transparency:** To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the qualitative findings, a collaborative coding approach was adopted. After independent coding, both researchers (JD and JEG) met to discuss their interpretations and reach a consensus on the coding scheme and emerging themes (Ganji et al., 2018; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020; Roberts et al., 2019). This inter-coder discussion process enhanced consistency in data interpretation and allowed for the integration of diverse perspectives, thereby mitigating individual researcher bias and increasing the rigour of the analysis.
- **Survey analysis:** Quantitative survey responses were analysed for descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, and open-text theming.
- **Integration:** Findings were synthesised across methods to highlight patterns (e.g., themes like bias in discipline and emotional labour echoed in both surveys and creative outputs), enhancing validity through triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Jogulu & Pansiri, 2011; Murphy & Maguire, 2011).

LIMITATIONS

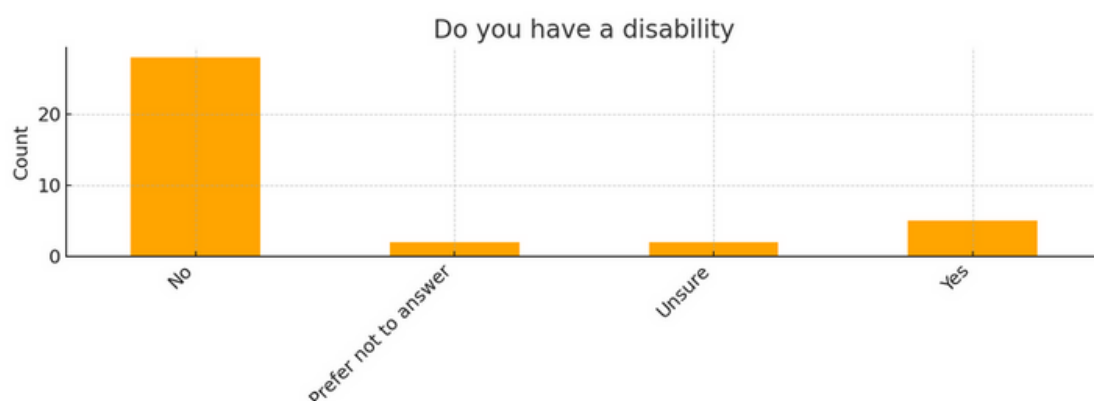
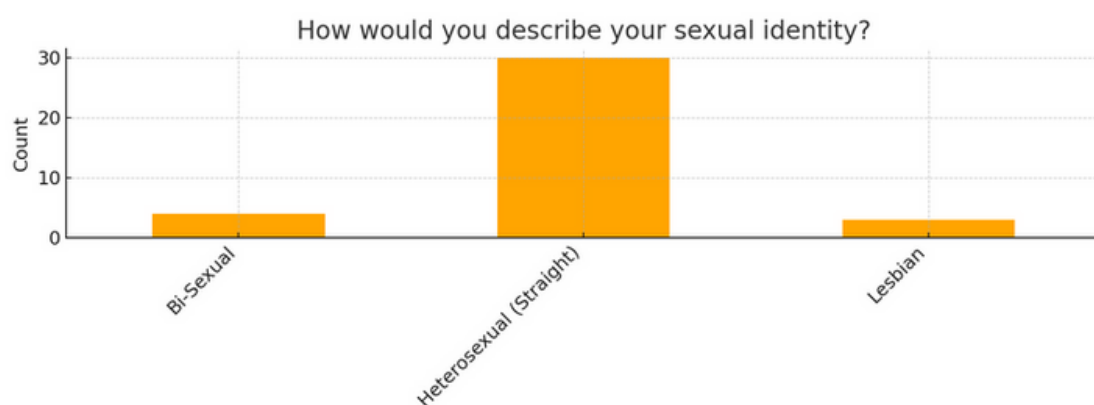
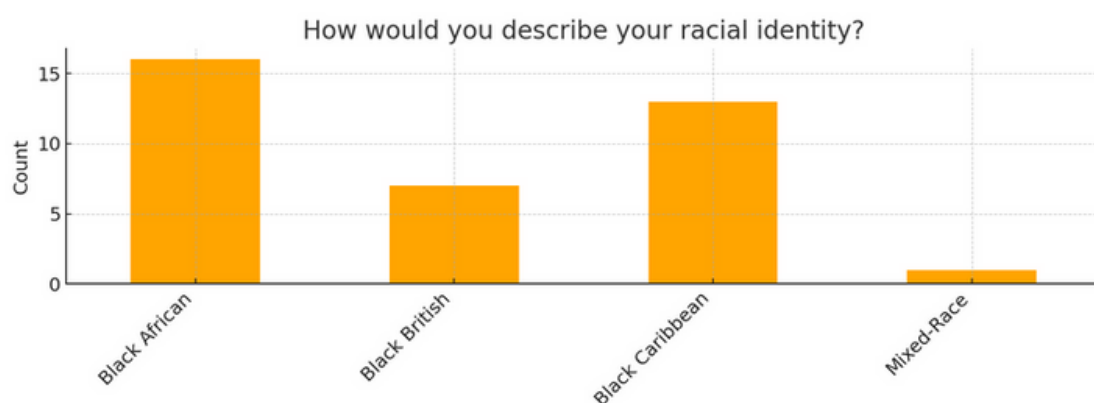
- **Sampling bias:** The educator group was skewed toward non-teaching roles and minoritised backgrounds. Furthermore, participation by white teaching staff was very limited, raising the question of whether key barriers to engagement among this group are missing from our findings. Mission 44's recent report on Exclusions (Mission 44, 2024) similarly found that many white educators struggle to engage in discussions on ethnicity and equity. Future research should purposely recruit white teachers and senior leaders to ensure that recommendations reflect the needs and perspectives of the entire staff body.
- **Racial Identity:** Only one participant identified as Black Mixed-Race, limiting our ability to draw robust conclusions about that group's experiences
- **Digital format:** Online sessions and surveys may have excluded digitally disconnected participants.
- **Time and resource constraints:** Limited sample sizes, especially among frontline educators, constrain generalisability.

Despite these, our methodological rigour, reflective practice, and data triangulation strengthen the credibility and applicability of our findings across contexts.

Findings

STUDENT SURVEY

The student survey was completed by 37 students across several year groups, most of whom identified as Black African, Black Caribbean, or Black British. While the focus of this research is on the experiences of Black girls, the respondent pool reflected a broad spectrum of identities: the majority identified as heterosexual and Christian, and 15% reported living with a disability. These identity markers are significant, not simply as demographic categories, but as intersecting lived realities that shape students' day-to-day interactions, their access to cultural recognition, compassion and wellbeing.



1. Racial Identity and Relational Variability

Disaggregated data revealed important variations in student experience. While Black British students reported the most positive teacher scores (+0.56), followed by Black Caribbean students (+0.16), Black African students, who made up the largest group, reported a net negative perception (−0.07). One respondent identified as Mixed-Race, offering a reminder that even within the scope of “Black” experiences are shaped by specific cultural affiliations, heritage, and perceived belonging. These distinctions are crucial. They underscore that “Black” is not a singular or hegemonic experience, and that students’ heritage, cultural context, phenotype, and migration histories all shape how they are read, treated, and supported in school.

This complexity extends to students with disabilities, who reported the most positive overall teacher index scores (+0.83). This finding may point to successful individual relationships or differentiated pastoral care. But it also highlights the need to explore how different forms of marginalisation interact, and how schools can avoid simplistic or one-dimensional approaches to equity.

