



**Institute for  
Educational &  
Social Equity**

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Capacity Development  
Research  
Institutional Support



# **A REPORT ON Factors responsible for and/ or contribute to BAME school leaders exiting the profession or accepting a junior role**

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction to this Report

This qualitative study is a specific piece of work jointly commissioned by Institute for Educational & Social Equity and Fig Tree International. It was commissioned to identify and understand, inter alia:

- Factors responsible for and/or contribute to BAME<sup>1</sup> school leaders exiting the profession or accepting a junior role.

It drew on a wide range of (i) experiences and (ii) perspectives from recent and/or current BAME senior leaders, all of whom have either exited the profession and/or accepted a more junior role during the period January 2020 - January 2022.

The recommendations in this study are based on two things:

- A review, analysis, and evaluation of interview data
- Curated suggestions received from participants during interviews

The research was undertaken by Professor Paul Miller (Principal Investigator), and Roxanne Lashley (Research Assistant).

### The Participants

16 recent and/or current school leaders participated in one- to- one interviews, each lasting between 50 – 60 minutes. There were fifteen females and one male. 12 identified as 'Black' and four as 'Mixed heritage'. Eight participants were connected to secondary schools, and eight to primary schools. Two were connected to Special schools, and six were connected to Multi-Academy Trusts. All participants, prior to accepting a lower role, or prior to exiting the teaching profession had an appointment as a Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher or Assistant Headteacher, except for participant 16 who was a SENCO. 12 had exited the teaching profession altogether, two had found new roles, and two found accepted more junior roles (See Table 1).

<sup>1</sup> We acknowledge the identity challenges associated with this term, whilst recognising alternatives such as Black and Global Majority, and UK ME.



Table 1: Participant Profile

Participant	School Type	Years in education, and in last leadership role	Current / last leadership role held	Still in the profession Y / N	Gender	Ethnicity
1	Secondary (Academy)	17.5 and 1	Out of work	N	F	Black
2	Secondary	20 and 6.5	Delivering NPQs	N	F	Mixed heritage
3	Secondary (Academy)	29 and 5	Coaching	N	F	Black
4	Secondary (Academy)	24 and 4	Out of work	N	F	Black
5	Primary (Academy)	18 and 2	School Improvement Officer	N	F	Mixed heritage
6	Secondary (Academy)	24 and 3	Education Consultant	N	F	Black
7	Primary	13 and 4	Out of work	N	F	Black
8	Primary	20 and 7	Education Consultant	N	F	Black
9	Secondary (Special)	9 and 2.5	Out of work	N	F	Mixed heritage
10	Primary (Academy)	26 and 2.5	New Headship	Y	F	Black
11	Secondary	24 and 2	New Headship	Y	M	Black
12	Primary	15 and 3	Educational charity	N	F	Mixed heritage
13	Secondary (Special)	18 and 3.5	Out of work	N	F	Black
14	Primary	15 and 2	Director of T&L	Y	F	Black
15	Primary	21 and 5	Tutoring Business	N	F	Black
16	Primary	21 and 5	Year 6 teacher	Y	F	Black

**Notes:** (1) Black: Black African, Black Caribbean, Black British (2) Mixed heritage: Mixed – Black/ white



## Summary of Findings

Key findings of this study are:

- Six factors: Quality of life, Conflict, Racism, Clash of values, Disillusionment, Bullying and Toxic Culture, are believed to contribute to decisions by BAME school leaders to leave the profession and/or to accept a junior role
- Racism, although a factor in accepting a junior role and in decisions by BAME school leaders to exit the profession, was not believed to be the most influential factor
- Quality of life was the number one factor which is consistent with increased work intensification among school leaders generally, and research evidence that BAME leaders tend to end up more frequently in 'challenging schools' leading to additional workload demands
- Conflict with other senior leaders (usually white, although not exclusively) and senior staff (usually white) was the second most crucial factor in decisions to exit the profession or to accept a more junior role
- Lack of support (absence of guidance and assistance) and inadequate support (insufficient or sparse guidance and assistance) from other senior leaders (usually white, although not exclusively) created a disabling environment for BAME school leaders
- Bullying (from peers and supervisors) and toxic school cultures also contributed to decisions to exit the profession or to accept a more junior role
- Overall, the experiences reported by BAME school leaders in this study suggest an active process of liabilitisation (led mostly but not exclusively by white leaders) which ends with their removal from their substantive post.

