



# Affinity Bias

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Training



## What is Affinity Bias?

Affinity bias, also known as similarity bias, is the tendency to favour individuals who share similar backgrounds, interests, and experiences. In education, this can affect teacher expectations, student interactions, staff relationships, and hiring decisions, often leading to a lack of diversity and inclusivity in schools.

## How Does Affinity Bias Manifest in Education?

**Expectations & Encouragement:** Teachers may (consciously or unconsciously) offer more encouragement to students who share similar backgrounds, interests, or learning styles.

**Discipline & Behaviour Management:** Students who relate more closely to a teacher's experiences may receive more leniency, while others may face stricter discipline.

**Subject Choices & Career Guidance:** Students may be subtly steered towards subjects and careers that align with the teacher's own experiences rather than their actual interests and strengths.

**Hiring & Promotions:** Preference may be given to candidates with similar backgrounds or experiences, leading to a lack of diversity in leadership roles.

**Mentorship & Support:** Staff members may be more likely to mentor or support colleagues who share similar life experiences, potentially limiting opportunities for others.

**Team Dynamics:** Informal cliques may form within staff teams based on shared affinities, making it harder for others to feel included or have their ideas valued.

## Recognising Affinity Bias in Schools

**Homogeneous Leadership Teams:** Lack of diversity in senior leadership roles.

**Unequal Student Support:** Certain students receiving more encouragement or opportunities based on shared affinities with teachers.

**Subjective Hiring Criteria:** A preference for "culture fit" over objective qualifications and diverse perspectives.

**Exclusive Staff Networks:** Informal staff groups forming based on shared backgrounds, potentially leading to exclusion of others.

## Strategies to Combat Affinity Bias in Education

**Structured Recruitment:** Use diverse hiring panels and objective criteria to ensure fair and balanced recruitment.

**Inclusive Leadership:** Promote diverse leadership teams to provide varied perspectives and challenge unconscious bias.

**Equitable Student Support:** Ensure all students receive equal encouragement, guidance, and access to opportunities.

**Inclusive Team Building:** Foster activities that encourage collaboration and interaction among all staff members.



## Reflective Questions

To better understand how affinity bias may appear in your school, consider the following questions:

### **Recruitment & Staff Development:**

Do you notice a tendency to favour candidates who share similar backgrounds, interests, or teaching philosophies?

What strategies can you implement to ensure hiring decisions are based on skills, experience, and suitability for the role, rather than personal affinities?

### **Leadership & Career Progression:**

Are leadership opportunities and promotions more likely to be given to staff members who share characteristics with decision-makers or senior staff?

What processes can you use to ensure that promotions are based on merit and not on personal similarities or shared traits?

### **Team Dynamics & Collaboration:**

Do certain groups of staff or students form based on shared affinities, such as teaching subjects, cultural backgrounds, or extracurricular interests?

What steps can you take to encourage a more inclusive and collaborative environment where all individuals feel valued, regardless of shared affinities?

### **Mentoring & Professional Development:**

Are mentorship or professional development opportunities predominantly offered to individuals who are similar to the mentors in terms of background or interests?

How can you ensure that all staff and students have equal access to mentoring, development, and support, regardless of their background or personal interests?

### **School Culture & Inclusion:**

Does your school environment feel more welcoming or supportive to certain groups of staff, students, or families based on shared backgrounds or interests?

What actions can you take to create a more inclusive and accepting school culture where everyone feels valued, regardless of their personal traits or experiences?