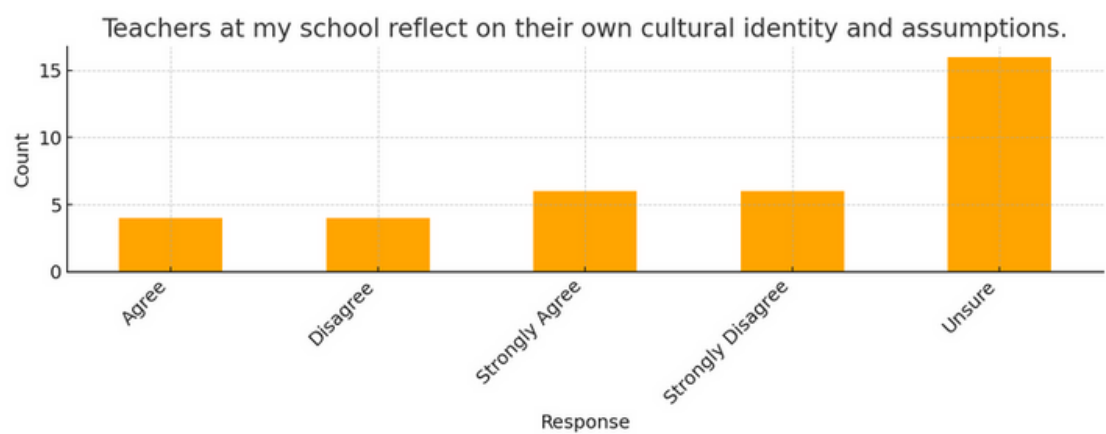
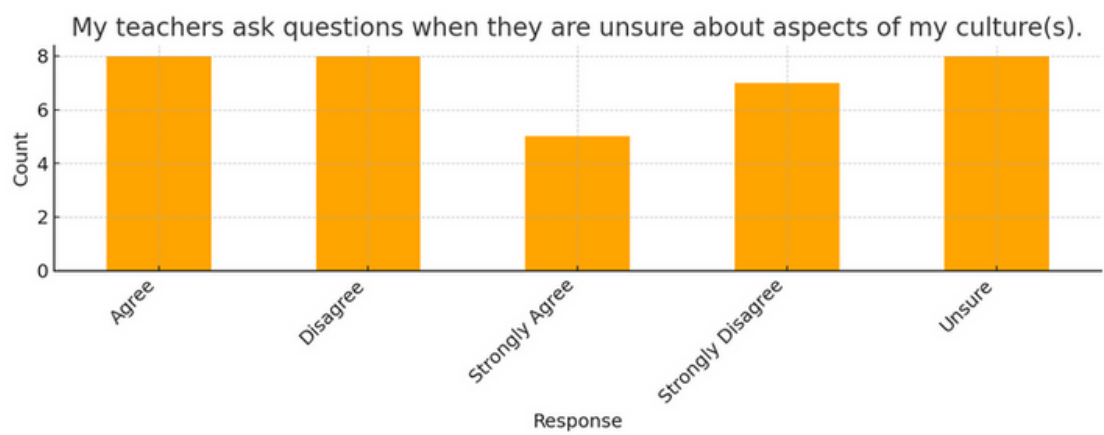
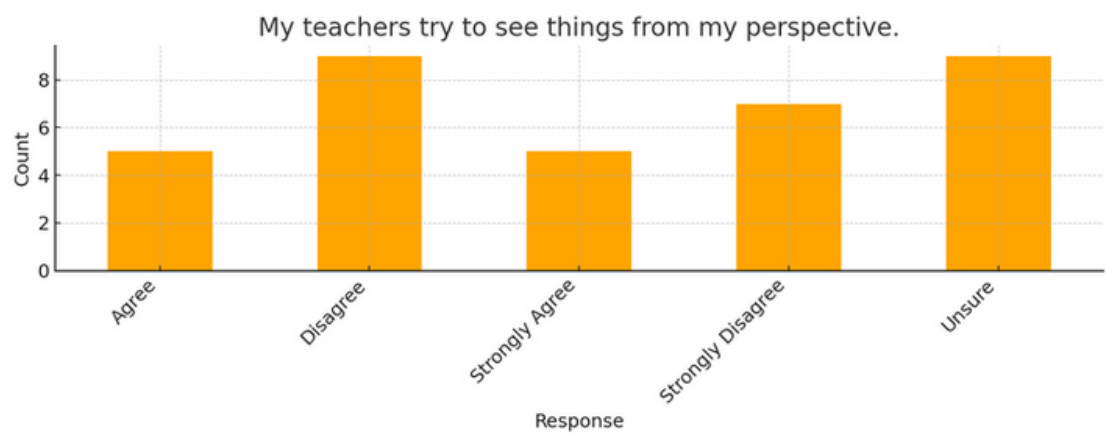
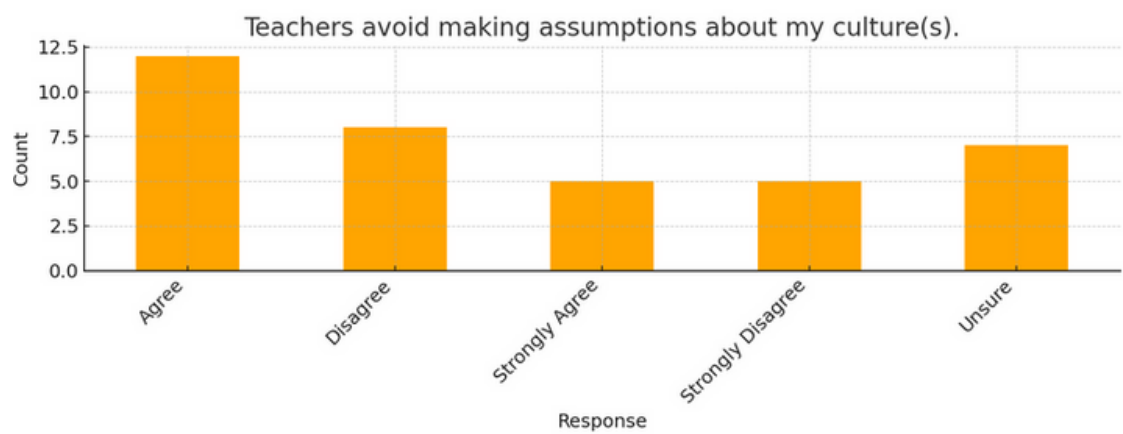
2. Educator Relationships and the Practice of Cultural Humility

The survey included a nine-item cultural humility index exploring how students perceive their teachers’ attitudes and behaviours around culture. These items ranged from overt behaviours (e.g. “asks questions when unsure”) to internal dispositions (e.g. “reflects on their own cultural identity and assumptions”). The overall average score across these measures was +0.14, indicating a marginally positive perception of teachers. Yet nearly 40% of students rated their teachers negatively on this scale, signalling a significant gap between intent and impact.

Students were most likely to agree with items that signalled passive respect (e.g. “open-minded about cultural difference”) and least likely to agree with those suggesting active engagement or self-reflection. Over half of the cohort were “unsure” whether their teachers genuinely avoided assumptions or reflected on their own identity, highlighting a lack of visible modelling of cultural humility in practice. As the literature affirms, cultural humility is not simply about being accepting, it requires ongoing praxis, a concept explored by Freire (1970) which refers to a cyclical process of reflection and action directed towards transformation and social justice. This process also necessitates discomfort, and accountability (Foronda et al., 2016; Habashy & Cruz, 2021).

Open comments reinforced this. Requests for teachers to “be more aware of what they say” and “ask more sensible questions” were common. These are not demands for perfect knowledge, they are calls for educators to demonstrate curiosity, sincerity, and respect in tangible ways.

STUDENT SURVEY

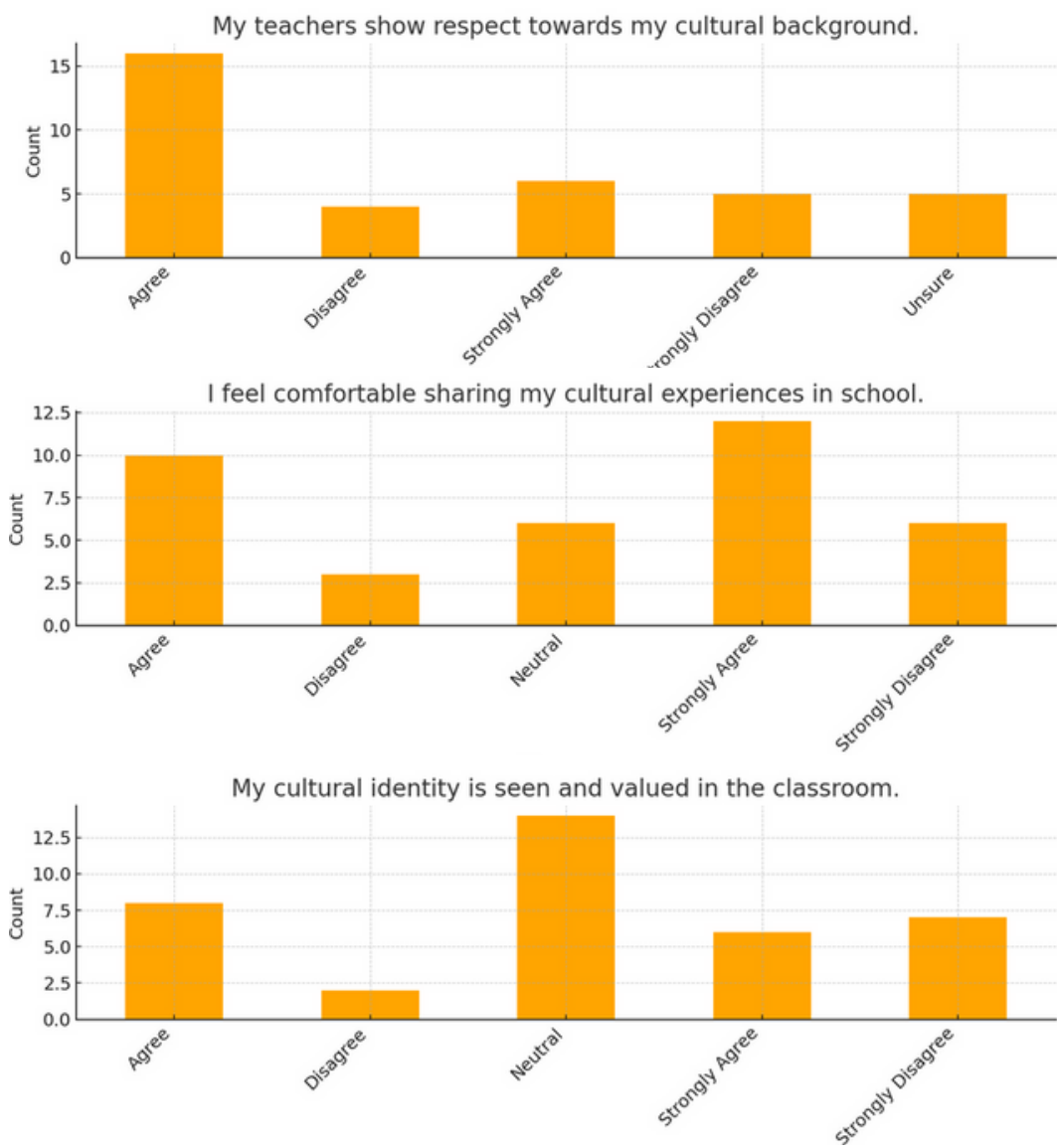


3. School Culture and Cultural Inclusion

In addition to teacher behaviours, students were asked to assess school culture more broadly using ten items related to belonging, respect, discrimination, and visibility. This produced a slightly higher average score (+0.16), again suggesting a school environment that leans towards inclusion, albeit sporadic in presentation.

While 57% of students felt respected by teachers, and 58% said they were comfortable sharing their cultural experiences, only 38% agreed that their cultural identity was seen and valued in the classroom. This discrepancy between interpersonal safety and institutional recognition is telling. It reflects a common pattern: students may feel individually acknowledged but not structurally affirmed.

Students expressed a desire for more proactive, visible forms of inclusion - citing a lack of regular cultural events, insufficient curriculum representation, and minimal access to diverse learning resources. These comments point to a need for schools to move beyond symbolic gestures toward sustained, authentic, and embedded practice.