## Summary of Key Recommendations

The following are among the recommendations of the study:

### Tracking experience and exit

- The Department for Education and/or the National College for Teaching and Leadership and/or Ambition Institute commissions and funds a longitudinal study lasting a minimum of 5 years to track and understanding the experiences of serving BAME school leaders on an annual basis – the findings from which could inform policy and practice in 'real time' on an ongoing basis
- The Department for Education and Trust leaders should systematically collect and publish data on the exit of senior staff, the reasons behind their departure, types of schools, ethnicity and gender

### Training & Development

- Providers of DfE initiated training such as NPQs should consider the integration of 'real-life experiences' (e.g.: quality of life issues, conflict management, etc) into leadership preparation and development programmes such as NPQSL, NPQH and NPQEL
- Governors, Chief Executives and Executive Officers should introduce structured coaching or mentoring programmes for newly BAME headteachers during their first year of Headship



as standard practice. Experienced BAME headteachers could be invited to support any such initiative

- Training in 'Allyship', 'Unconscious Bias', 'Conflict Management', 'Anti-racism and Leadership' 'Leading Diverse Teams and Workforce' should be provided for Chief Executives, Executive Headteachers, Headteachers and other school leaders on an ongoing basis as part of an agreed programme. This could be sponsored by the Department for Education and/or the National College for Teaching and Leadership and/or Ambition Institute, and/or Confederation of School Trusts and/or the Multi-Academy Trust Association

## Integration

- The Multi-Academy Trust Association and leaders of Multi-Academy Trusts should work together to examine, better understand and address concerns raised by school leaders in this study regarding corporatisation and perceived disalignment of educational values in academy management and leadership
- The experiences of BAME female school leaders are sought and captured in developmental and support schemes (e.g.: mentoring, coaching and training & development programmes) delivered by training programmes and/or the Department for Education since they appear more at risk



## Chapter 1: Background & Contextualisation

There are circa 453,000 teachers in England of which circa 18,400 are from BAME heritage. Of the approximate number of teachers in England, there are 24,281 headteachers of whom circa 397 are of BAME heritage. There are also approximately 950 teachers of BAME heritage in the category “Assistant” or “Deputy”, although the precise numbers per category are unclear. Put differently, of the circa 18,400 teachers of BAME heritage in England, 950 of whom are “Assistant” or “Deputy” and 397 – an approximate total of 1,347 school leaders of BAME heritage in England (DfE, 2022a; Tereshchenko et al, 2020; Miller, 2020).

In terms of the population of students in primary and secondary schools there are, circa: 33.9% or circa 1,598,307 of primary school pupils are of BAME heritage; 32.3% or 1,101,196 of secondary school pupils are of BAME heritage, and 30.2% or circa 245,104 of pupils at special schools are of BAME heritage. Pupils from South-Asian backgrounds are the largest minority ethnic group in state-funded nursery (17.6%), primary (11.3%), secondary (11.6%) (DfE, 2022b).

When compared, we see that for every 1 teacher of BAME heritage, there are 160 students of BAME heritage (or 2,944,607 students/ 18,400 staff = 160). Furthermore, for every 1 headteacher of BAME heritage, there are 7417 students of BAME heritage (or 2,944,607 students/ 397 Headteachers = 7417) (Miller, 2022). When senior leaders of BAME heritage (headteachers, Assistant headteachers and Deputy headteachers) [1,347] is compared with the total students of BAME heritage, the ratio is 2,186, or for every 1 school leader of BAME heritage there are 2,186 students of BAME heritage (ibid).

