

NGO DIVa - Parents for Diversity
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When the school is unsafe

Discrimination, racism and anti-racism in the Finnish school system

Information FOR PARENTS

Introduction

All children have the right to safe schooling. Children should not be subjected to discrimination, abuse, contempt, hate speech, hate crimes or belittlement at school.

That's why this material puts the child at the centre. Because even though there are plenty of words prohibiting inappropriate behaviour, children are still exposed. There is a gap somewhere. Unfortunately, it is also often the case that schools are unable to rectify the situation. Our society tends to prioritise the rights of adults more than children.

This material is a helper when things go wrong. Think of it as a letter from parent to parent, without intermediaries.

We briefly describe discrimination and racism as a phenomenon in Finnish comprehensive schools. The material is compiled through interviews with authorities, researchers, school staff and parents. In addition, our organisation has a strong contact with grassroots institutions on diversity issues. We have collected the interview material in 2022.

The material consists of eight parts. We start by talking about racism and discrimination as a phenomenon. In the second section we briefly describe the legislation that applies to schools and in the third we go through which authorities you can contact if you are discriminated against at school. The fourth section summarises case studies and the fifth section provides an analytical reflection on the current situation in Finnish schools.

In the sixth and seventh sections, we have collected recommendations for creating a more inclusive school environment and a checklist for actions in discrimination situations. Sections seven and eight provide a glossary and reading tips.

1. What is racism in schools?

To work effectively against racism in schools, the first step is to reach a common understanding of what racism is, otherwise measures risk becoming unequal and disjointed.

Racism is a historically rooted system built on power and privilege. Racism is based on the idea that certain groups of people have a lower status because of their ethnic origin, skin colour, citizenship, culture, mother tongue or religion, and can therefore be ranked hierarchically and oppressed. In a society built on racism, everyone is involved in perpetuating racism at a structural level, it is not a question of who is racist or not.

As a parent, you can choose to work towards anti-racism and so counter racism.¹

Racism can be expressed through individual racism:

"My child was once called a monkey in the classroom by another student and when my child said it to the teacher, the teacher just replied 'We are all monkeys' and did not intervene in the situation." - PARENT

The example above depicts what most people perceive as racism: a student who intentionally says something to hurt someone. However, the concept is broader than that. There are discriminatory structures in society that maintain inequalities between people. These structures are both visible and invisible and are maintained both consciously and unconsciously.



Racism is systemic and permeates the policies, institutions, culture and norms that maintain positions of power in society, as certain groups of people are considered to have a lower status than other groups. Discrimination means that a person is treated less favourably than others or is disadvantaged because of their personal characteristics, such as their minority background.

"Research has shown that there is a division between those who are seen as immigrant pupils and those who are seen as Finns in Finnish schools, and culture are used as an explanation for not fitting in, but it is more about exclusion. Whiteness is seen as 'normal' in Finnish schools. Ethnicity is used as an explanation: if the children are rowdy, it is because they are immigrants." - RESEARCH in EDUCATION

What is racism and why is too little being done today to combat it?

Finland likes to define itself as a country with no colonial history, despite the oppression of indigenous minorities, such as the Sámi. Racism and its consequences for those affected have long been a low priority in society. Problems of discrimination and racism in the Nordic countries are often misrepresented as minor and therefore not prioritised.

However, Finland has been classified as one of the most racist countries in the EU by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in its research EU MIDIS II (2017). In Finland, 45 per cent of parents of children with a minority background report that their child has experienced racist harassment or discrimination at school.²

Despite the reports, racism continues to be seen as such a marginal problem that teachers are rarely adequately trained in anti-racist approaches. They are therefore unable to give pupils the support they need. Without training, it is difficult for school staff to understand what racism is, how it manifests itself and the consequences of racism for its victims.

However, it is the responsibility of the school and the school principal to ensure that racism and discrimination are investigated and addressed. When the municipality fails to do so, there is currently no adequate monitoring and no body with a mandate to intervene quickly, directly and effectively.

The racism experienced by pupils is rarely addressed due to ignorance of what racism is and the culture of silence that makes it difficult to talk openly about sensitive issues. Another reason why racism and discrimination are rarely reported is that minorities do not trust the authorities in Finland.³

2. The school's equal opportunities programme

Schools are environments that bring together children, young people and adults from different backgrounds. The school's mission is to equip students with the knowledge they need to become active citizens in our democratic society. Various laws and regulations give schools the opportunity, but also the obligation, to work in an anti-racist way.

Schools have a duty to *prevent* racism and discrimination.

Schools has a duty to *address* racism and discrimination.

Schools have a duty to *promote* the principle that all pupils have equal value in school.