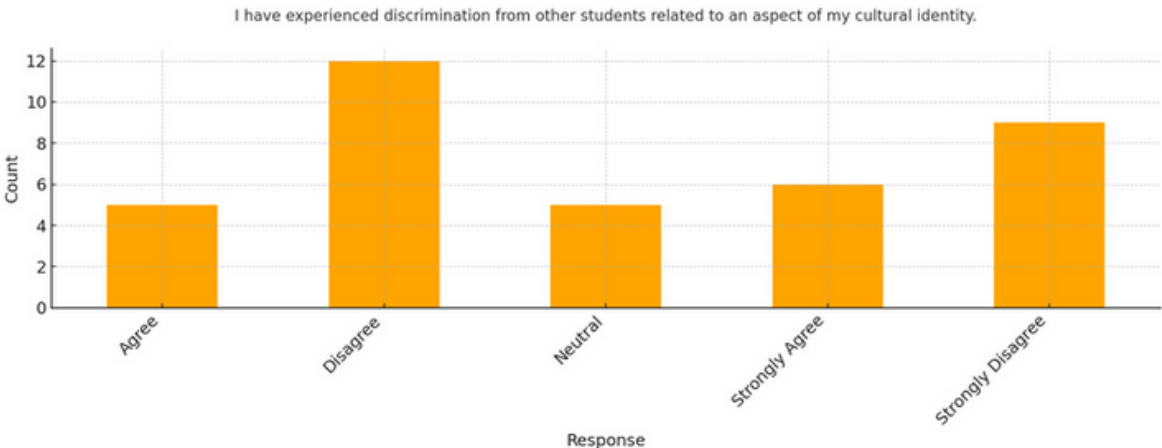
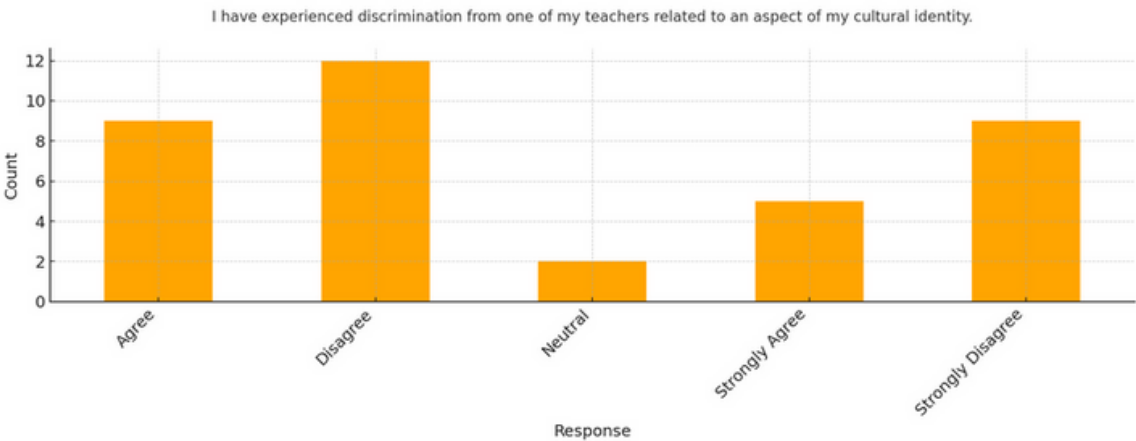


4. Silence and the Realities of Discrimination

Perhaps the most concerning finding was the level of reported discrimination. Forty-two percent of respondents said they had experienced identity-based discrimination from a teacher, and 35% from other students. These figures are significant, and they demand a more robust exploration of the way in which power imbalances present themselves within everyday school interactions.

Notably however, none of the students expanded on these experiences in the open text responses. This silence must be read with caution and care. Not as an absence of harm, but perhaps as an absence of safety or trust. The lack of narrative responses may reflect a fear of retaliation, a history of being disbelieved, or simply a feeling that to disclose wouldn't change anything. If students do not feel safe to disclose, and/or feel that action does not follow disclosure, then schools cannot meaningfully respond.

To redress this, schools must work towards building psychological safety via trust-building practices and anonymous sharing channels. Hosting student-led language workshops where pupils surface the words they use, whether everyday phrases or culturally specific idioms, to describe harm and belonging would not only validate lived language but also strengthen everyone's vocabulary for justice.



5. Uncertainty and Relational Ambiguity

For those items where teacher intent or self-awareness was in question participants frequently responded “Unsure”. This could represent a population of students whose experiences are not overtly negative, but who are unconvinced that cultural humility and relational equity are truly present in their school environment.

This group, which could be described as the “swing group,” represents both risk and potential. Their uncertainty reflects a gap in visibility, not necessarily hostility. If those working within the educational environment can demonstrate openness, reflexivity, and shared learning in more explicit ways, this group may shift towards trust and connection. But if left unaddressed, uncertainty may become disengagement.

Conclusion

The student survey data paints a nuanced picture, one of care, contradiction, and cautious hope. The experiences suggest that for many Black girls in education inconsistent recognition is a key feature of their educational journey. It is powerful to note from the open text responses that students are not asking for teachers to become experts in their cultures, but to recognise and honour their shared humanity in all its complexity. Schools must take the time to engage in robust praxis to ensure that their words and their actions are in alignment, anything less risks a lack of authenticity, and a lack of care for all students.



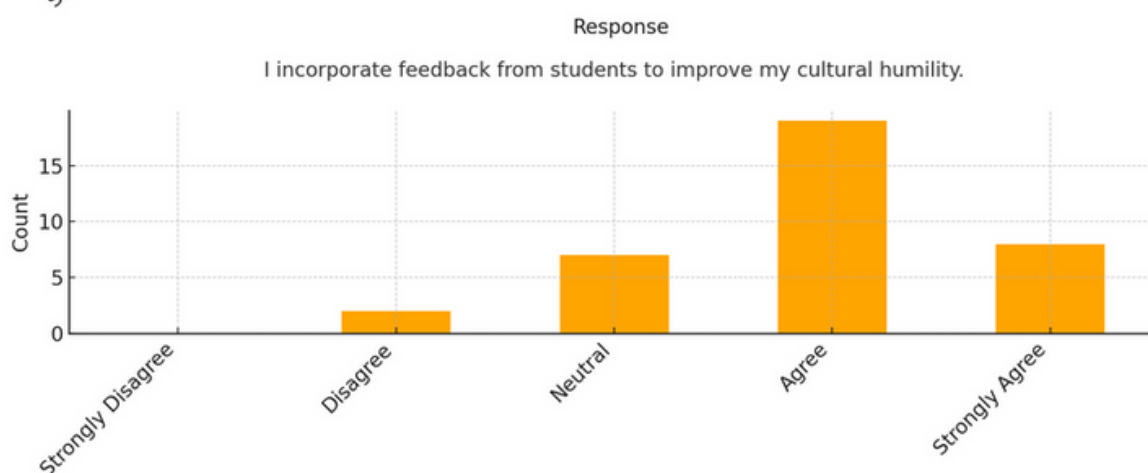
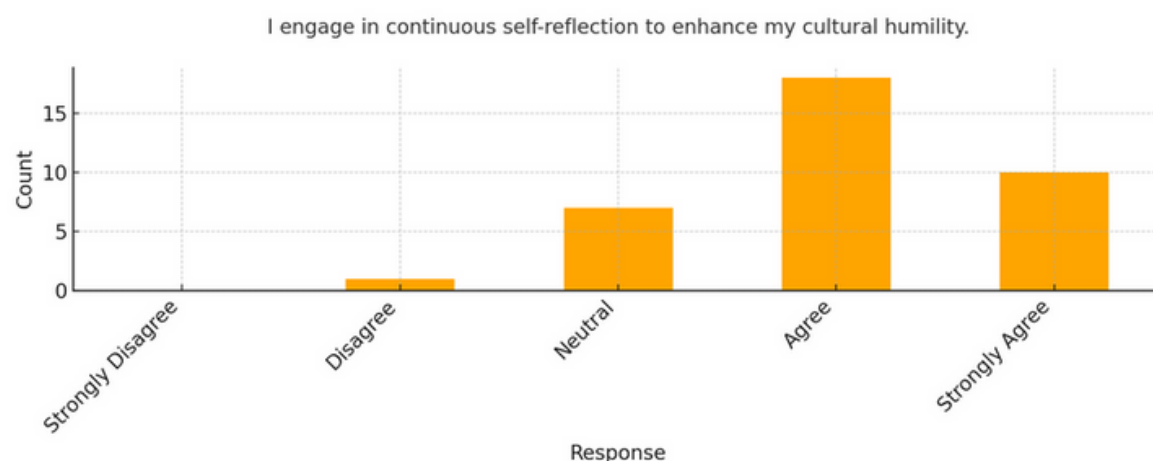
Findings

TEACHER SURVEY

The teacher survey was completed by 36 members of staff, the majority of whom identified as classroom educators. Their responses offer insight into how cultural humility is currently understood and enacted within schools, as well as where gaps remain between individual intent and institutional support. Overall, the data present a promising but uneven picture, suggesting that while educators may aspire to teach with cultural humility, they do so within systems that are not always designed to achieve that aspiration.

1. Relational Commitment: Teacher Perspectives on Cultural Humility

The cultural humility index comprising 11 items seeks to measure personal attitudes and behaviours related to openness, curiosity, reflexivity, and cultural responsiveness. The responses yielded an encouraging average score of +1.33, reflecting strong agreement across most items. A striking 89% of responses fell into the “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” categories, with only 2% reporting any disagreement. What is interesting to note are the two lowest scoring items in the entire survey, which centre on core tenets of cultural humility practice, namely self-reflection and incorporation of feedback for continuous praxis.



TEACHER SURVEY

This absence of continuous praxis can be seen in teachers' own narrative reflections. In an open-text response one participant acknowledged, "Sometimes I don't have time to process something and reflect ... but I try now to make that space for myself." This suggests that the challenge may not be a resistance to cultural humility, but a lack of structured time and support to understand, and practise it meaningfully.