Given the relatively low numbers of senior leaders of BAME heritage in schools in England and given the increasing anecdotal evidence of BAME school leaders exiting the profession, and in some cases giving up leadership for more junior roles, the Institute for Educational & Social Equity (IESE) and Fig Tree International jointly commissioned a study to ‘identify and examine factors responsible for and/or contribute to BAME school leaders exiting the profession or accepting a junior role’.

The findings from this study are intended to contribute to broader understanding of (i) inclusivity and school leadership (ii) the nature of the experience of BAME school leaders in England, (iii) systems and interventions needed to safeguard and effectively support BAME school leaders.



## Chapter 2: Methodology

### 2.1 Design and Approach

This study was collaborative in nature, involving a Black female school leader (a researching professional) and a senior academic (professional researcher). Both brought different insights to the interview questions, field engagement, and data analysis. Data gathering was done simultaneously with both members of the research team undertaking separate interview using the main question and some suggested sub-questions. Fieldwork lasted for four months between May – August 2022.

### 2.2 Participants

16 recent and/or current school leaders participated in one- to- one interviews, each lasting between 50 – 60 minutes. There were 15 females and one male. 12 identified as 'Black' and four as 'Mixed heritage'. Eight participants were connected to secondary schools, and nine to primary schools. Two were connected to Special schools, and six were connected to Multi-Academy Trusts. All participants, prior to accepting a lower role, or prior to exiting the teaching profession had an appointment as a Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher or Assistant Headteacher, except for participant 16 who was a SENCO. 12 had exited the teaching profession altogether, two had found new roles, and two found accepted more junior roles.

### 2.3 Data Analysis

Data from the 'interviews were analysed using 'Thematic Analysis'. This was iterative in nature and involved the research team scrutinising and exploring the data. Participants were also provided an opportunity to review the draft report in order to 'sense check' and as a means of 'respondent validation'. In the main, data analysis involved:

- Identifying key themes and findings
- Exploring the themes – common views, divergent views, participants' views by position in the organisation
- 'Reality- checking' findings between the research team and with participants
- Triangulation – looking at experiences described and/or factors identified across ethnicity, school type, gender and position held.



## Chapter 3: Findings from the Interviews

Sixteen one-to-one interviews were conducted. The primary question was ‘What factors are responsible for and/ or contribute to BAME school leaders exiting the profession or accepting a junior role?’ Six themes were identified (See Table 2).

Table 2: Factors & frequency count

Factors	Quality of life	Conflict	Racism	Organisational processes	Disillusionment	Bullying & Toxic Culture
<b>Frequency</b>	9	7	6	4	4	3

These are presented in turn below.

### 3.1 Quality of Life

The major theme was Quality of life with the sub-themes: workload, family life, finances, and self-care.

#### (i) Workload

Workload was mentioned by most participants. However, each participant had a different concern regarding workload. For example, Participant 2 indicated that she was given too many responsibilities and shared:

*[I]t got to the point where actually there was too much work. I had way too many responsibilities. And when I would tell people what I was responsible for, it was like, it was literally three people’s jobs. I was safeguarding lead, I was doing the timetabling, curriculum and assessment, line managing English Faculty, plus I had year group responsibilities. I was just like this stupid.*

Participant 8 was also concerned about being overwhelmed and burnt out:

*I didn’t want that, I didn’t want to get burnt out. I didn’t want that for myself, which sounds a bit morbid now that I say it. But I’d read a lot of research over time about headteachers dying two years after retiring. And I just decided, when I turned 40, that’s not happening to me. I don’t really want to be doing this job till I’m 65. And then I’m dead.*

Participant 9 expressed concerns about the restrictions that increased workload would place on her ability to work creatively. She provided:

*[T]he workload, it was just too much. I don’t think that’s why I left teaching at the time. But now I’m thinking back I know that I could never go back to that. I don’t think now. But I think the workload restricts creativity, and I didn’t like that at all.*



In addition to the workload being expansive, Participant 7 distinguished between an expansive workload and a workload that does not make best use of their skills. She provided,

