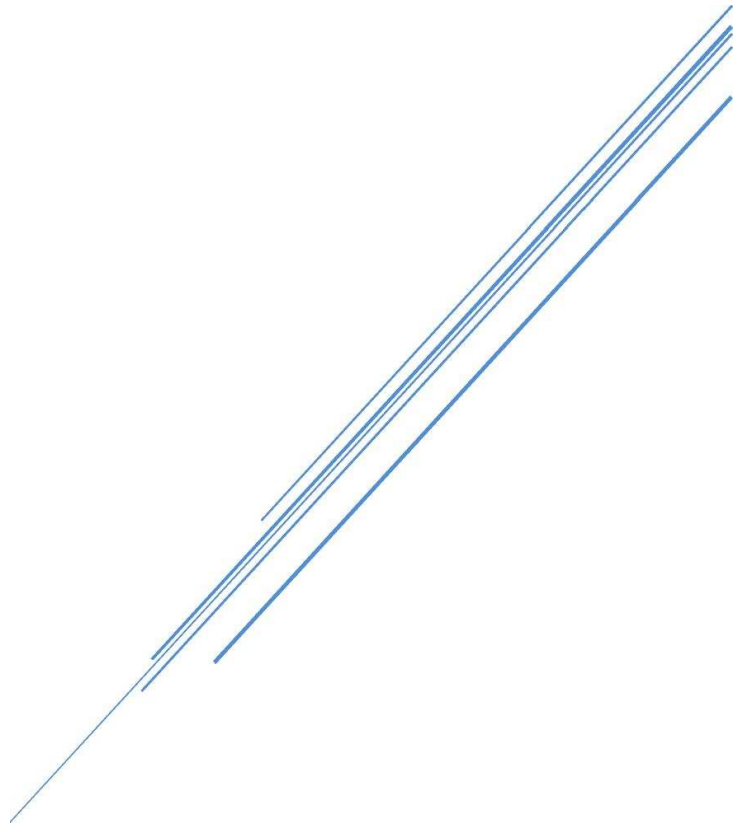**innerstrengthconsulting**

MERTON SUCCESSION PLANNING REPORT FOR BLACK ASIAN MINORITY ETHNIC TEACHERS
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Interviewing for insight

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1. Executive Summary

There were 24 schools who participated and 20 BAME teachers who were interviewed consisting of primary schools and special schools. There were no responses from the secondary schools; this was unfortunate as it would have been useful to explore the differences between the two phases and to compare the distinct challenges faced by BAME teachers within the primary and secondary sectors.

The interview questions were organised under the following headings
- Opportunities
- Support
- Barriers
- Headship
- Culture
- Coaching and mentoring

There were several themes that emerged from the interviews conducted and they were as follows;

Opportunities

In exploring the theme of *Opportunities*, the interviewees fell into five broad categories:

1. Those who took on additional responsibilities without receiving recognition or reward
2. Those who were proactive and were 'go-getters'
3. Those whose gifts were recognised either by OFSTED or external agencies but this recognition did not necessarily result in career progression
4. Those who felt that they were somehow 'stuck' and unable to progress.
5. Those who remained resilient in the face of a range of challenges, identified as 'fighters'; not because they were disruptive but because they remained passionate and hopeful regarding their future careers.

Looking at each group in a more detail, we found the following:
Teachers taking on extra *responsibility but without receiving the recognition* felt they were being used specifically as a result of their ethnic and cultural characteristics translating on behalf of the school, dealing with difficult BAME parents, as well as advising on issues of culture. These duties were carried out in addition to their teaching responsibilities and they felt that this was taken for granted and that they were not given credit for these interventions. It must be noted that this group of teachers were committed to their schools and passionate about their work and did want to appear ungrateful, but felt that they took on additional responsibilities, however, they found it difficult not understand why their contribution to the work of the school in this area was not recognised or rewarded by the school leadership. Teachers in this group also felt 'trapped' in the sense that whenever they expressed an interest in leadership posts and in some cases actually applying for specific posts they were told that their skills were needed in their current post.

Those teachers, described as '*go getters*' because they were highly motivated and proactive about their continued professional development, were not fazed by their ethnicity but simply strived to succeed in their professional development. Those teachers in this group met with a measure of success. However, whenever they successfully applied for leadership roles they were told that even though they were the best candidate for the post they were told to hold off until another time as their skills were needed in their current role. In these cases the needs of the school mitigated against the progression of talented teachers.

The third group of teachers, described as those who are '*head hunted*' because they were recognised as being very good or outstanding teachers and were encourage by external agencies to apply for various leadership roles due to their expertise in a particular area of work. These teachers described their schools as having a culture of excellence and reported that received great support from their Head teacher and or leadership team and as a result thrived in a great atmosphere contributed to their success as teachers. Ironically those in this group, lacked the confidence to 'take the leadership leap; they all felt that they held themselves back due to a lack of confidence and concerns regarding being able to fulfil the demands of leadership or headship and maintain a healthy work-life balance. This group needed actual encouragement to apply for Headship but also role models of heads who modelled a healthy work-life balance.

The fourth group of respondents were teachers who felt '*stuck*' due to what they perceived as limited opportunities to apply for specific leadership roles because they lacked experience and were not able to access appropriate training for continued professional development (hereafter, CPD) or opportunities to gain the experience needed to successfully apply for leadership roles. Those in this group were typically in their roles for a considerable length of time and at times feel frustrated as there are no openings for them to excel due to a variety of factors including the culture of their particular school, low or unclear expectations regarding what was needed to progress.