Teacher narratives also illustrate moments of what could best be described as 'moral tension' where cultural humility was required, and necessary, but was not encouraged or supported by the wider system. One staff member recounted confronting colleagues on racial bias: "I have had to 'check' certain members of staff on their attitudes to specific students (always non-white) and challenge their biases on more than one occasion." Another cited the need to self-advocate: "Being judged for being an immigrant." These reflections remind us that educators themselves are not immune to marginalisation and discrimination, and that their ability to support students may often hinge on whether they are supported by the institution in return.

Sometimes I don't have time to process something and reflect ... but I try now to make that space for myself.

I have had to 'check' certain members of staff on their attitudes to specific students (always non-white) and challenge their biases on more than one occasion.



2. Inclusion and Infrastructure: Institutional Culture and Resource Gaps

The second index assessed staff perceptions of school-wide inclusion practices across 17 items, including curriculum, professional development, leadership, and institutional climate. This measure scored slightly lower at +0.98 whilst it can be viewed as a positive average, deeper analysis reveals key points of friction that are worthy of exploration.

Agreement was highest around school climate and values. Over 80% of staff agreed that there is a “clear institutional commitment to equity” and that “diversity is respected” within their school. However, this sense of alignment dropped considerably when the questions shifted from rhetoric to resourcing. It is useful to note that this aligns with student survey results, whereby words and actions do not appear to carry equal weight.

53% felt that their institution provides relevant resources

53% said they actively seek out professional development on this topic.

50% of teachers agreed that there are regular continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities focused on cultural humility.



TEACHER SURVEY

As one teacher explained:

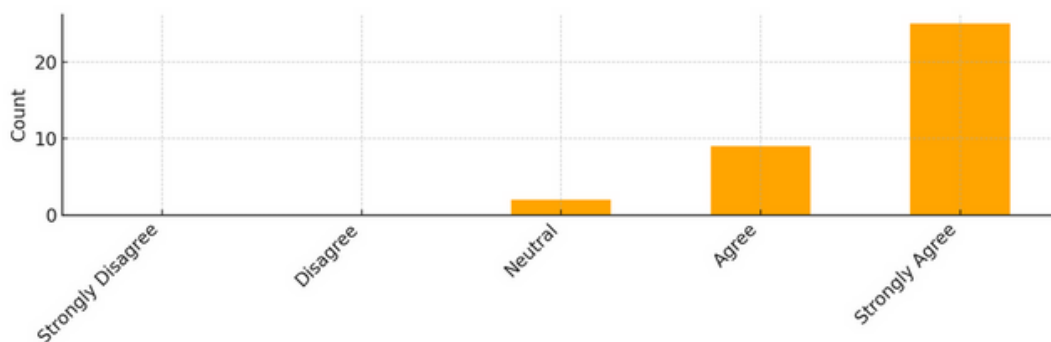
"I would love for us to do a big book audit ... and buy some new books with diverse characters."

Another added:

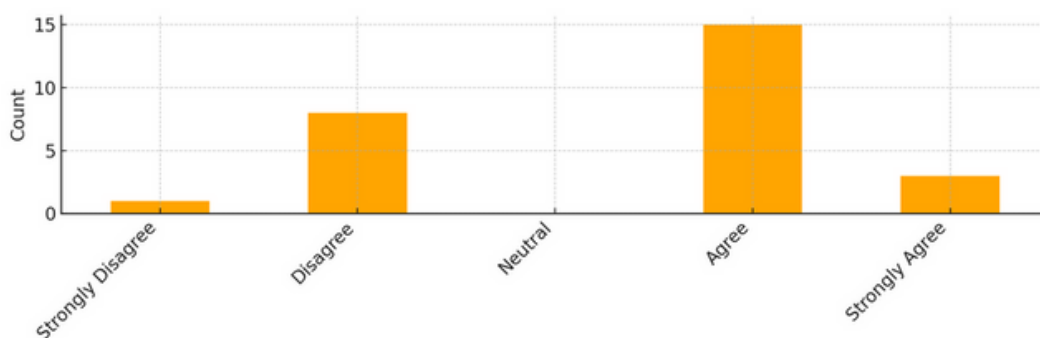
"We need effective CPD, not just discussions about whether we have cultural humility. We need tangible suggestions for improvement."

These comments point to a collective sentiment but an absence of scaffolding. Without ongoing opportunities to reflect, learn, and resource institutional change, cultural humility cannot be understood nor authentically embedded into school cultures, for all staff.

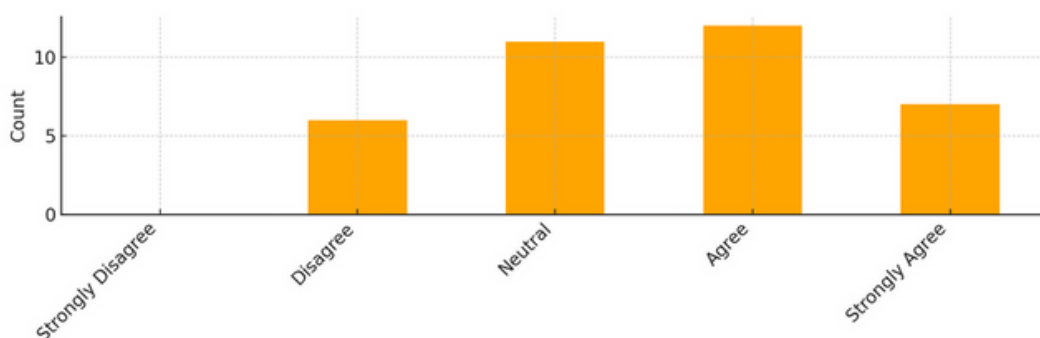
I am open to learning about the cultural experiences of my students.



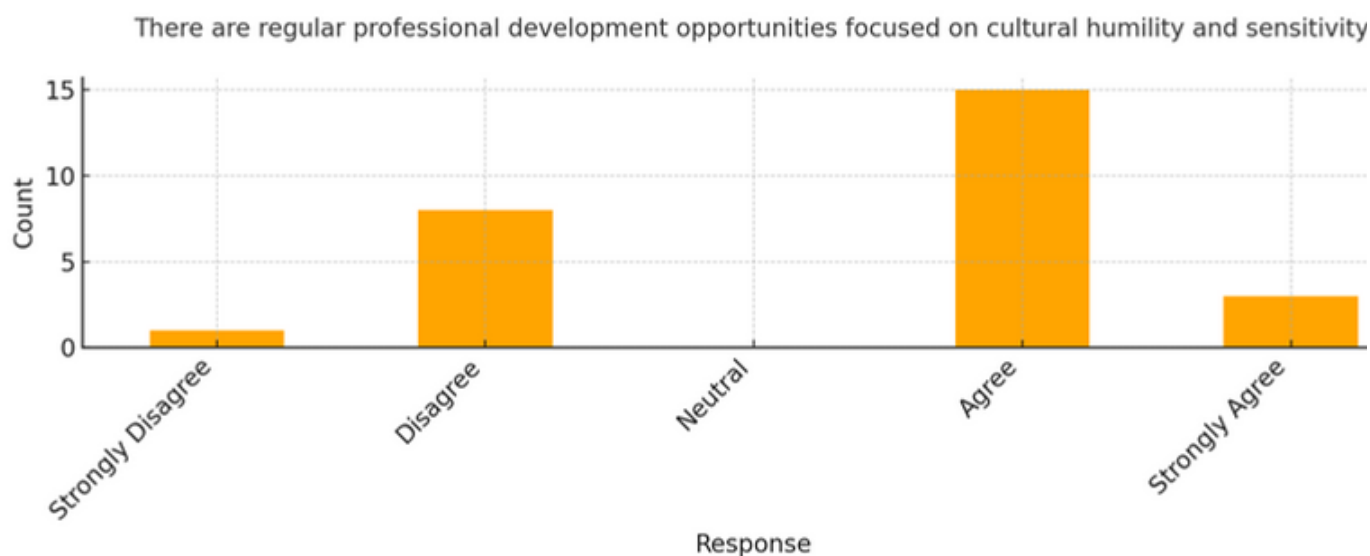
There are regular professional development opportunities focused on cultural humility and sensitivity.



I seek professional development opportunities to improve my understanding of cultural humility.



TEACHER SURVEY



3. Discomfort and Avoidance: Where Confidence Falters

Although the overall cultural humility score was high, the survey also revealed specific areas of discomfort, particularly when teachers were asked to engage with discrimination, student experience, and their own identity. The items with the highest Neutral/Disagree responses all relate to these themes:

“I feel comfortable engaging in discussions with my students related to their experiences of discrimination” (14%)

“I reflect on my own cultural background and how it impacts my teaching” (8%)

“I demonstrate a genuine interest in learning more about my students’ cultures” (11%)

It is important to note that these are not ‘nice to have’ practices in educational environments, they are core practices of cultural humility. The fact that these items were experienced as more challenging suggests that while many staff may be open in principle, the more uncomfortable, vulnerable aspects of building relational trust with students may be difficult in practice. Through the lens of cultural humility this may look like the discomfort of being unsure, the willingness to admit a lack of awareness, the ongoing labour required for personal and professional reflection, and the uncertainty of navigating power dynamics and positionality - particularly in classrooms where identities are diverse and structural inequalities are present.

4. Institutional Perception vs. Student Reality

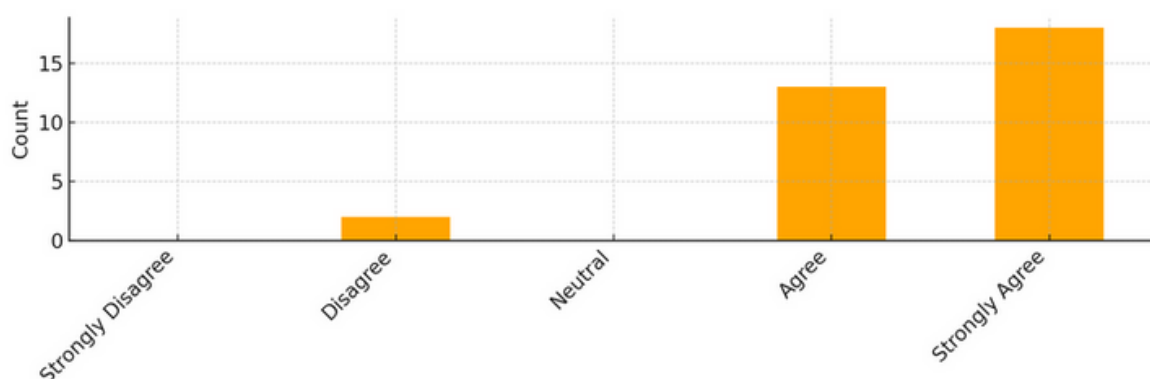
Perhaps the most striking finding comes not from teacher responses alone, but from their comparison to student data. While teachers rated themselves positively across almost every cultural humility item, students consistently rated those same behaviours as infrequently observed.