*You're not really given the workload that you're supposed to be doing, so your skill set is not being used.*

## **(ii) Family Life**

Some participants expressed concerns about the amount of responsibility they had at work, and given the time spent commuting to and from work, these were taking away time to be spent with family. Participant 12 shared:

*It sparked memories of that relationship that I had with my executive head. I decided that actually, I didn't want to work for her anymore, and that my family was more important. We were not far away from the school, but I had what could be a 45minutes to an hour's commute, depending on traffic, half an hour if there was no traffic. I didn't want to put my son in childcare from 07:30am till 6:00pm till six o'clock at 12 months old. So I handed in my resignation.... I didn't want to go back and work for somebody like that...*

Participant 15 shared that her primary aged child had to wait for them at her school in order to reduce potential safety risks – as she was teaching after school and as a result she could not have gone home. She explained however that her decision for her child to wait on her at her school was not supported by her headteacher. She shared:

*So the plan was after school, my daughter would meet me at my school. For summer she could go home straight, but this was in the winter. I was told that she could not sit in the foyer to meet me. And it got to a point where in winter, she would have to be outside, in the school yard waiting for me. This is in the dark. And that impacted me emotionally and mentally.*

## **(iii) Self-Care**

Self-care was also mentioned by some participants, with Participant 12 sharing:

*My Executive Head and I had a difficult relationship. And although I was on maternity leave for 12 months, which gave me a lot of time to reflect, my stance was still that I would go back. But I had a conversation with her (Executive Head) whilst I was on maternity leave, and I requested to have a three-month extension to my leave - unpaid. This was seen as out of the ordinary, they'd never heard of it before, they needed to go to the governing body and talk to HR, and all of that.... In the end I left as my health matters.*



## 3.2 Conflict

Conflict appeared to be a recurring theme with majority of participants describing their relationship with supervisors (e.g.: Headteachers, Executive Headteachers, Chief Executives) as 'stormy' or 'fractious', leading some to conclude "I don't have to work for someone that I don't respect". Fourteen of 16 participants suggested that their race/ethnicity was an underlying factor in the conflicts with supervisors, although in two cases such conflicts were with an Asian and a Black leader. Although conflict with supervisors was more extensive, conflict with peers was also a concern.

### (i) Conflict with Peers

Participant 13 illustrated:

*And things like that will have been going on over the years to the point where last summer, a member of staff made a complaint about me.*

Continuing, she also alluded to potential collusion within the grievance process:

*And I didn't know behind my back, the head office, the HR team, the CEO had been meeting with her [the complainant] and agreed to move her to a different division. It was after that I found out that she had put in a formal grievance against me.*

### (ii) Conflict with Supervisors

Conflict with supervisors (e.g.: Headteachers, Executive Headteacher, Chief Executives), was mentioned by several participants. For example, Participant 1 explained:

*I was offered an SLT position within a few months of being there by the head, but that head was pushed out by the new executive head, who incidentally was an Asian woman. She took an instant dislike to me. She used three months' probation period to get rid of me on silly petty little things.... I got a small pay-out and I just left.*

Participant 12 described the relationship with her Executive Head as 'fractious' and stormy' and identified her race/ ethnicity as a contributing factor in the conflicts. They reflected:

*I think that part of my fractious relationship with my Executive Head was associated with race. There was never anything overt that I can put my finger on. Since I left, I've reflected a lot on what went wrong in our relationship. And obviously, there's differences between head teachers, to head teachers. And one was me, and one was one of my best friend – a white female. We're very alike in how we conduct ourselves. We both speak our mind quite freely, we are similar in age and both females. And the relationship was definitely different between her and my Executive Head.... And she did not experience the same kind of undermining from the Executive Head, particularly publicly, that I experienced.*



Participant 14 described 'strong arm' tactics used by her Trust's Chief Executive in arranging a return-to-work meeting following a period of sick leave. They recounted:

*They insisted that they had no other time, it had to be now. And they met with me the first morning at nine o'clock that was back in from being off for a month with COVID. Then they started talking about how my Covid plan wasn't good enough that it hadn't been implemented swiftly enough. They outlined a lot of problems, and they said all the other schools in the trust were doing so much better than me. And I was just like, well, I don't know what's wrong.... but my plan was head and shoulders above anybody else's. But all they did was stare at me. These were part of a pattern of niggling problems which quickly became an active pattern of trying to make a liability out of me.*

Participant 14 also disclosed that not only was her relationship with the Chief Executive fraught, but this was also the case with the deputy CEO, who was also Chair of Governors for her school. For example, she noted that she was often not credited for her ideas, and these were instead 'taken' and passed upwards as ideas emanating from a collective 'we'.

Participant 15 shared that she was asked by her Headteacher why two persons in the same family (she and her husband) needed to be in senior leadership positions, a question which complicated their relationship. She explained:

*Our school was going through a lot of change, and being asked questions, like, why do you need to be a senior leader when your husband is already? I have a child who is special needs. The hostility that was faced was different from the leadership from the head teacher. The thing that was one factor were deteriorating relationship there's a relationship with the head.*

It should be noted the Participant's 15 Headteacher was a Black female.

Participant 2 shared how the experience of conflict had left them disillusioned with teaching. They provided,

*I thought, I don't know if other schools are like that. I don't know if I'd be able to do it. And I think because of the damage that she did, I just felt like, I can't do it. So I felt like schools weren't an option for me.*

Participant 11 reported that his decisions (e.g.: staff disciplinary, curriculum choices) had been overturned and/or criticised by supervisors, sometimes in front of their staff, resulting in him feeling undermined and disrespected. Participant 14 also revealed that her job was advertised whilst she was still in post, and without any prior discussion and/or notice from the Trust's HR team or Executive Headteacher.



### 3.3 Racism

Racism was a factor identified by participants. Lack of representation, tokenism and diversity, and double standards were sub-themes.

#### (i) Lack of Representation

Participant 4 reflected on a perceived mismatch between the curriculum provided to and consumed by students and her values and identity.

*I don't agree with a lot of the agenda. I don't agree with this consistent colonialisation of the curriculum, and this consistent fight to not bring ethnicity or true black curriculum in place. I just don't agree with it. I don't want to promote an education system that I don't agree with and that is trying to completely eradicate my existence and their responsibility to my experience.*

Other participants surmised that their school and/or Trust weren't serious about ethnic diversity in leadership, and that their being in post was tokenistic and performative. Participant 13 explained:

*I realised that I was basically there in a tokenistic fashion that I wasn't going to get anywhere with them...*

#### (ii) Fraught Grievance and Disciplinary Processes

This was an area of significant concern raised by participants who suggested a different standard was often applied to them, whether they had initiated grievance processes or whether they had been the subject of such processes. There was an overwhelming feeling among participants that sometimes grievances are 'cooked up', and grievances they initiated were more likely to be dismissed, although grievances brought against them were more likely to be upheld.

Participant 14 shared that although the panel dismissed all the points she'd raised in her grievance against the Trust, the Trust acknowledged that several lessons had been learnt. She recalled being asked by her deputy CEO "whether my children have the same father" – a question they acknowledged asking during the grievance hearing. Despite this, it was reasoned that:

*I shouldn't have been offended by that because it wasn't meant in a derogatory way. So this white investigator was telling me how I should feel about a racist comment. The whole process was shoddy and badly handled, and the person chairing the grievance panel didn't have the skills or training in unconscious bias to understand what was going on. In the end, they didn't uphold my complaint.*



Participant 3 reflected on how what she perceived to be a fraught disciplinary process contributed to her challenges and ultimately exit from the profession.