"Teachers should know what racism is, its history and understand individual and structural racism. Knowledge becomes a lens to see racism, because if you don't understand it, you can't prevent racism and prevent the maintenance of different norms such as whiteness, Finnishness, gender and social class, for example." - RESEARCHES IN ANTI-RACISTIC PEDAGOGIC

"The language used by adults reflects attitudes and influences the child. Language can show that minorities are not seen as worthy." - HEAD TEACHER

"Society is unfair and we should talk to children about it already in early childhood education and care, so that everyone is aware of the situation but is prepared to change it."

— RESEARCHES IN ANTI-RACISTIC PEDAGOGIK

This text focuses mostly on *remedial action*, i.e. what should happen when a pupil has already experienced racism or discrimination. We also focus on you as a parent. Unfortunately, at present, the responsibility often falls first and foremost on the parents.

"These parents would need someone to speak for them and they don't have that. Through this material, the parents get a handbook on what they should do, but the problem is that few have the capacity to do it."

— RECTOR

The Constitution of Finland

Children's rights at school are fundamental rights and are based on the Constitution of Finland. Fundamental rights are part of the Finnish legal system and are recognised in the Constitution of Finland.⁴ Teachers are public officials and must be familiar with the legislation and general administrative laws in their field of responsibility.⁵

Under section 22 of the Constitution of Finland, public institutions must protect the realisation of fundamental and human rights. The tasks of public authorities are specified in legislation, such as the Early Childhood Education and Care Act (L 540/2018) and the Basic Education Act (L 21.8.1998/628).⁶



Conventions

Fundamental and human rights are also enshrined in the general administrative laws with which public authorities must comply. In addition, these rights are protected by the European Convention on Human Rights, The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Finland is a signatory to these international conventions, which guarantee human rights to Finnish citizens. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the state must take all measures that required to protect children from discrimination. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that education should be designed to 'promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic and religious groups' (CESCR).⁷

The school curriculum

The curriculum currently states: "Bullying, violence, racism or other discrimination shall not be tolerated and inappropriate behaviour shall be addressed immediately". Schools and authorities have a duty to promote equal treatment and to ensure that no one is discriminated against on the grounds of sex, age, ethnic or national origin, language, religion, belief, opinion, health status, disability or sexual orientation.⁸ However, schools have very different approaches to tackling racism and discrimination, as there is currently no standardised and effective way of addressing and reporting racism. Responsibility usually falls on the shoulders of teachers and principals. Based on their resources, expertise and capacity to act, the situation will

in schools will therefore look very different. There is an alarming need for transparency within the administration, in terms of discrimination and knowledge of how to engage in dialogue with families. There is also a need for more experts in intercultural communication, equality and racism, and in making minorities and inequalities visible.

"It's important to think from the top down, that is, who writes the curricula and who is involved in reviewing the structures of how to work? Part of the problem starts when white privileged people write policies for others to follow. There needs to be diversity in all levels of education to facilitate change." - RESEARCHES in PEDAGOGY

Who is responsible for ensuring compliance with the law?

The training provider is responsible for ensuring that the training complies with the legal principles of the country and that the Equality Act and the Non-Discrimination Act are complied with. Every educational institution should have a statutory equality plan and a statutory equal treatment plan, describing what the school does to promote equality and prevent discrimination in schools. Each school should also have a plan to prevent harassment and violence and a clear action plan to follow in cases of racism.

If an educational institution acts illegally, complaints should be made first to the Regional State Administrative Agency and secondly to the Parliamentary Ombudsman. In cases of discrimination, you can also contact the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, who can advise on how the case can be taken forward and investigated. It can be difficult to have a case dealt with by more than one authority. At the same time, there are now cases in which the non-discrimination officer and the Regional State Administrative Agency cooperate around complaints. This usually produces good results. You can ask for a case to be dealt with in parallel, in which case each authority will deal with its own specialised area, but will help each other.

3. Who to contact if your child is experiencing racism and discrimination at school

Discrimination in schools can be addressed by different authorities depending on the type of discrimination involved. These procedures have different names. They can be requests for reconsideration, administrative appeals, complaints or contacts. We will try to clarify these later. Not all authorities can be appealed to and a decision is required to appeal and demand a change. In school matters, appeals can be made to the Regional Administrative Agency and the Administrative Court. Compensation and damages for discrimination can be claimed in the District Court. According to the Basic Education Act, only the party concerned may appeal a decision, while anyone can file a complaint. Unfortunately, it often becomes the responsibility of the parents to courageously ask difficult questions and demand that the child's rights are upheld.