- **86% of teachers say they ask questions when unsure; only 32% of students agree.**
- **89% of teachers say they show genuine interest in students' cultures; just 39% of students affirm this.**
- **78% of teachers say the school addresses discrimination appropriately; only 46% of students concur.**

This discrepancy may not necessarily point to insincerity, but that of a visibility gap. Teachers may believe their intent is evident, but it is clear from the data and responses that students do not experience it as such. One student asked simply for "teachers to be more aware" and "ask sensible questions." This reinforces that humility is something that must be shown, not simply assumed that cultural recognition is not about a private internalised commitment but is instead embodied and enacted through relational demonstration.

Also of particular interest are questions related to witnessing bias or experiencing cultural discomfort. Only a few teacher narratives referenced these issues, such as "checking" a colleague's comments or being "judged for being an immigrant." By contrast, 42% of students reported experiencing discrimination from teachers. This raises a more unsettling question. If close to half of students are reporting experiencing discrimination from teachers, yet few staff identify themselves or their colleagues as responsible, then where is the harm coming from? This discrepancy points not only to a visibility gap, but to a lack of self-awareness within the institution. If all staff see themselves as the "good ones," then who is left to be held accountable? Silence becomes a form of self-protection in an environment where acknowledgement of harm is rare, and the dominant narrative centres on intention rather than impact.

The school climate promotes respect for diversity among students and staff.



There is also a further question of role ambiguity. Students did not always specify which adults were responsible for discrimination. One teacher mentioned a teaching assistant who “physically pulled S out of the line,” suggesting that experiences may involve support staff, supply teachers, or other adults outside the classroom. This finding speaks to the importance of training, initiatives and policies being inclusive of all adults working within an educational institution, if cultural humility isn’t understood and practiced in every day-to-day interaction, from the classroom to the canteen, robust systems change cannot take root.

Finally, there appears to be a gap between teacher intention and student experience. Several staff members mentioned improvements that are currently underway, such as curriculum reviews, book audits, and expanded training. Teachers may be responding with future hopes in mind, while students are describing their present-day reality. Without clearer communication and collaboration, this gap risks becoming entrenched, leaving students feeling unheard while staff believe change is already happening.

5. Leadership, Accountability and the Work Ahead

While many teachers shared a desire for curriculum reform, resource updates, and reflective leadership, these aspirations often appear as individual initiatives, not system-level changes. One teacher called for “SLT to reflect the community we serve.” Another commented that institutional commitment “feels like talk, not action.” The strongest correlation in the dataset $r = 0.42$ was between teachers’ own cultural humility scores and their ratings of the institutional climate. This suggests that those most committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion are also more attuned to where the system falls short. These are often individuals who have the ability to become key agents of change, but importantly, they cannot be tasked with doing the work alone. If cultural humility is to become part of an authentically inclusive school culture, it must be embedded in the structures that support, evaluate, and resource practices, both individual and collective.

Conclusion

The teacher data reveal a hopeful yet fragile picture. Educators overwhelmingly state that they want to be reflective, equitable, and culturally responsive, however their responses suggest they are operating in systems that present continuous challenges related to capacity, resources and sustainability. Furthermore, despite strong intentions, the act of practising humility is often invisible, and in some cases, missing, to the very students it is meant to benefit.

Findings

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP

The student focus group was created and facilitated by Milk Honey Bees to explore students' educational experiences in greater depth. This was achieved through curated discussion and creative expression. Four core themes emerged consistently across both verbal and written contributions: Misrecognition and stereotyping, adultification and discipline, emotional containment, and calls for healing and representation. These themes were consistent across verbal discussion and written poster outputs.

1. Misrecognition and Stereotyping

Students reported feeling misread or pre-judged in their interactions with some school staff. These perceptions were voiced explicitly in the focus group, where participants described being labelled "aggressive," "disrespectful," or as having "a lot of attitude" for behaviours they saw as neutral or self-defensive. In one exchange, a student remarked: "Apparently to them it's backchat. What is it to you?" - to which another responded, "I wasn't talking back. I was just standing up for myself". These insights suggest that for many Black girls in education expressions of distress or resistance are mis-perceived as defiance or aggression (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Blake et al., 2017).

This theme was reinforced during the creative reflection session. Poster contributions included statements such as "They call my expression of emotions a threat and aggressive," "They think the way I look, the reaction is already rude," and "They stereotype me because I am Black." These reflections extended beyond instances of interpersonal interactions between staff and students to include commentary on appearance and expression of cultural identity, "saying my hair is too much", "If you don't act 'girly' enough, you're just weird" and "Hair, communication, confidence" listed under 'Punishment' in poster contributions. These insights illustrate the ways in which Black girls' bodies and self-expression are subject to ongoing scrutiny based on assumptions related to race, gender and also heteronormativity, often resulting in disproportionate disciplinary responses or emotional silencing. With students sharing statements like "Not allowed to cry because we are seen as weak," and "Having to throw out our feelings," evidencing the emotional regulation and suppression often expected of them (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016; Joseph-Salisbury & Connelly, 2021).

2. Adultification and Disproportionate Discipline

A second theme centred on an expectation for Black girls to demonstrate maturity, composure, and restraint beyond their years (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017). This was described in relation to classroom behaviour, emotional expression, and physical presentation. Students reported being told to “stop being childish,” “be more mature,” and “act their age,” often in contrast to their white peers. This finding also points to an absence of centering playfulness, joy and creative self-expression in the educational experiences of Black girls. It suggests that inequities within systems and processes contribute to the premature erasure of childhood innocence and restrict opportunities for growth through exploration and play (Morris, 2016). The focus group and poster activities also highlighted inconsistencies in how school rules are applied. For example, one student noted, “Not allowed to do my hair how I want,” while another remarked, “White girls get away with more.” These experiences align with Morris’ (2016) assertion of the “criminalisation of Black girlhood,” a process often enacted through unequal treatment and disciplinary bias.

“Told to be more mature”

“Told to stop being childish”

“White girls get away with more.”



**"NOT
ALLOWED
TO DO MY
HAIR HOW I
WANT"**

“Told to act my age”

3. Wellbeing and Mental Health

Students spoke about the emotional strain of navigating school environments where their wellbeing was often overlooked. Several participants described feeling that their mental health was not taken seriously, with comments such as “We go through all these things, and they don’t notice” and “Teachers don’t really ask how we’re doing” reflecting a broader sense of invisibility and emotional erasure. This absence of relational care contributed to feelings of isolation, fatigue, and frustration.

Emotional suppression emerged as a repeated theme. Students reported feeling unable to show distress without judgement, with phrases like “not allowed to cry because we are seen as weak,” “having to throw out our feelings,” and “I felt like I had to bottle everything up” appearing across the focus group and creative sessions. These experiences suggest that students often felt pressure to attend to and manage their emotions quietly, without support, and without visible signs of vulnerability.

References to feeling “It’s like you’re meant to be strong all the time” also appeared in students’ reflections. These were not framed as isolated incidents, but as part of an ongoing emotional burden tied to their school experience. The expression of such sentiments appears to confirm that Black girls, as young as fourteen years old, are already negatively impacted and affected by the racialised ‘Strong Black Woman’ narrative seen across wider society, whereby emotional needs go unrecognised or unacknowledged (Watson & Hunter, 2015). These findings are also consistent with research highlighting the cumulative emotional toll that can result from prolonged exposure to institutional neglect and racialised expectations (Geronimus, 1992; Hope, Hoggard, & Thomas, 2023).

**"IT'S LIKE YOU'RE
MEANT TO BE STRONG
ALL THE TIME"**



4. Representation, Healing, and Belonging

While students highlighted the challenges of navigating school life, they also identified what was missing. Several participants expressed a need for culturally affirming spaces and greater diversity among staff. One poster noted the importance of “bringing in people we can relate to like Milk Honey Bees,” referencing a desire for visible role models who reflect their lived experiences and identities. Research shows that representation among staff can foster greater trust, safety, and student engagement (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020; Arday & Mirza, 2018). While Milk Honey Bees are not part of a school’s permanent staff, their mention raises the question as to whether representation from outside agencies could also foster similar outcomes.

The concept of healing was also raised during discussions, with students describing the importance of “It would be good to have someone who actually understands” and “Sometimes we just want someone to ask if we’re okay and actually mean it.” These conversations and contributions are important to highlight as they allow for restorative thinking. School does not have to remain a site of harm for Black girls; they could become a potential space for repair. However, this aspiration is conditional on the presence of meaningful, compassion centred, interpersonal relationships and a sustained commitment to embedding a cultural humility approach across the school eco-system. The expressed desire for care and connection supports literature that identifies authentic, as opposed to conditional, belonging as a key protective factor for Black girls’ wellbeing in educational environments (Hope et al., 2023; Crenshaw et al., 2015).

**"IT WOULD BE GOOD
TO HAVE SOMEONE
WHO ACTUALLY
UNDERSTANDS"**



Findings

PARENT FOCUS GROUP

1. The Practice of Humility

Within the focus group conversation parents demonstrated a nuanced understanding of Cultural Humility, positioning it as both a personal and institutional practice. It was widely agreed that humility begins with introspection, one parent reflected that “you start with your own first... respecting their boundaries, respecting how they feel or what they stand for”. For cultural humility to be an authentic and embodied practice, there must be a commitment to self-reflection of one’s own cultural identity, as a starting point. This reduces the likelihood of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion education and interventions becoming centred on ‘others’, a dynamic that can obscure the critical need for self-examination within educational institutions. Without this, EDI efforts risk reinforcing dominant norms rather than challenging them.