*So what made me leave the profession? Okay, so I went through a disciplinary process which ended with sanctions being put against me. I had a final written warning which lasted for two years. So, it meant that if I was to try and get a job, I had to declare it on any job application I ever made.*

Participant 8 also highlighted concerns about double standards:

*I would say the school data for that particular year was an interesting dynamic because as I said the year before, was the year that I got high data, when everyone was expected to get ready for a change in the curriculum. I did really well that year. With very little praise and everyone else that did really poorly. They were like supportive and coaxed and you know, we can get through this. The following year the grades were lower, and although I'd warn them that that was coming, in terms of the level of accountability that I experienced it was nothing like those headteachers the year before, whose data went from 90% to like 23%. I was micro-managed the following year, and my data was nowhere as bad as other individuals.*

### 3.4 Clash of Values

Organisational processes were also identified by participants, as another factor, primarily concerning how schools are led and manage, and the nature of the curriculum provided to students.

#### (i) Education Corporatisation

The approach of some schools that are part of a Trust compared with schools under local authority control was identified by a small number of participants as being 'corporate' and out of sync with their values. Participant 4 explained:

*I don't want to work for an academy, because it's about money. It's corporate. Education has become too corporate for me, too business-like, and I don't agree with that. I don't believe... I think there's a disconnect between being about profit, and education, especially for our most vulnerable pupils.*

This theme requires further investigation. However, that some academy schools are perceived to be 'corporate' and therefore present a challenge to the values of some school leaders is consistent with existing research.



## (ii) Curriculum Rigidity

More than a third of participants expressed concerns about what could be described as a rigid curriculum. Participant 9 articulated:

*I think the curriculum is too rigid. Dependent on your headteacher, though, you might be a bit more flexible, but I feel like yeah, like it's about data and, you know, ticking boxes, even though things are not done. I'm seeing people going back and ticking boxes that you know, yeah. I just don't feel like there's a lot of honesty in education. I feel like honesty is very little, and I'm quite an honest person and I struggle with making things look a certain way – especially for that child who is failing.*

Participant 6 expressed a sense of resignation due to perceived institutional and systemic blockages:

*I've had enough experience as a black person. You know, you look at so many things that need to change for black kids, your kids, and you, you can't do it. You're prevented from doing it.*

## 3.5 Disillusionment

Some participants left their roles due to becoming disillusioned with their supervisors and/or other aspects of the education system. At least four participants reported some element of disillusionment or being 'fed up' as a factor in their decision to exit the profession and/or accept a change in role.

Participant 1 shared:

*One person, a white female, got promoted to Senior Assistant Principal because she'd been there for 25 years. She was failing in her job but had an amazing personality. She got promoted, and my title stayed the same. And even though I was doing something of the nature of an assistant principal, so it was just all political. I said to myself, I don't need this, so I left and went to a large secondary school headed by a Black headteacher.*

Participant 9 provided:

*I didn't feel fulfilled, I know that I do more. I just didn't know what that more was. And I think being on maternity leave, like, confirms that 100% that, you know, this is not what I want to do. And I had to go back for 13 weeks, and that was torture. That really, really was hard. Like being somewhere you really don't want to be, somewhere you don't enjoy; something that you don't feel fulfilled in. There's nothing that excites you about it. I decided this was not actually for me. So being out of it, and then going back into it, this was quite helpful. It cemented that I'd made the right decision.*



Being able to earn more elsewhere and being able to contribute and feel valued elsewhere led participants 8 and 9 to leave, with participant 13 sharing,

*... it just led to a combination of me just being fed up, and really just trying to look for a new opportunity.*

Participants 8 provided:

*Finances were a big factor in that decision to step away, because I think, as a black person, we can't just leave a job. Like, you can't just walk away, like there are too many financial pressures, you know, we know how challenging society is for black people, we know that we don't have support.... Life is much harder for black people in the UK, we don't have those resources or those networks that mean that we can just walk out of a job and not worry.*

### **3.6 Bullying and Toxic Culture**

Bullying was also another factor identified by participants. Peer (Cyberbullying) and supervisor bullying were reported.

#### **(i) Peer Bullying (Cyber Bullying)**

Participant 13 reported being bullied by peers. This was believed to have stemmed from the fraught relationship with her line manager, and which, as a result had led to students and staff "calling me names" and "posting pictures of me online without permission". Participant 13 also shared that despite reporting these concerns and incidents to the Trust leader, they "didn't deal with it at all".