The school

If your child is a victim of racism at school, you should raise the issue with the child's teacher and head teacher at the earliest opportunity. If this does not lead to the desired result, you can contact the education coordinator in the municipality's school or education system.

If you want to appeal against a decision taken by the school, the decision must contain instructions on how to appeal. The instructions must also indicate the legal body or authority to which the appeal should be addressed, such as the Regional State Administrative Agency or the Administrative Court.⁹ If the decision cannot be appealed, a complaint can be submitted to the Regional State Administrative Agency.

If a member of school staff behaves inappropriately, the school may take internal disciplinary action. These measures are confidential. If the case is serious, the school must make a criminal report to the police. Repeated misbehaviour can be grounds for dismissal.

"The best results are achieved when a low threshold is set for co-operation between the school and parents, leading to concrete results in the school's activities." - HEAD TEACHER

"If the head teacher does not listen or act, go to the head teacher's supervisor, it is right to demand that children are happy." - HEAD TEACHER

Local authorities

The municipality is legally responsible for the municipal schools. If the matter cannot be resolved within the school, you can bring it to the attention of the municipality's head of education. Unfortunately, there is no specific body within the municipalities to deal with issues of discrimination and racism. However, mediation can be used to resolve disputes with the help of an external mediator. You can find your local mediation office here:

<https://thl.fi/sv/web/thlfi-sv/tjanster/statens-specialtjanster-inom-social-och-halsovarden/medling/medlingsbyraernas-kontaktuppgifter>

Regional State Administrative Agencies

A Regional State Administrative Agency deals with complaints, appeals and statements from schools, for example. You can lodge a complaint free of charge in a case that concerns yourself or someone else. In the Regional State Administrative Agency's complaint decision, administrative guidance can be given to the party against whom the complaint is made. You can also phone up and get advice.¹⁰

Non-Discrimination Ombudsman

The task of the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman is to promote equal treatment and intervene in cases of discrimination. The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman can also give you general advice and instructions, investigate suspected discrimination and promote a solution to the dispute between you and the school. An individual discrimination case can be brought to the National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal or to a court for judgement. The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman investigates discrimination complaints and issues non-legally binding statements.¹¹

Discrimination and Equality Board

The National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal monitors how discrimination and equality laws are applied in, for example, schools. It handles complaints and issues legally binding decisions. The Tribunal can prohibit an operator to continue an activity that violates the Discrimination Act. The Tribunal may also order the operator to fulfil its obligations under the Discrimination Act. The Tribunal may not decide on the payment of compensation or damages. The Tribunal's decision can also be appealed to the Administrative Court.¹²



Administrative and District Courts

Administrative courts hear appeals in administrative matters. District courts deal with compensation and damages issues and criminal cases.

The police

The mission of the police is to safeguard the rule of law and social order, maintain public order and security, and to prevent, detect and investigate criminal offences and conduct offences to be prosecuted (L 872/2011). You can report a discrimination or hate crime to the police. Hate motives can lead to harsher penalties.

The police then decide whether to investigate the case and refer it to the prosecutor, who decides whether to prosecute. The threshold to have a case dealt with is lower in administrative cases than in criminal cases, which are dealt with first by the police and then by the prosecutor.¹³

Ombudsmen

The Ombudsman monitors and promotes legality and respect fundamental rights of public authorities and private actors carrying out public tasks. You can file a complaint if you suspect that an authority or an official has violated the law or neglected their duties. The Ombudsman can then advise or mediate and request information from the authority concerned by the complaint.

The Ombudsman is not an appeal authority and therefore cannot overturn or change the decisions of other authorities. In serious cases, a complaint to the Ombudsman can lead to a preliminary investigation and prosecution.¹⁴

Ombudsman for Children

The Ombudsman for Children promotes the realisation of the best interests and rights of the child. The Ombudsman for Children ensures that the position and rights of children are taken into account in legislation and decision-making. The Ombudsman for Children does not investigate complaints and cannot take a position on individual cases.¹⁵

Lawyer

A private lawyer can help you in a discrimination case by giving advice, writing applications or letters of claim and participating in court proceedings.

Home insurance often covers legal costs in general courts (district courts), but rarely in administrative cases (regional administrative agencies, administrative courts, etc.). It is important to check the terms of the insurance and the amount of the excess.

You can also apply for legal aid, i.e. financial support for a legal adviser, such as a lawyer. In Finland, there is no age limit for receiving legal aid, so even people under 18 can be eligible for legal aid. Legal aid is dependent on the income and assets of the party concerned, even when the applicant is a minor.¹⁶ Many people who have experienced discrimination are in a relatively weak financial position. This makes it difficult to take the high personal cost risk of legal services. This is why can be seen as another form of discrimination by society.