Parents were clear that cultural humility must be rooted in equity. One parent observed, “there needs to be some kind of fairness... the kind of resources that maybe the predominately white schools have are not available to the Black kids.” Their reflections made evident that families are not seeking superficial displays of inclusion but transformational culture change that addresses longstanding disparities.

Importantly, cultural humility was framed as an ongoing process. “We are always gonna be learning... from different people,” one parent said, highlighting the value of continuous learning and openness to being reshaped through dialogue. This emphasis on sustained reflection and relational respect echoes existing scholarship on cultural humility as a lifelong, iterative practice (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015; Brooks, 2021). Taken together, these insights suggest that parents are calling for an education system in which cultural humility is lived, not simply named, through shared responsibility, accountability, and transformation.

2.The Cost of Bias and Assumptions

Incidents of bias emerged as a recurring theme shaping experiences of harm and exclusion for both parents and their children. "They just saw us as young Black parents... didn't choose to respect our voices," one parent reflected after feeling ignored by educators regarding her child's educational needs, which resulted in recommendations not being acted on and an eventual referral to a pupil referral unit: "they didn't choose to respect our voices because before that he had already been assessed and they had given me recommendations and I had moved into a new school and they decided not to, to act on those recommendations." The resulting inaction led to the child being referred to a pupil referral unit, a trajectory that echoes wider research showing how Black children are disproportionately funnelled into exclusionary pathways due to institutional bias (Gillborn, 2008; Macpherson, 1999). For many parents, experiences of exclusion of their child felt directly related to racialised assumptions and for many this bias was compounded by a feeling of powerlessness "you cannot just challenge their decision". A comment that speaks to the power imbalances that can be embedded within school structures resulting in minoritised parents feeling silenced, disempowered or unable to challenge the authority of predominantly white leadership structures (Crozier & Davies, 2007; GHK & Ethnos, 2007; Pushor & Amendt, 2018).



"THEY JUST SAW US AS
YOUNG BLACK
PARENTS, DIDN'T
CHOOSE TO RESPECT
OUR VOICES,"

3. Power, Culture and Hierarchy

Throughout the focus group, many parents shared a sense of frustration, discomfort or futility when attempting to engage or challenge school authority, particularly when navigating hierarchies during attempts to escalate concerns. This unease was not only procedural, but also cultural. With participant responses suggesting that it may be rooted in structural dynamics where schools hold power, and families from minoritised communities, parents and students alike, feel an expectation to defer “They just force decisions on us... You didn’t consult nobody” (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Pushor & Amendt, 2018).

Cultural norms around deference and respect also shaped parental hesitancy. One participant reflected, “there is that kind of hierarchy... and I guess maybe some people come from different cultures... where... you respect the school... but there has to be that engagement.” For some, deference came as a result of unfamiliarity about their rights within the system or how to navigate it, “some people don’t know they can challenge things” and “coming from an African community... most of the parents would not know where to go or they wouldn’t know where to turn to.” Such responses speak to multiple cultural barriers and challenges, which include, silence or deference as a response to uncertainty of boundaries and safety to cross them, and also culturally informed expectations of who gets to speak and when (GHK & Ethnos, 2007; Vincent, 2017).

These parental reflections suggest that current school practices often reflect a cultural competence model rather than a cultural humility approach. Within this framework, education professionals may position themselves as cultural authorities rather than as co-learners in partnership with families. This positioning risks misinterpreting silence, uncertainty, or deference, particularly from Black parents, as disengagement or agreement. Such responses, however, may reflect institutional power imbalances and culturally shaped expectations around communication and authority. When not examined critically, this mindset reinforces systemic marginalisation shaped by racialised assumptions, cultural stereotyping, and unequal power relations (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Berryman, SooHoo, & Nevin, 2013).

**"THEY JUST FORCE DECISIONS
ON US, YOU DIDN'T
CONSULT NOBODY"**

Findings

EDUCATORS FOCUS GROUP

This focus group engaged a range of participants working across school communities, including classroom educators, safeguarding leads, SEND coordinators and governors. The majority of participants identified as Black or from other racially minoritised backgrounds. Although this demographic skew was not intentional, it speaks to the realities of who feels most compelled and often most burdened to engage with issues of equity in education. The insights shared reflect both lived experience and professional observation, offering a layered perspective on the systemic and relational barriers facing Black girls in school.

1. The Burden of Representation in the Absence of Reflection

A striking theme was the observation that self-reflection around identity often occurs primarily among minoritised educators. One participant noted, “I would say no,” when asked if white educators engage in such reflection, adding, “They just focus on the behaviour.” This sentiment was reinforced by a number of other participants, one who suggested that white educators rarely “identify their culture,” because “their culture is the system.” Another articulated this systemic dynamic, stating, “What we’re talking about is whiteness, and whiteness is the organising principle to how we understand the world.” These insights resonate with critical race theory, which holds that whiteness, as the dominant racial identity, is often normalised and unexamined in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Related to the perceived absence of self-reflection participants expressed their exhaustion and frustration at how this often manifests in minoritised educators bearing the responsibility for equity work. “If it wasn’t for me... things just maybe wouldn’t happen” and “It always feels like it has to be raised by non-white members of staff.” Such experiences reflect Ahmed’s (2012) findings on diversity work: minoritised facilitators often bear the dual responsibility of representing diversity and being tasked with addressing systemic inequities. This positioning places them at a complex intersection of power and marginalisation, requiring a navigation of resistance, defensiveness, and significant emotional labour, all while attempting to foster inclusive and transformative educational spaces. This emotional and structural burden has been shown to contribute to burnout among minoritised educators (Kohli, 2018).

2. Labelling and the Misrecognition of Black Girls

Across the focus group, educators expressed deep concern about the ways in which Black girls are routinely misrecognised and disproportionately punished in school settings. Their testimonies pointed to a troubling pattern of adultification, stereotyping, and the cumulative effects of racialised surveillance and discipline as described throughout this report. One participant described how a Black girl had been labelled “aggressive” by a white male teacher for simply asking why she had been told to stop talking. As the educator recalled, “She simply just said, ‘but I wasn’t talking. Why did you say that?’... she was deemed aggressive and he gave her the sort of one of the maximum sanctions that we have in school.” The educator then sought to intervene on behalf of the student “I didn’t outright say... I think your biases have gotten in the way and... that I don’t think that this deems it, but I did... say, I don’t think that this warrants the sanction that you’ve provided her.” The choice to avoid directly naming bias, while still challenging the outcome, reflects the careful navigation required of minoritised staff who seek to disrupt inequitable decisions without exposing themselves to professional risk.

This incident was not isolated. Other participants spoke of the frequency with which Black girls are disciplined for behaviour that would likely be perceived as assertive or neutral in white peers. One educator noted the speed with which students were branded with harmful identities: “By the time they’re almost facing that exclusion or permanent exclusion, they’ve been labelled everything under the sun - promiscuous, etc.” The broader implication, as one participant pointed out, is that these labels are not just disciplinary, they become internalised by students and used to justify their removal from the school community. “There’s a lot of labelling,” they explained, “and it’s the language as well that we have to tackle because sometimes by the time they’re almost facing that exclusion... it’s already been decided who they are.” The educator’s use of “it’s already been decided” suggests a system in which identity is imposed based on race, gender, class, immigration status etc.

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These reflections resonate deeply with the work of Morris (2016), who describes the adultification of Black girls. Similarly, Crenshaw et al. (2015) document how Black girls are often “pushed out” of school not because of inherently disruptive behaviour, but because of the ways their presence and voice are framed as problematic within educational spaces. As evidenced in the focus group, participants recognised that this misrecognition operates not only through institutional policy, but also through classroom dynamics such as how tone is interpreted, how questions are received, and whose emotions are deemed valid and worthy of compassion. “It’s systemic, it’s hard. Once it’s built into the policies and the way that people believe and those at the top... it can become really difficult to challenge.”

Ultimately, this theme revealed a profound tension: while some educators found ways to advocate for Black girls through acts of professional courage, they were also aware that these acts occur within systems created and maintained by racial and gendered power. As one educator put it, “We’re still in a system where it’s easier to remove the child than to change the structure.”

3.Risk and Resistance in Challenging Power

Across the focus group, educators described the high personal and professional costs of speaking out against inequity within schools. For many, the act of challenging unjust decisions or systemic practices was emotionally taxing and, at times, career-limiting. One educator admitted plainly that “if you’re on your own... you can easily be targeted,” highlighting the isolating and exhausting nature of advocacy work when not supported by collective action and met with structural and interpersonal resistance. This sense of isolation and exposure to retaliation was not abstract; it was rooted in participants’ experiences of being marginalised or dismissed within their professional settings. As one participant put it, “people are just too scared because they want to protect their jobs.”

Despite this, some found strategic ways to challenge decisions by appealing to institutional values. One educator described how they used a school leader’s stated commitment to critical thinking as a tool for accountability, asking, “You value [critical thinking] - how does that lead us to this decision?” By leveraging language already accepted within the institution, they reframed their resistance not as opposition but as alignment with the school’s professed values. An approach that works to disrupt the idea that equity and institutional loyalty are incompatible.

What emerges across these narratives is a complex picture of critical resistance: educators operating within systems that often refuse to acknowledge their complicity in harm yet continuing to advocate for the young people most affected by that harm. These acts, though sometimes small or constrained, represent what Picower (2012) describes as “critical advocacy”, a form of principled persistence in the face of institutional inertia. While the risks are real and the emotional costs high, these educators demonstrate the courage required to challenge power not just in theory, but in practice, in classrooms, corridors, and conversations every day.

