# Surge in suspensions for racist behaviour includes children as young as four



Children as young as four years old are being sent home from school for racist behaviour, with suspensions for such incidents more than doubling in recent years. Government data reveals that in the 2023/24 academic year, over 15,000 pupils were suspended for racism, compared to 7,403 in 2021. This increase spans various forms of misconduct, including the use of discriminatory language, physical assaults, graffiti, and social media posts.

The Department for Education disclosed that among those suspended last year, 2,485 were primary-aged children, with five cases involving Reception pupils as young as four to five years old. Such figures have sparked concern among campaigners who argue that very young children may not fully understand the concept of racism, while older pupils are facing disciplinary actions for racist posts on social media platforms. Experts link the rise in suspensions to a broader surge in antisocial behaviour following Covid-related lockdowns, which disrupted social interaction and normal school routines.

Incidents of racist abuse have attracted widespread attention in recent years. In one harrowing episode, a black girl was subjected to a violent attack by a group of youngsters outside a school in Ashford, a case that led to multiple convictions and a prison sentence for an adult involved in encouraging the assault. Another notable example comes from a prestigious London private school, Lycée Français Charles de Gaulle, where a black student reported experiencing sustained racism, including being called a "monkey," hearing racist jokes, and encountering demands for an "N-word pass" from white classmates. Such testimonies highlight that racist behaviour is not confined to any one sector of the education system, affecting even fee-paying institutions in affluent areas.

The rise in suspensions reflects a national trend documented across multiple regions. London schools reported 4,381 suspensions for racist abuse between the 2020-21 and 2023-24 autumn terms. Similarly, data from Bedford and Doncaster shows hundreds of suspensions in the same period, consistent with a near doubling of cases across England. Councils with the highest recorded suspensions include Essex, Kent, Hampshire, and Hertfordshire, among others.

While there is consensus on the need to address racist behaviour firmly, some experts caution against overzealous punishments. Christopher McGovern, Chairman of the Campaign for Real Education, told The Mirror that secondary schools should adopt zero tolerance for clear evidence of racist incidents, with repeated offences warranting permanent exclusion. However, he warned against treating pupils as "thought police" targets for unthinking or erroneous comments, emphasising the need for a measured approach to discipline.

The government has responded to these troubling statistics with a commitment to providing greater support for schools. A Department for Education spokesperson called the increase in suspensions "unacceptable" and reiterated the pledge to combat racism and discrimination in educational settings. The Education Secretary’s strategy includes setting up behaviour and attendance hubs to target schools with the greatest needs, alongside broader initiatives such as free breakfast clubs and enhanced mental health support to address underlying behavioural issues.

Despite these measures, experts and campaigners argue that schools need more proactive policies not only to penalise racist behaviour but also to tackle its root causes. This includes educating pupils about diversity and inclusion, managing online hate speech, and maintaining safe environments where all children can learn without fear of discrimination.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15035843/Children-young-four-sent-home-racist-behaviour-number-suspensions-doubles-15-000.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/children-sent-home-school-racist-behaviour-b1244461.html), [[3]](https://www.upday.com/uk/uknews/school-racism-doubles-4-year-olds-among-15000-hit/hlsqhwj), [[5]](https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/absence-and-exclusions/pupil-exclusions/latest/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15035843/Children-young-four-sent-home-racist-behaviour-number-suspensions-doubles-15-000.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/children-sent-home-school-racist-behaviour-b1244461.html), [[3]](https://www.upday.com/uk/uknews/school-racism-doubles-4-year-olds-among-15000-hit/hlsqhwj)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15035843/Children-young-four-sent-home-racist-behaviour-number-suspensions-doubles-15-000.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15035843/Children-young-four-sent-home-racist-behaviour-number-suspensions-doubles-15-000.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://barnetpost.co.uk/2025/02/08/racist-abuse-thousands-of-school-suspensions-handed-out-to-pupils-in-london/), [[6]](https://www.bedfordtoday.co.uk/education/racist-abuse-more-than-100-school-suspensions-handed-out-to-pupils-in-bedford-4951013), [[7]](https://www.doncasterfreepress.co.uk/education/racist-abuse-hundreds-of-school-suspensions-handed-out-to-pupils-in-doncaster-4946707)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15035843/Children-young-four-sent-home-racist-behaviour-number-suspensions-doubles-15-000.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15035843/Children-young-four-sent-home-racist-behaviour-number-suspensions-doubles-15-000.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15035843/Children-young-four-sent-home-racist-behaviour-number-suspensions-doubles-15-000.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/children-sent-home-school-racist-behaviour-b1244461.html> - The Standard reports that over 15,000 pupils were suspended for racist behaviour in the 2023/24 academic year, a significant increase from 7,403 cases in 2021. Among these suspensions, 2,485 involved primary school children, including five pupils aged four to five. Incidents ranged from racist language to physical assaults and vandalism. Experts attribute the rise to challenging behaviour post-pandemic and call for proactive measures to address the root causes of racism in schools.
3. <https://www.upday.com/uk/uknews/school-racism-doubles-4-year-olds-among-15000-hit/hlsqhwj> - Upday News highlights a dramatic surge in school suspensions for racist behaviour, with over 15,000 pupils suspended in the 2023/24 academic year, up from 7,403 in 2021. The data reveals that five Reception pupils aged between four and five were among those disciplined. The incidents included racist language, physical assaults, and vandalism. Experts suggest that the lack of social interaction during lockdowns has impacted pupil behaviour, leading to an increase in such incidents.
4. <https://barnetpost.co.uk/2025/02/08/racist-abuse-thousands-of-school-suspensions-handed-out-to-pupils-in-london/> - Barnet Post reports that between the 2020-21 and 2023-24 autumn terms, London schools issued 4,381 suspensions for racist abuse. This figure reflects a significant rise in suspensions across England, from 2,628 in the 2020-21 autumn term to 4,966 in the 2023-24 term. Experts express concern over the increasing number of suspensions and advocate for proactive policies to address the root causes of racism in schools.
5. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/absence-and-exclusions/pupil-exclusions/latest/> - The UK Government's Ethnicity Facts and Figures website provides data on pupil exclusions, including suspensions for racist abuse. In the 2022 to 2023 school year, 11,619 suspensions were recorded for racist abuse, accounting for 1.3% of all suspensions. The data also breaks down suspensions by ethnicity, highlighting disparities among different groups. This resource underscores the prevalence of racist incidents in schools and the need for targeted interventions.
6. <https://www.bedfordtoday.co.uk/education/racist-abuse-more-than-100-school-suspensions-handed-out-to-pupils-in-bedford-4951013> - Bedford Today reports that between the 2020-21 and 2023-24 autumn terms, Bedford schools issued 109 suspensions for racist abuse. This reflects a broader trend across England, where suspensions for racist abuse have nearly doubled in three years, from 2,628 in the 2020-21 autumn term to 4,966 in the 2023-24 term. Experts call for proactive strategies to address the root causes of racism and discrimination in schools.
7. <https://www.doncasterfreepress.co.uk/education/racist-abuse-hundreds-of-school-suspensions-handed-out-to-pupils-in-doncaster-4946707> - Doncaster Free Press reports that between the 2020-21 and 2023-24 autumn terms, Doncaster schools issued 267 suspensions for racist abuse. This increase aligns with a national trend, where suspensions for racist abuse across English schools have nearly doubled in three years, from 2,628 in the 2020-21 autumn term to 4,966 in the 2023-24 term. Experts attribute the rise to factors such as the spread of hateful content online and advocate for better regulation to address the issue.