In court proceedings, support can be obtained, for example, through a decision of the National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal, i.e. through the fact that the case has already been dealt with in court. The courts investigate the cases that come before them more thoroughly than many other authorities have the resources to do.

"Parents should stand up for themselves and know their rights, and demand what they are entitled to." - TEACHERS

"My friend's son was excluded by teachers and students. The son was black. The mother contacted a lawyer and reported it to the principal and immediately positive things started to happen." - PARENT

According to the 2018 EU MIDIS II survey, only 12% of ethnic discrimination cases in Finland are reported, only 10% of hate-based harassment and 28% of hate-based violence.¹⁷ In Finland, the Parliamentary Ombudsman has stated that there is a lack of training to prevent violations of fundamental and human rights.¹⁸ Of the respondents to the EU MIDIS II survey in Finland, 45% reported experiencing discrimination in the past year, which is higher than the European average. 63% of those with an African background had experienced racist harassment and 14% reported experiencing racist violence in the last five years.¹⁹

The promotion of equal treatment is one of the main tools of the Non-Discrimination Act (L 1325/2014) to prevent discrimination. The last reform of the Act in 2015 extended the obligation to promote equality not only to public authorities but also to employers, schools and educational institutions. These are now obliged to draw up an equality plan.²⁰

The Discrimination Act is currently being reformed and should enter into force on 1 June 2023.²¹

The number of civil cases in the courts has increased since the new Discrimination Act entered into force in 2015, but the number of successful cases remains relatively low. Most of the court decisions concern labour law issues and there is little information on the content of the cases where the parties reached a settlement agreement. There are also few successful claims for damages in the general courts.

However, contacts with enforcement authorities have increased since 2015. This may be due to a number of reasons, including increased awareness of the different legal protection channels.²²

The main goal of victims of discrimination is often to be heard and to have the discrimination recognised. Victims of discrimination often also want to have justice and a solution to the discriminatory problems. Financial redress is often a secondary but important part of effective legal protection.

4. Case studies

Below are examples of the struggle to get the right kind of help at the moment, when your child or a pupil is exposed to racism at school.

The school

When Marianne's children were about to start school, Islam was not a religious option. As Marianne's family belongs to Islam, she wanted her children to be taught Islam. She then decided to report the problem to the city. On the form, she offered to teach the children if the school could not find a Swedish-speaking teacher. Two years passed before the city contacted Marianne and asked her to teach the children, as they had not found a suitable teacher. During this time, the children had not received any religious education at all, even though the municipality is obliged to offer education in one religion if there are three children belonging to the religion in the municipality. This was fulfilled in the case of Marianne's children. When the children started secondary school, Islamic education was not automatically continued. Marianne then had to apply to the local education authority herself, with the signatures of four other parents, to obtain Islamic education for her secondary school pupils. The Islamic textbooks for secondary school pupils have so far not been translated into Swedish, but only into Finnish.

The National Agency for Education had promised that the books would be translated by 2020, but then the Agency announced that they had other priorities. At the moment, it is unclear when the books will be translated.

Marianne's child has been called a bully, a bomber and a terrorist in secondary school. The discrimination went on for three months and her children refused to talk about it, Marianne found out from another mum. The school took action and called Marianne's child in for an interview, but the child refused to talk about what had happened. Marianne said that other pupils also said that it is common for them to be called "blackhead" or other racist names at school.

"Today, schools often want to choose teachers from outside the Islamic tradition to teach Islam. They want to mould the Islamic tradition and how it is interpreted in Finland. Children are victimised because they feel that they cannot interpret their own religion correctly, but that a teacher from outside their religious tradition feels the need to correct their interpretation." - HEAD

TEACHER

Regional State Administrative Agency

One head teacher said that a decision by the Regional State Administrative Agency has no real impact on the situation in the school, unless the head teacher himself is willing to recognise the problems of racism. The only impact the decision has is that it gives the principal more paperwork. It is only if the parents can bear to submit the complaint to the Regional State Administrative Agency repeatedly that it can have an impact, as such complaints lead to more work in reporting to the authority. It is easier to fix the problems, according to the head teacher interviewed.

"Nowadays, when the municipalities' rights are huge, there is only the Regional State Administrative Agency to which you can complain, and for the Swedish side there is perhaps only one lawyer who will take care of everything." - PARENT

"The answer from the Regional State Administrative Agency is always quite unclear and in the municipalities, they can interpret the answer as they want and we as parents can interpret the answer as we want. But really, what happens after that decision letter? Nothing, nobody has any control." - PARENT

The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, the Regional State Administrative Agency and the National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal

When Anna's child was in primary school, her child was taught Orthodox religion, known as her own religion. When the child was about to start the fifth grade, the school decided to merge the teaching of religion and philosophy of life and to discontinue the teaching of Orthodox and other religions. Anna and some other parents were upset and decided to send a letter to the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman. The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman was unsure whether they could help Anna or the other parents, so Anna herself took her case to the Regional State Administrative Agency.

