

A nationwide scheme has been launched today (Monday 4 March) to tackle prejudice and discrimination in Scotland's classrooms.

The 'Inclusion and Diversity Charter Mark' will recognise the efforts of schools in promoting inclusion and diversity, placing pupil-to-pupil learning at the heart of the project.

The scheme has been developed by young women and will be piloted in Edinburgh and rolled out across the country.

The Charter Mark will help schools examine policy, practice and legal obligations on equality for all young people, and Action for Children, the charity behind the scheme, has created 'Equality Indicators' for schools so they can mark progress towards the recognition.

Pupils will be encouraged to share their experiences with each other and help teach the next generation of youngsters to reject prejudice and discrimination. The award was created by young people supported by Action for Children, and was launched at Broughton High School in Edinburgh, along with Anas Sarwar MSP, the chair of the Cross-Party Group on Tackling Islamophobia.

It was inspired and developed by young women who took part in the charity's 'Heritage and Inclusion' project based in Edinburgh, which works with more than 50 young people of 19 different nationalities. It sees the young women spend time researching and developing heritage learning using oral histories, archives and art collections allowing them to become more aware of their own heritage and increase their participation in the community.

Toqa Abdel Motalab, 16, from Edinburgh was one of the young women who developed the 'Inclusion and Diversity Charter Mark'. "I loved being part of the 'Inclusion and Diversity Charter Mark' journey from beginning, finally, our voices were being heard," she said. "I was part of the co-production and I even helped secure funding for it. It was such a special day to think that my work, my experiences and my dedication was going to help other young people who suffer from isolation and racism in Scotland.

"I saw the 'Inclusion and Diversity Charter Mark' actually work, with real outcomes being made. It was so inspirational to me hearing comments like "it doesn't matter what we say, it won't make a difference in our school" change to "my voice got heard, and teachers listened to me, I now know what I can do to make change happen". I feel this can be a brilliant change."

Paul Carberry, Action for Children Director for Scotland, said: "We are very proud to be launching the 'Inclusion and Diversity Charter Mark' with some of the young people behind creating it.

"We believe this pupil-led award will encourage schools to further develop social justice and inclusion for Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) young people while promoting equality and anti-racist education. Furthermore, it will demonstrate to all BAME young people that their school includes and supports them to identify their rights and provides understanding and support to their individual needs.

"Our vision is for schools across Scotland to achieve accreditation against the 'Inclusion and Diversity Charter Mark' for their commitment to promoting the inclusion and identity of all young people. This is a legacy-based model which is self-sustaining through identifying 'Inclusion Champions' within each school and building their skills and capacity. Young people then play an active role as 'agents of change' who then support their peers and help instil a culture of inclusion from the inside out."

Anas Sarwar MSP, chair of the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Tackling Islamophobia, said: "Education is the key to defeating prejudice and discrimination.

"Everyday racism can be found in our classrooms and playgrounds across the country, and too many young people in Scotland face bullying and discrimination.

"Teachers play a vital role in changing this culture, but the best lessons for children often come from fellow children, building confidence and better understanding.

"This Charter Mark focuses on pupil-led education and the real-life experiences of pupils, providing support to the next generation so that together we can build a Scotland free of prejudice and discrimination."