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Conference unites independent and state schools on staff room diversity campaign

Francis Holland School, Regent's Park hosted more than 120 headteachers to discuss why staff from diverse backgrounds must reach leadership positions



James Higgins

More than 120 headteachers joined an event calling for more ethnically diverse staff rooms and more Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff in leadership positions.

The event was organised by schools from the independent and maintained sectors.

The Teachers Like Me conference was co-hosted by All Saints Catholic College, King Solomon Academy, The St Marylebone CE School and Francis Holland School (FHS), Regent's Park.

Panellists at the event stressed the importance of a "top-down" approach from senior school leaders and efforts to improve the diversity of members of school governing bodies. Senior leaders on the panel called on their peers to view job applicants in "holistic" and "creative" ways to foster diverse potential.

They urged school leaders to prioritise removing barriers to recruitment and progression, arguing that better teacher diversity improves the school experience and prepares students fully for the wider world.

Difference is challenging to your emotions, but it is necessary for your development –
Allana Gay, headteacher

Zehra Jaffer, headteacher at Stoke Newington School, told delegates that teachers from diverse backgrounds struggle to find role models within the profession. Despite being one of the most diverse cities in the country, where 40% of the population identifies from minority ethnic backgrounds, just 4% of headteachers in London are Black, Asian or minority ethnic.

Allana Gay, headteacher at Vita et Pax Preparatory School and co-founder of BAMEed Network, told the audience of school leaders: "Difference is challenging to your emotions, but it is necessary for your development."

Headmaster at FHS, Charles Fillingham, said: "Schools have never been more important as powerful agents of change. This event shows that schools are determined to play their part in building a more inclusive society without barriers."