The Regional State Administrative Agency took a year to process the case, and the municipality was also involved. After a year, they received an unclear decision from the Regional State Administrative Agency, which Anna and the school interpreted in different ways. The decision did not bring about any concrete change, but only a rewording in the curriculum. Anna also contacted the Education Authority and was told that they cannot help her. After this, Anna decided that it would be best if the child changed schools. As a last resort, Anna sent the case to Discrimination and Equality Tribunal, which led to a clear decision by the Tribunal that the municipality had violated the Discrimination Act. The municipality's director of education did not care about the decision. A new director came to the municipality and sorted it out. The whole process took over five years. Anna believes that there is no point in making a complaint, as nothing is gained from it and it takes a long time for the problems to be resolved within the school and the municipality. She believes that the only thing a complaint can achieve is to become an example for someone else.

"If we deny structural discrimination, we cannot correct it and we do not see the problems in the structures." - RECTOR

"There must be common guidelines and goals, not so that teachers can do whatever they want without consequences and responsibility. Several teachers have subsequently denied making racist statements, even though several students have heard them say them." - PARENT

5. Discussion and debate

In Finnish society, discrimination and racism are still often very difficult to prove. There are some formal ways to intervene, but according to the information we have gathered, the best results are achieved through local consultations with the school or municipality. It is also important to react to discriminatory behaviour in a timely manner and ideally start a discussion with the school as early as possible to prevent the conflict from escalating.

The municipality plays a very important role in school management, but there is no body within the municipality to which issues of racism and discrimination can be brought. If your own case cannot be resolved with the staff of your own school, you can contact the municipality's head of education or another authorised official. According to the Basic Education Act, a teacher or principal must report any harassment, bullying, discrimination or violence on the way to school or in the learning environment that they become aware of to the guardians for the suspected and victimised pupil. In addition, the school is obliged to report to child protection under the Child Protection Act and to the police in case of offences against life or health.

The Regional State Administrative Agency is actually the only authority that supervises primary schools, but in order for it to intervene, someone has to make a complaint. However, a complaint to the Regional State Administrative Agency does not lead to a legally binding decision. The idea is that after receiving a decision from the Regional State Administrative Agency on its own activities, the education provider will correct its behaviour. After that, there are no sanctions or monitoring, so the same problem can be repeated in the same school.



Other authorities, such as the National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal and the various ombudsmen, also investigate complaints submitted to them. Administrative processes often move slowly within public authorities, which means that they are often unable to deal with an urgent situation. Depending on the authority to which the case is submitted, the burden of proof on the complainant varies, and administrative procedures are often cumbersome and requires a lot of effort from the complainant, often the parents. There is no guarantee that the process will lead to a desired outcome. In addition, the resources available to the authorities to deal with a case may be limited.

It is important that you know your rights and that you document your problems carefully. However, it is often difficult to gather evidence in a discrimination case. Public authorities have different areas of action and powers to deal with discrimination and racism. It is good to know which body is relevant in each case.

In the absence of rapid and effective means to address discrimination and racism in the school environment, much depends on the active involvement of parents. Many people may find it difficult to come forward and make a complaint. For example, they may be afraid of being labelled as a difficult person in the school community or they may find it difficult to trust authorities. Parents may be concerned about their own children's situation at school if such a process is initiated. Moreover, the processes are cumbersome and require efforts on the part of the complainant. However, the Non-Discrimination Act is being reformed. The school's responsibility to ensure a discrimination-free environment is increasing and may lead to more concrete sanctions against the school if it does not address discrimination. In future, an educational institution may be found guilty of discrimination if it does not take action against reported harassment.

Legal problems related to administrative procedures and decision-making are a human rights challenge also in schools. For example, administrative decisions that can be appealed by parents are not always taken, are not statutory or do not fulfil the requirements of the Administrative Code (L 6.6.2003/434).²³ Legal issues related to education in Finland have so far been dealt with mainly from an administrative law perspective. In problematic situations, this means that in the worst case, issues related to the rights of the child are not taken into account at all, if the review is limited to the traditional interpretation of administrative law. The child rights perspective should therefore be a starting point for the work of primary schools. A child rights approach means striking a balance between children's autonomy and their dependence and need for protection. It also means building on the principle of the best interests of the child, ensuring the equality of the child, supporting the protection of children and the principles of child self-determination.