The fifth and final group of teachers are called '*fighters*' for the benefit of this report. Those teachers in this group were overwhelmingly positive in their outlook. They remained resilient and determined despite a number of negative experiences received in their careers; these teachers refused to give up hope and welcomed the local authority caring enough to investigate what the issues are. They remained up-beat and optimistic even whilst acknowledging the very real challenges that they faced as BAME teachers. They all had clear aspirations with clear plans of action in order to achieve them.

Support

Interviewees spoke about the clique culture within schools. There was a repeated perception that that if your face did not fit then you would not be called to attend courses or participate in some activity that would be beneficial in terms of CPD. Teachers spoke of an unspoken culture of exclusion. Although the cliques were mentioned there was not much clarity as to whether these cliques were aware that they were alienating other members of the teaching profession. Head teachers in particular should ensure that they are inclusive when organising events within their school and take into consideration some BAME group's faith.

However some interviewees were clear that they had been discriminated against as White UK colleagues, relatively new to the school were provided with more opportunities to apply for posts. Even if a particular staff was considered suitably qualified and experience to apply for leadership posts, it was found that they were told by their head teachers that their focus should be on another area of development. Twenty per cent of interviewees felt that despite being in the profession for some time and mentoring other White UK counterparts to succeed they were dissuaded from pursuing specific leadership post. The challenge for Merton is to create a culture where the perception of exclusion of BAME teachers is challenged by the presence of visible role models coupled with real transparency and openness about the criteria for progression to leadership within the borough.

We asked interviewees, "Have you ever experienced discrimination related to any of the following protected characteristics?"

38% said yes
62% said no
Barriers

There were 64% of teachers who said they had not even considered applying for a senior role. The main barriers which arose for BAME teachers related to not being given enough opportunities to gain the right kind of experience to develop and broaden their skills and experience in order to have a better chance of success when applying for senior leadership roles. There were some examples of BAME members of staff who were given additional responsibilities, however, these extra responsibilities whether paid or unpaid were not primarily related to the member of staff's specialism, which resulted in confusion and feelings of slight resentment. Staff felt that they were being used as opposed to being provided with opportunities to develop and progress.

We also found that teachers' own confidence played a significant role in the decision to apply. Part of supporting or undermining confidence was that it was important to provide teacher with developmental opportunities that were aligned to teachers' developmental needs and CPD goals. We found that a number of teachers were provided with training that they felt was inappropriate as it related to areas where these teachers felt they had sufficient skill and expertise. As a result of this, teachers felt that they were being judged as being somehow inadequate or simply not good enough.

How schools supported cultural difference and the religious and ethnic backgrounds of teachers presented a specific barrier for BAME teachers. Ten per cent of those interviewed felt that their identity as Muslim teachers and their decision to wear traditional clothing impacted on their ability to progress in Merton There were also examples from teachers who were advised to apply for leadership roles in another borough where they would be treated more favourably as they were Asian. Further, there was a suggestion that that Islamophobia may be an issue. Some Muslim teachers who chose to wear traditional attire spoke about the specific challenges they faced from parents, teachers and non-teaching staff. These teachers were committed to their schools and their faith and were keen to dispel myths by explaining cultural differences.

Headship

Most of the teachers spoke about the pressures that being a head teacher would bring and the impact it would have on their family and work-life balance. Some BAME teachers spoke about the importance family and faith and that these factors took priority for them. Others spoke about the fear of failure especially when they considered the perceived lack of support for BAME head teachers and Senior Leaders. The other issue of lack of experience remained a constant theme during these questions relating to Headship.

Culture

Many BAME teachers were uncomfortable with these questions as it directly related to whether they had experienced discrimination. Most of the teachers said they had not experienced direct discrimination but suggested that further training for head teachers needed to be provided in order to help head teachers to have a greater understanding of and sensitivity towards the distinct support needs of staff from various cultural backgrounds.

Promoting inclusion should be considered as a whole school initiative from head teachers to staff and parents. At times BAME staff received abuse from the parents and lack of understanding from teachers. Staff also felt that their White UK colleagues 'tip toeing' around them in order not to offend was considered to be potentially offensive in itself. The experience of being treated equality and the reality of level playing field was essential. These teachers went on to refer how they had been treated differently from their white counterparts especially in terms of training, internal leadership roles and career progression.

Coaching and Mentoring

Nearly all teachers said that coaching and mentoring would build confidence and guide them in their career development. This could be done via action learning sets, group coaching or via one to one sessions for teachers.

Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1:** Talent Management for BAME Leaders is valuable tool that should be used within schools. Talent management is about communicating, the mission, vision and values of the school to all staff and establishing clear expectations.1 The job descriptions and criteria should be clear in order to realistically measure performance, promote training/CPD and succession planning for all staff.

- **Recommendation 2**: That a formal BAME Teachers' network be set up to support BAME staff in their career development. This would also acknowledge that various cultures bring their own expertise within school systems and potentially act as an advisory network for the borough.

- **Recommendations 3:** To provide refresher equality and diversity training for Head teachers in order to help them to understand how best to support different cultures within their school.

- **Recommendation 4**: to provide shadowing training with Head Teachers and or senior leaders, which would enable other teachers with the potential to become future Head Teachers to experience what is required for Headship roles.

- **Recommendation 5:** to provide secondment opportunities. The challenge will be finding the time for Head teachers to do this, however, this challenge is not insurmountable.

- **Recommendation 6** If budget permits, to obtain relevant research from secondary schools in order to explore the CPD and career aspirations of BAME teachers in this sector, as well as the barrier to progression that they may face.

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