4. Superficial Commitments and the Need for Strategic Change

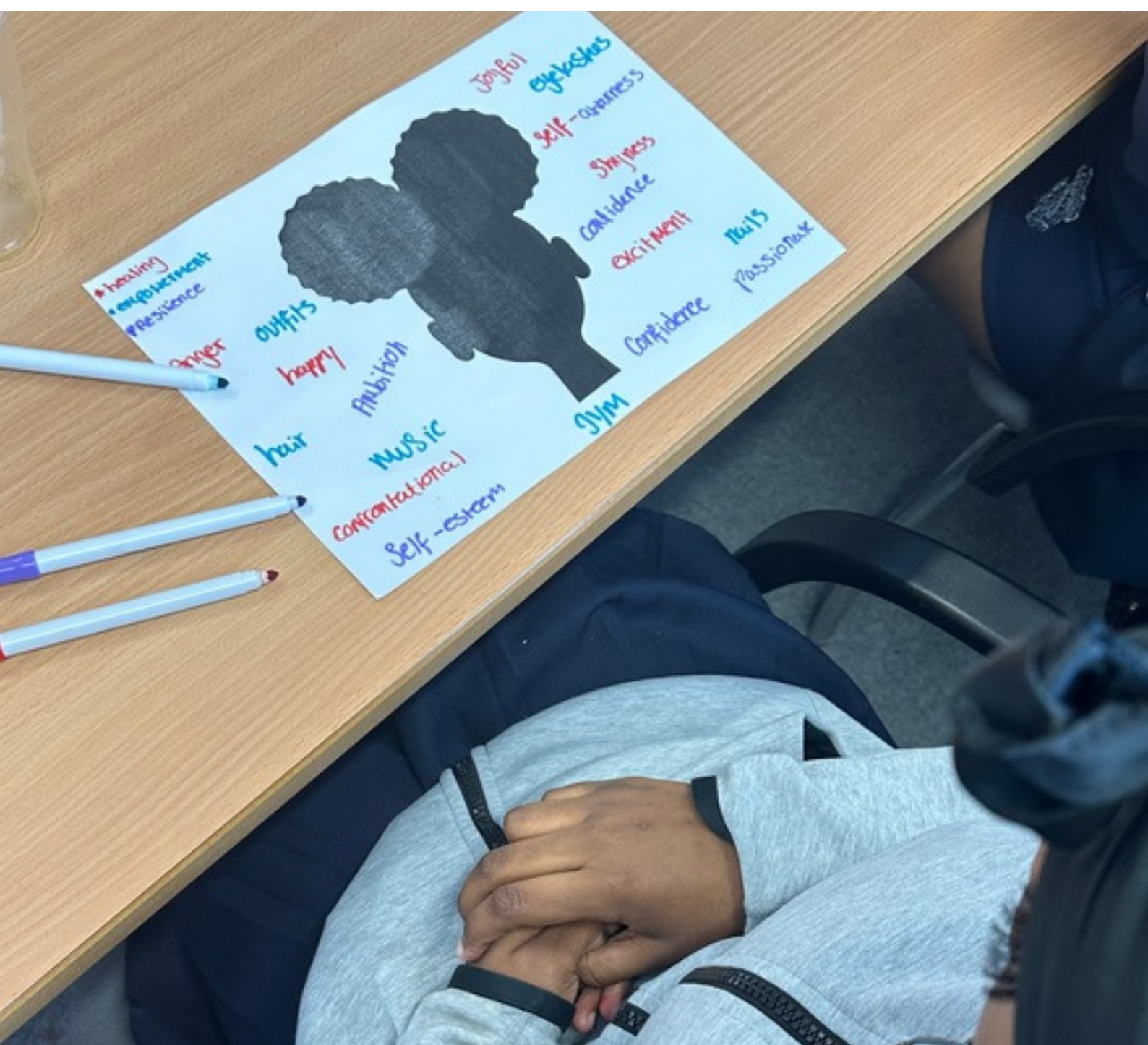
Educators in the focus group voiced deep frustration at the tokenistic ways in which schools’ approach cultural humility and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) more broadly. Rather than embedding it authentically and sustainably, participants expressed that too many institutions treat it as a one-off gesture. As one participant remarked pointedly, “It’s in an inset day for maybe an hour, maybe once a year.” Another echoed this sentiment, describing how cultural humility is often “slapped on... just a quick, oh, just a reminder: don’t be racist,” with no strategic follow-through or accountability.

These accounts resonate with critiques of performative equity work in education, where EDI initiatives are treated as checklist exercises rather than transformative commitments (Ahmed, 2012; Bhopal & Pitkin, 2020). Participants repeatedly emphasised the absence of structural planning, with one educator urging that such work be “part of your school development plan.” The implication here is not simply about increasing visibility of EDI, but about institutionalising it, making it a consistent institutional priority that is evident in policy, practice, leadership, and curriculum.

The conversation also pointed to the dangers of surface-level engagement. Without consistent practice, schools risk creating environments where cultural humility is misunderstood or dismissed entirely. One participant noted, “Being well intentioned is one thing, but that only goes so far,” pointing to the disconnect between educators’ perceived good intentions and the real-world implications and outcomes for Black girls. In the absence of a strategic, collective and sustained effort, the work is too often falling to individual educators, largely from minoritised backgrounds.

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Ultimately, participants were unanimous in their call not just for more training, but for systemic changes. Cultural humility, they argued, must become a core part of how schools create cultures of genuine inclusion, and belonging. Rather than an optional add-on, it should be accepted by all within the school ecosystem as a foundational principle which shapes every aspect of school life. Without this shift, participants expressed their fears that efforts will remain fragmented, under-resourced, and unsustainable.



Discussion

Our findings underscore that cultural humility is not merely a theoretical ideal but a practical necessity for creating equitable educational experiences, particularly for Black girls. The mixed-methods study, encompassing the voices of girls, educators, and parents in Lambeth and Southwark, consistently revealed a profound value placed on educators who engage in honest self-reflection and cultural responsiveness. However, the data also expose a critical tension: a significant gap between the intent of educators and the impact experienced by students, alongside stark discrepancies in perception between teachers, students, and parents. This gap highlights that while cultural competence may focus on acquiring knowledge about other cultures, cultural humility is fundamentally about gaining perspective a continuous, iterative process of self-evaluation, redressing power imbalances, and fostering mutually beneficial partnerships (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998; Foronda et al., 2016; Tripathi, 2021).

The observed inconsistencies where teachers report high levels of cultural humility in their practice, yet students report infrequent experiences of active engagement or structural affirmation are not necessarily indicative of insincerity. Instead, they point to a pervasive "visibility gap" and a lack of structured opportunities for genuine, non-blaming, and non-judgmental dialogue. As the parent focus group revealed, families are often compelled to engage with schools only in moments of crisis, a reactive dynamic that perpetuates mistrust and disempowerment (Crozier & Davies, 2007; GHK & Ethnos, 2007; Pushor & Amendt, 2018). This study's findings suggest a collective willingness for change among all stakeholders, yet a clear absence of the necessary time, space, and tools to translate this aspiration into authentic, embedded practice.

This tension between intent and reality presents a profound opportunity for transformative growth. It calls for a bold reimagining of educational environments, moving beyond superficial "tick-box" diversity initiatives towards the "scaling deep work" required for long-lasting, sustainable change (Tate & Page, 2018). True cultural humility in education demands a shift from a focus on individual sensitivity to systemic consciousness, enabling educators to critically examine how institutional norms, such as behavioural expectations, disciplinary practices, and curriculum content, can inadvertently marginalise or erase minoritised students (Habashy & Cruz, 2021).

Discussion

The pervasive issue of adultification bias, where Black girls are perceived as older and less innocent than their peers, leading to disproportionate discipline and emotional suppression, is a stark manifestation of this systemic failure (Epstein et al., 2017; Ikomi, 2023; Wordlaw, 2025). The silence around reported discrimination in student surveys, coupled with teachers' limited awareness of their role in perpetuating harm, underscores a critical need for psychologically safe spaces where experiences can be disclosed without fear of retaliation or disbelief (Pennant, 2024; Piotrowska, 2025; Stoll et al., 2022). This necessitates a commitment to relational accountability at all levels, from individual interactions to institutional policies, ensuring that racism itself is recognised as a safeguarding issue (Wordlaw, 2025).

Furthermore, the call for shared learning and mutual growth, where students' cultural knowledge and lived experiences are valued as invaluable resources, aligns with critical pedagogical approaches that democratise the classroom (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1992). This requires an "egoless stance" from teachers, a willingness to learn alongside their students, and a commitment to co-creating curricula that authentically reflect diverse heritages (Habashy & Cruz, 2021; Shakir, 2024; Ramdeo & Nicholls, 2025). The emphasis on representation and healing spaces by students highlights the urgent need for culturally affirming environments that foster genuine belonging and support mental wellbeing (Aldinhe, 2025; Black Equity Organisation, 2024; Hope et al., 2023).

Ultimately, advancing cultural humility in education is a journey of both personal and institutional transformation. It calls for educators to engage in bold self-reflection and shared learning, positioning themselves as partners in students' growth rather than top-down authority figures. It also calls for educational systems to confront uncomfortable truths about bias and actively rewrite policies through a lens of equity and justice. The Black girls at the heart of this study, along with their teachers and parents, have shown us that relational accountability, humility, and courage can light the path toward more inclusive and empowering learning environments. Embracing cultural humility is fundamentally about recognising each child's full humanity and potential, moving beyond performative gestures to embedded, systemic change that prioritises wellbeing and genuine equity.

Conclusion

This research has illuminated the critical role of cultural humility in fostering equitable educational experiences for Black girls in UK schools. Our findings reveal a persistent and concerning gap between the expressed intentions of educators and the lived realities and perceptions of students and parents. This disparity underscores that cultural humility is not a static competence to be acquired, but a dynamic, ongoing process of deep self-reflection, active listening, and a willingness to redress power imbalances.

The data unequivocally call for the creation of psychologically safe spaces where all stakeholders; students, teachers, and parents can engage in open dialogue, free from blame or judgment, to foster mutual understanding and shared learning. Crucially, because Black girls represent one of the most marginalised and overlooked groups within the education system, the insights gleaned from their experiences offer a powerful lens through which to understand and dismantle systemic inequities for all marginalised learners.