6. Recommendations for creating a more inclusive school environment

- Ask the school how they work to prevent and intervene in discrimination and racism. Demand that they are concrete. How is it done and by whom? Remember that you have the law on your side.
- It is important to take diversity into account in all recruitment - there should be multilingual teachers, tutors and assistants where possible. Cultural interpreters could be employed.
- Training and materials on non-discrimination and anti-racism are available increasingly available to staff. All school staff should be encouraged to participate in the training and familiarise themselves with the material. Take heart as a parent: have staff updated themselves?
- All teaching materials used should be scrutinised from an anti-racist perspective and, if necessary, corrected by someone knowledgeable in the field.
- All schools are already required by law to have equality and equity plans. The creation, implementation and monitoring of these plans could be better integrated into the curriculum and used as part of teaching. School staff, parents and students can all participate in the preparation of the plans and thus engage in discussions that benefit the whole community.
- Schools should create an open atmosphere for discussions about discrimination and racism. It must be safe for everyone to ask questions and express their opinions and discussions can take place in a spirit of mutual respect. In order to bring about change, it is necessary to first identify and recognise the problems that prevent equality and non-discrimination from being achieved.
- Legal requirements are needed to address racism and discrimination in schools. Pupils are now encouraged to report racism and discrimination, and then when the measures are not taken or are kept secret, the pupil is victimised once again. Municipalities now have preventive programmes, but when the fire is out, they have no action programmes.
- Finland could follow the Swedish model, where schools are monitored by a specialised external authority that focuses on schools and can be contacted for help if needed.
- Pupils currently in special needs education, for example due to disabilities, could participate more in mainstream education and break norms in this way.



"Society is unfair and we should talk to children about it already in early childhood education and care, so that everyone is aware of the situation but is prepared to change it."

— RESEARCHES IN ANI-RACISTIC PEDAGOGIK

"It is important that teachers critically analyse the materials they use in schools and how they talk about the world and about people. In addition, it is important that teachers and authorities participate in anti-racism workshops. Ideally, every school should have workshops annually until it becomes an established way of thinking for everyone in the school." - RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

"The teacher thinks 'I'm not racist and we have zero tolerance for discrimination'. But we should think further: what can we actively do? There is no school that is free of racist structures at the moment."

— RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

"If you are a teacher, you have to think every day: What am I doing to break these norms that make someone not fit in or someone perceived as having less potential than someone else?" - RESEARCH IS IN EDUCATION

"Teachers should know what racism is, its history and understand individual and structural racism. This knowledge becomes a lens to see racism, because if you don't understand it, you can't prevent racism and prevent the maintenance of different norms such as whiteness, Finnishness, gender and social class, for example." - RESEARCHER I ANTI-RACISTIC PEDAGOGIC

Remember!

- The best and most effective results are usually achieved by negotiating locally with the school and the municipality.
- Sometimes a minor can also file a complaint, but who can be active also depends on the situation and should be further defined for example in the Basic Education Act
- Schools often misunderstand the EU Data Protection Regulation and keep data secret. Families have the right to know what happened at school and who did what (www.hemochskola.fi/2020/09/28/hemligtellerinte_artikel/)
- Request written documentation of everything!
- Filing a complaint is often free of charge.
- The complaint must be written in Finnish or Swedish, otherwise the authorities are not obliged to give a decision or investigate the complaint.
- Discrimination is often difficult to prove, and in a legal tradition that places a lot of emphasis on evidence, this is a challenge, If you have evidence, save it.
- Legal protection mechanisms are fragmented and it can be unclear who is responsible for what.
- Judicial protection mechanisms are overloaded and slow, and many of them do not provide a legally binding decision.
- Going to the media can make it easier to make an impact.
- If the difficult situation continues, you can change schools or move to another municipality.
- Every contact with an authority makes discrimination in schools more visible. Even if the contact does not lead to any direct action, every single action of you parents contributes to creating an environment where discrimination is identified and recognised. Public debate and education on racism is a step towards eradicating racism and discrimination in schools.
- Don't stay alone when facing problems related to discrimination - seek help and support in your situation, for example from the authorities, a lawyer or a third sector organisation.

"It's very important to get support from other families, otherwise you can't cope." - PARENT

DIVa tips for parents

- Listen to your child! Is he/she safe? Monitor the situation and pay attention to changes in behaviour. If your child suddenly acts out, gets hurt in the stomach, doesn't want to talk about their school day or doesn't want to go to school, take it seriously. Don't force your child to go to school, but find out what's going on and contact the school and the school's medical staff. When you tell them that the school is not safe for the child and that the child is therefore at home, the school will usually listen. The child should only go to school when it feels safe.