#### **(ii) Supervisor Bullying**

Participant 16 reported that they were bullied by their Headteacher and had been "left out of meetings." Participant 16 also continued:

*I'm always the only black person. I'm always the only black person at the table. And, you know, we may have a meeting. So when I, had my mentor, my mentor told me certain things that, you know, should be done. And so I am going along with that, not knowing that basically, I'm just setting up myself. Because the more you talk is the less, they want to hear. And even in meetings, they pipe up in meetings, and if you're not saying what they want to hear or whatever that will go against you.*



### **(iii) Toxic Culture**

Wrong school was mentioned by Participant 5 who surmised they had ended in the room school which they described as a toxic environment. They provided:

*[I]t was definitely, I definitely feel it was the wrong school. It was a toxic school on so many levels.*



## Chapter 4: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

### 4.1 Discussion and Conclusions

BAME school leaders in England are an endangered species with actual numbers in terms of appointment to leadership roles, especially as a Headteacher, appearing to stand still year on year. Whilst this is partly explained by endemic racism in the educational system, this study has unearthed new evidence which could partly explain why the numbers of BAME senior leaders in post remain relatively low. Whilst racism is a significant factor in progression, and a significant factor in the overall experience of school leaders in this study, it was not the most influential factor in their decision-making to accept a lower job role and/or to exit the teaching profession. Based on the evidence, and in ranked order, the factors influencing their decisions were Quality of life, Conflict, Racism, Organisational Processes, Disillusionment and Bullying & Toxic Culture.

Nearly all participants in the study felt undermined by conflicts, bullying and toxic school cultures which led to the diminishing of their personal and professional agency. In 14 of 16 cases, conflicts were with white supervisors and peers, highlighting that although racism was not thought to be the most influential factor, it is nonetheless embedded in the experiences of participants in the study, underlining the insidious nature of racism in England, and in England's education system (Miller, 2021). The loss of agency experienced by some school leaders led them to question their fitness for the job and/or the choice of school. Conflict between BAME school leaders and their supervisors was described as 'common' and which led two patterns of exit from their role for BAME school leaders: 'voluntary' and 'enforced'. Although several participants described their exit or redeployment as 'voluntary', the weight of evidence suggests the opposite since, although not 'forced out' their decision to leave was in response to fraught supervisory relationships which made it improbable for them to continue in their roles.

Quality of life was a major theme identified, with 12 participants reporting the job was more demanding and more consuming than anticipated. Although this could be related to the fact many were in 'challenging' schools, many had underestimated the intensification of work associated with school leadership, and the impact such work intensification would have on their family life (especially absences from their own children), and on them as individuals, especially in terms of self-care needs. Furthermore, as reported by three participants, the pay received didn't always appear to match the job demands and responsibilities. Together, these suggest the school leaders in this study may not have received adequate preparation and/or guidance (e.g.: mentoring or coaching or advice) regarding the demands of senior leadership roles, and crucially, how to 'stay afloat'.

Despite this, the findings also identified 'lack of support' as a key factor in their overall experience, leading some to feel 'overwhelmed'. Many described not receiving any or adequate support from supervisors and other senior colleagues, and they reported receiving relentless criticisms concerning their decision-making and approach to leadership.

It is well known that BAME senior leaders in England have a fraught journey to leadership. It is also well known that for many, their experience of leadership itself is also fraught. The findings of this study should help us to understand what happens as a result of these fraught experiences – the loss (whether voluntary or enforced) of significant experience and capacity, and the loss of senior level



ethnic representation from schools and from the education system. The findings therefore provide new insights and new understandings into how BAME school leaders in England experience leadership, and how these experiences differ based on school type, and gender.