The study highlights that current educational systems often lack the necessary time, space, and tools to support educators in translating their aspirations for cultural responsiveness into consistent, impactful practice. This leads to a visibility gap where genuine efforts remain unseen by those they are intended to benefit, perpetuating feelings of invisibility and marginalisation among Black girls. Moving forward, it is imperative that schools embrace a bold, ambitious, and urgent approach to cultural humility, one that transcends superficial initiatives and commits to the profound, systemic work required for long-lasting, sustainable change. This includes confronting adultification bias, decolonising curricula, challenging and embedding relational accountability at every level of the educational ecosystem. Only through such a holistic and courageous commitment can we truly honour the humanity and potential of every child, ensuring that all students are respected, understood, and empowered to thrive.

Recommendations

The findings of this study present a clear path forward for creating truly equitable and inclusive educational environments for Black girls in the UK. These recommendations are designed to be bold and ambitious, yet realistic, with a strong emphasis on mental health and wellbeing, recognising that systemic change must be deeply embedded, not merely superficial.

1

Expand & Deepen Context-Specific Research Across UK Cities

Rationale: Our London-centric findings offer powerful insights into the lived realities of Black girls, yet they cannot capture the full range of regional experiences. Black girlhood in Britain is shaped by local histories, community dynamics and variations in school cultures. If we rely solely on US frameworks or on data drawn only from London, we risk overlooking the vital differences and visceral nuances that characterise Black girls' lives in Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow or Cardiff, for example. Moreover, mental-health impacts linked to discrimination, exclusion and adultification bias may manifest differently outside London, where resources, demographics and local policies vary. Context-specific research will ensure that interventions, policy recommendations and teacher-training programmes are informed by the diverse realities of Black girlhood across the UK (Morris-Jarra & Iyere, 2025).

Action: Secure follow-up funding to replicate this mixed-methods approach, including creative formats such as photo-journals and digital storytelling, in diverse urban and regional contexts. Ensure each site includes focus groups with mixed-heritage pupils, students with SEND and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Recommendations

2

Co-Create a Cultural Humility Toolkit and Framework

Rationale: Our data reveal a persistent gap between educators' intent and students' experience of cultural humility. Teacher's report wanting to act inclusively, yet students often feel unseen, unheard or misunderstood. At the same time, there is no consistent, structured time or resource base for staff to learn, practise and reflect on culturally humble approaches. Traditional top-down training too often fails to address power imbalances or to integrate mental health-informed design, leaving staff without practical strategies to support Black and mixed-heritage girls through microaggressions, adultification bias or epistemic exclusion. A co-designed toolkit will ensure that resources are relevant, grounded in lived experience and incorporate trauma-informed principles to protect both staff and students.

Action: Bring together mental health practitioners, educators, parents and young people to develop a modular toolkit. Include guided exercises on recognising and naming microaggressions, case studies on adultification bias, prompts for counter-storytelling to counter epistemic exclusion and activities to enable educator reflexivity. Add decision-tree tools for crisis moments and journey-maps to guide teachers through long-term relationship-building built on the foundations of cultural humility. Ensure dedicated sections on facilitating focus groups for mixed-heritage students and pupils with intersecting identities.

Recommendations

3 Mandate Protected Time for Reflective Practice and Supervision

Rationale: Teachers in our survey expressed a strong desire for structured time to reflect yet cited the absence of such time as a critical barrier. Cultural humility is fundamentally a process of ongoing self-evaluation and critical reflection. Without dedicated spaces for supervision, peer feedback and self-care, educators cannot sustain the emotional labour required to support students who face racialised and gendered harm. This lack of support also undermines teacher wellbeing, increasing burnout and reducing the quality of student-staff relationships. Models from healthcare CPD demonstrate that reflection, guided journaling and regular supervision improve both practitioner resilience and service outcomes (Cox & Simpson, 2020).

Action: Advocate with policymakers to require that all schools allocate protected time within Continuing Professional Development schedules for reflective practice focused on cultural humility. This should include facilitated peer-supervision groups, structured mental-health check-ins and guided journaling prompts that encourage educators to process experiences, share insights and set personal learning goals.

Recommendations

4 Embed Cultural Humility as a Core Philosophy in Training and Policy Standards

Rationale: The stark discrepancy between teacher self-assessment and student-reported experiences shows that cultural humility cannot remain a peripheral or performative exercise. Current unconscious-bias sessions often function as tick-box activities rather than catalysts for systemic change. To be effective and sustainable, cultural humility must be woven into the fabric of the school eco-system. This requires accountability at every level, from Initial Teacher Training through to Ofsted inspections, and must link explicitly to mental health and wellbeing outcomes, ensuring that equity is neither optional nor superficial (Tate & Page, 2018).

Action: Work with government bodies and training providers to integrate comprehensive cultural humility and trauma-informed care modules into Initial Teacher Training and National Professional Qualifications, require Ofsted and other inspectors to assess authentic use of cultural humility toolkits and to include student and parent feedback as key performance indicators tied to wellbeing, and publish a Code of Practice for Everyday Interactions co-drafted by students, parents and staff that embeds routines such as contextual reflections, relational check-ins and restorative-language prompts into every lesson and communal space. Schools should also develop targeted engagement strategies for white educators, for example dedicated briefing sessions, peer-mentoring circles and reflective workshops, to ensure full-staff buy-in and to surface any unique barriers they face in practising cultural humility (Mission 44, 2024).

Recommendations

5 Prioritise Teacher and Parent Wellbeing Through Tailored Reflective Spaces

Rationale: Parents in our study described feeling ignored or undermined when raising concerns, while teachers reported their own experiences of marginalisation and bias, affecting their capacity to support students (Parent Focus Group Findings; Teacher Survey Findings). Without dedicated, safe forums, both groups lack the chance to process emotional labour, build trust or learn from one another. Reflective practice is as important for parents as it is for educators, helping them navigate power dynamics and advocate effectively for children's needs.

Action: Establish separate, ongoing reflection circles for teachers and for parents, each facilitated by a mental-health practitioner, where participants can share experiences, learn strategies for navigating school systems and receive peer support. Then convene joint forums termly, once both groups have built trust in their own circles, to foster mutual understanding and co-create solutions. Include reflective-parenting modules in the parent circles so that caregivers develop skills in self-reflection, advocacy and trauma-informed support.

Recommendations

6 Build Safe, Youth-Led Reporting and Reflection Mechanisms

Rationale: Although 42 per cent of students reported identity-based discrimination by teachers and 35 per cent by peers, none provided detailed narratives in open text responses. This stark silence signals a profound lack of psychological safety and trust in reporting processes. When Black girls do not feel able to speak about harm, schools lose the opportunity to intervene and to support their mental health. Safe, transparent mechanisms must centre student voice, confidentiality and clear accountability, moving beyond informal channels that too often exclude the very young people they aim to protect (Pennant, 2024).

Action: Implement an anonymous online reporting platform with a published process for how reports will be handled, investigated and tracked, ensuring mental-health support at each stage; establish youth advisory panels and peer-mentor schemes facilitated by mental-health-trained staff so that students can share experiences, test cultural-humility practices and inform policy to ensure that the “swing group” of uncertain students sees tangible actions emerge from their feedback, thereby building trust and visibility.

Recommendations

7 Embed Structural Accountability and Long-Term Evaluation

Rationale: Parents in our focus groups called repeatedly for “structural not tokenistic change” to dismantle adultification bias and systemic racism in schools. Piecemeal initiatives or one-off events will not shift entrenched power dynamics or improve mental health and wellbeing for Black and mixed-heritage girls. Lasting change requires formal governance structures, transparent action plans and continuous monitoring to ensure that policies, curricula and disciplinary practices reflect equity and inclusion (Ikomi, 2023).

Action: Constitute a prototype Community Advisory Group designed by the authors. This group, comprising senior leaders, staff, parents, students and community advocates, will meet termly to undertake rapid equity audits of school policies, curricula and disciplinary data, conduct focus-group hearings to surface lived experience, and co-design both school-level and borough-wide recommendations complete with named owners and clear deadlines. It will publish quarterly “pulse” updates tracking progress and host an annual forum to review cross-cutting findings, secure fresh commitments and prevent duplication across all race-equity initiatives in the borough.

To ensure these recommendations translate into tangible, sustainable change, a strategic, integrated approach is essential:

- **Pilot & Iterate:** Implement the co-created toolkit and structural measures in a small number of local schools, rigorously tracking impact on equity and mental health using both quantitative (e.g., student and teacher survey metrics, exclusion rates) and qualitative (e.g., focus group feedback, case studies) data.
- **Facilitate Communities of Practice:** Establish cross-school communities of practice where educators, parents, and students can share outcomes, discuss barriers, and collectively refine approaches to cultural humility and racial justice.
- **Scale Through Policy Influence:** Leverage robust pilot data and ongoing research to advocate for the embedding of cultural humility and mental health criteria into national educational frameworks, including Ofsted inspections, Initial Teacher Training (ITT), and National Professional Qualifications (NPQs), ensuring a systemic shift towards truly inclusive and equitable education for all.

Closing Remarks

The journey towards truly equitable and inclusive education is a continuous one, demanding unwavering commitment and courageous action from all stakeholders. This research, by centering the invaluable experiences of Black and Black-Mixed-Race girls, has not only illuminated specific challenges but also provided a powerful blueprint for systemic transformation. The principles of cultural humility; lifelong learning, self-reflection, redressing power imbalances, and fostering authentic relationships are not confined to one group. Indeed, the insights gained from addressing the unique marginalisation faced by Black girls offer profound lessons and actionable pathways that can be adapted and applied to create more just and compassionate educational systems for all marginalised learners. By embracing these findings and committing to the deep, sustained work required, we can collectively move closer to a future where every child is seen, heard, valued, and empowered to thrive.

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This report is not an endpoint. It is a provocation, an invitation to reflect, respond, and act.

Joel Dunn & Jade Ecobichon-Gray
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FROM INTENTION TO IMPACT

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