- Be proactive. Before the child starts school or kindergarten or moves to a new school - have a dialogue with staff, talk about past experiences, bring information materials and literature to school and talk to other parents, ask the school to bring knowledgeable speakers on the topic of discrimination to parent-teacher meetings.
- Experience shows that if it is difficult to engage in dialogue with a school, this often indicates internal problems and therefore it can be difficult to resolve cases of discrimination and racism. Sometimes this may be a reason to change schools. Check if there are other schools in the municipality or in a neighbouring municipality. Home schooling is another option. In Finland we have compulsory education, not compulsory schooling. Contact www.suomenkotikouluyhdistys.fi for more information.
- Build a network of people in the same situation so you can support each other. There are organisations in the third sector that you can talk to, for example Mieli, Tjeivillan, Tyttöjen talo, the Public Health Youth Clinic, the Helsinki Mission, crisis centres, Victim Support Finland, various associations for minorities, your religious congregations.
- Contact the authorities mentioned above. For your child, knowing that you are doing something can be important and reassuring. Think also of other children who may be helped by your action. Remember that children's rights at school are fundamental rights based on the Finnish Constitution.
- Most importantly, make sure your child is OK and take their experiences seriously! If necessary, get your child counselling and health care, but also a network of friends, hobbies and other extracurricular activities. Support your child by telling them about others who have gone through similar things to show that they are not alone. Remember that school health professionals are linked to the school so find services outside the school if it feels traumatising to go there.

7. Glossary of terms²⁴

Ableism is the assumption that the world is broadly structured to accommodate the needs and the abilities of people without disabilities. Disabled people are seen as deviating from the norm and inferior. Ableism leads to discrimination, which can also be called disablism.

Anti-racism is the recognition that racism exists and that we are all part of racism as a system. It involves proactive and conscious action to resist racist actions, structures, institutions and organisations. Anti-racism is active work to prevent and combat racist discrimination, the consequences of discriminatory practices and negative prejudices.

The term BIPOC is derived from the words *Black*, *Indigenous*, *People of Colour*. The term has recently been introduced, as the discrimination and racism and the oppression suffered by black and indigenous people is specific in comparison to the oppression suffered by other POC. Both of these terms (POC, BIPOC) refer to all groups of people who are not perceived as white.

Discrimination means that a person is treated less favourably than others or disadvantaged on the basis of a personal characteristic without an acceptable reason. There are various forms of discrimination mentioned in the Non-Discrimination Act (L 1325/2014):

Direct discrimination (section 10): A person is treated less favourably than someone else without an acceptable reason. For example, a trader refuses to let a black person into his business premises.

Indirect discrimination (section 13): Rules, criteria or practices may disadvantage someone without an acceptable reason. For example, in a job situation, excellent knowledge of Finnish is required, even if it is not necessary for the job.

Harassment (Section 14): The Discrimination Act prohibits harassment. The Act defines harassment as behaviour that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's human dignity. The behaviour creates a degrading, intimidating

The Equality Act (section 7) prohibits sexual harassment and harassment based on gender, gender identity or gender expression.

Refusal to make reasonable adjustments (section 15): Public authorities, education providers, employers and those providing goods or services must make reasonable adjustments for persons with disabilities. Reasonable accommodation ensures the equal treatment of persons with disabilities in individual situations. Refusal to make reasonable adjustments constitutes discrimination.

Instructions or orders to discriminate (Section 8): Instructions or orders to discriminate are prohibited by law. For example, a manager who instructs employees in a shop not to serve customers of foreign origin is guilty of discrimination. Discrimination is involved even if the employee has not yet followed the instruction. Following discriminatory instructions or orders is also considered discrimination.

Prohibition of discriminatory job advertising (Section 17): An employer who advertises a vacancy or position may not require applicants to have the personal characteristics mentioned in the Non-Discrimination Act.

Prohibition of retaliation (section 16): A person may not be treated unfavourably or with negative consequences because they have invoked rights or obligations under the Non-Discrimination Act, participated in the investigation of a case of discrimination or taken other measures to ensure equal treatment.²⁵

Diversity means that society is made up of different individuals and groups with different backgrounds. However, they are located in different positions in relation to each other. Standing up for diversity is not the same as equality or inclusion. We can talk about diversity without doing anything concrete about the institutional and structural systems that create and maintain inequalities.

Exoticization means that a non-white person is scrutinised only on the basis of their ethnicity and the stereotypes associated with it and is therefore seen as exotic or exciting. For example, a pupil may be perceived as having 'rhythm in their blood' simply because they are of African origin.