As mentioned earlier, direct experiences of racism was not the most influential factor identified as contributing to decisions to exit the profession and/or take a junior role. Nevertheless, the findings underline the existence of systemic racism borne out in structures and interactions. Consequently, and based on the evidence, these factors appear to suggest line managers (mostly white) of BAME school leaders are engaged in an active process of liabilisation - or a situation where they are characterised as 'incompetent', 'incapable' and 'lacking good judgment'. This process of liabilisation is consistent with previous research (e.g.: Miller & Callender, 2018), and is set out in Table 3:

Table 3: Liabilisation process and BAME senior leaders

Stage 1 →	Stage 2 →	Stage 3 →	Stage 4 →	Stage 5 →	Stage 6 →	Stage 7
Personality fit questioned	Discounting	Overlooked or sidelined	Devaluing	Intervention	Disciplinary	Outcome
p.14 – refusal to talk about family and personal life interpreted as being 'difficult' or 'dull'	p.12 – wellbeing concerns <b>ignored</b> or <b>dismissed</b>  p.16 – ideas <b>dismissed</b> and/or <b>overlooked</b> in meetings	p.15 and 16 – <b>left out</b> of SLT meetings  p.13 - <b>left out</b> of key decisions & processes	p.11 – decisions and/or judgements <b>challenged, questioned</b> or <b>overturned</b>  p.14 – ideas were 'taken' and passed on as <b>someone else's</b> or as 'we', and I was never credited	p.8 – <b>performance questioned</b> ; accountability targets introduced; micro-management; <b>capability process initiated</b>	p.3 – you are put through a grievance process – usually <b>upheld</b> ; <b>counter grievance dismissed</b>	Outcome 1: Dismissal  Outcome 2: Redeployment  Outcome 3: Resignation



## 4.2 Recommendations

Several recommendations have emerged from this study. These are based on interview evidence, and from participants as suggested during one-to-one interviews. It is hereby recommended that:

### 4.2.1 Tracking Experience and Exit

- The Department for Education and/or the National College for Teaching and Leadership and/or Ambition Institute commissions and funds a longitudinal study lasting a minimum of 5 years to track and understanding the experiences of serving BAME school leaders on an annual basis – the findings from which can assist policy and practice on an ongoing basis in ‘real time’
- The Department for Education and Trust leaders should systematically collect and publish data on the exit of senior staff, the reasons behind their departure, types of schools, ethnicity and gender

### 4.2.2 Training & Development

- Providers of DfE initiated training such as NPQs consider the integration of real-life experiences of leadership (e.g.: quality of life issues, conflict management, etc) into leadership preparation and development programmes (e.g.: NPQSL, NPQH and NPQEL)
- Governors, Chief Executives and Executive Officers arrange structured coaching or mentoring for newly BAME headteachers for their first year of Headship as standard practice. Experienced BAME headteachers could be invited to support any such initiative
- Providers of mentoring and coaching programmes for aspiring and existing BAME school leaders consider the integration of real-life experiences of leadership (e.g.: quality of life issues, conflict management, etc) into leadership preparation and development programmes
- Training in ‘Allyship’, ‘Unconscious Bias’, ‘Conflict Management’, ‘Anti-racism and Leadership’ ‘Leading Diverse Teams and Workforce’ is provided for Chief Executives, Executive Headteachers, Headteachers and other school leaders on an ongoing basis as part of an agreed programme. This could be sponsored by the Department for Education and/or the National College for Teaching and Leadership and/or Ambition Institute, and/or Confederation of School Trusts and/or the Multi-Academy Trust Association

### 4.2.3 Integration

- The Multi-Academy Trust Association and leaders of Multi-Academy Trusts work together to examine, better understand and address concerns raised by school leaders in this study regarding corporatisation and perceived disalignment of educational values in academy management and leadership
- The experiences of BAME female school leaders are sought and captured in developmental and support schemes (e.g.: mentoring, coaching and training & development programmes) delivered by training programmes and/or the Department for Education since they appear more at risk
- Ofsted inquire about the wellbeing and support needs of BAME school leaders, and whether or the extent to which these are being met, in inspection processes – the result of which could inform policy interventions.



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