Exceptionalisation means a belief in the superiority of one's own people over other populations.

Inclusion means that people from different backgrounds and identities are valued and welcomed as equals, and equal. When inclusion is present, all people can be successful and share a sense of belonging. Diversity efforts alone do not create an environment that is open to all. Inclusion is about the person feeling that they can be included and accepted as they are, without having to assimilate with the dominant group and give up their own identity.

Institutional (or structural) racism refers to the structures that favour the majority and disadvantage minority groups in society. Institutional racism widens gaps between groups in society and reinforces white power, while harming racialised individuals.

Internalised racism is both a conscious and unconscious process. The individual experiencing racism sees racist ideas, beliefs and patterns of behaviour associated with their own group and occurring in the majority society as natural and true, thereby internalising inferiority. Thus, the oppressed support the dominant group's power position by indirectly or directly participating in the attitudes, behaviours and ideologies that maintain the dominant group's power.

Interpersonal racism is the most obvious form of racism and the one most often thought of first. It is racism that is shared between two or more individuals. It is expressed through comments, actions, beliefs or attitudes. The person expressing racism may do so intentionally or unintentionally. It can be, for example, statements that are seen as unintentional discrimination or 'well-meaning' such as so-called microaggressions.

Equality means the equal dignity of all human beings regardless of origin, gender, gender identity, gender expression, age, ethnic or national origin, citizenship, language, religion, belief, opinion, disability, health status, sexual orientation or any other characteristic of an individual.

Marginalisation occurs when members of the dominant group in a society place a particular group outside the meaningful contexts, thus preventing them from having an active voice, an identity or to take up space. Marginalisation aims to maintain the position of the dominant group in society.

Microaggressions are everyday small words, actions and assumptions that convey stereotypical assumptions about groups in society. Microaggressions can be intentional or unintentional and are often referred to as 'well-meaning'.

Minority stress is the additional stress that a member of a minority experiences in their life because of their minority status. The stress can be related both to past racist or discriminatory treatment and to the fear of being victimised in the future.

POC (*People of Colour*) is a political or social, but not biological, identity for people who are racialised as non-white. The term can be understood as an umbrella term as it includes different groups that are racialised as non-white and is often used to highlight the fact that many different groups in society are subject to racism.

Race is a social and political construct, with no genetic or biological basis. The concept aims to categorise and divide people based on physical and social attributes, such as skin colour, origin, cultural history and ethnicity. The term has been used historically and is still used to justify domination, exploitation and violence against people who are racialised as non-white. Although race is not a biological truth, it has a real social, political and economic impact on how we are perceived and understood in society and how we perceive and identify ourselves.

Racialisation is a process of attributing characteristics to a person or group of people based on hypothetical race or ethnicity. Racialisation can occur in interpersonal relationships and at the societal level. The end result of racialisation is racism or racial discrimination. All people are racialised, including people of white skin colour, but this racialisation is generally invisible and often involves privilege.

Racism is a mindset in which certain groups of people are considered to have a lower status, for example because of ethnic origin, skin colour, citizenship, culture, mother tongue or religion. Racism can take the form of intentional or unintentional behaviour between individuals or groups based on prejudice and fear of the unknown. Racism can also be discriminatory structures in society. Racism perpetuates inequalities and is harmful not only to those who are victims of racism, but also to society as a whole. Racism is a system whereby policies, institutions, culture and norms maintain positions of power in society and some groups of people are considered to have a lower status than others.

Everyday racism includes racist acts that are repeated and commonplace. In other words, racism that is reproduced in everyday and familiar situations.

The whiteness norm does not refer to skin colour but to invisible social hierarchies and power relations, where the Western and European norm is seen as defining the social structures and representing the norm from which one starts. This normativity is only revealed when one deviates from it.

White supremacy is the use and exploitation of power to enhance and maintain the power and resources of white people. It is built on an ideology based on a norm of whiteness, i.e. the belief that white people are superior to other people.

White fragility refers to the defensive feelings and behaviours that white people exhibit when faced with uncomfortable knowledge about racial issues. This can take the form of emotions such as anger, fear and guilt. Defensive emotions and behaviours can also manifest themselves in argumentation, silence or withdrawal from situations where racism is raised or occurs.

White privilege is the power and privileges granted to people perceived as white solely because of this characteristic and without any other merit.

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NGO DIVa - Parents for Diversity

wants to raise awareness of multiculturalism and anti-racism in schools and local government and promote equal treatment in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The organisation carries out advocacy work through seminars, discussions, publications and meetings.

The association also organises events such as theatre visits, nature outings and parties for minority families.

Find out more at www.diva.ngo.

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