

Raising The Achievement of White Working Class Pupils

Barriers and School Strategies

Executive Summary

Acknowledgements

This research was commissioned by London Borough of Lambeth in the light of the growing national concern about the low attainment of White British children from a low income background. It is hoped that the findings will be of value to policy makers, schools and practitioners.

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¹For details of the reports see: Demie, F and Lewis, K. (2010). *White Working Class Achievement: Barriers to learning*, Research and Statistics Unit, London Borough of Lambeth, January.

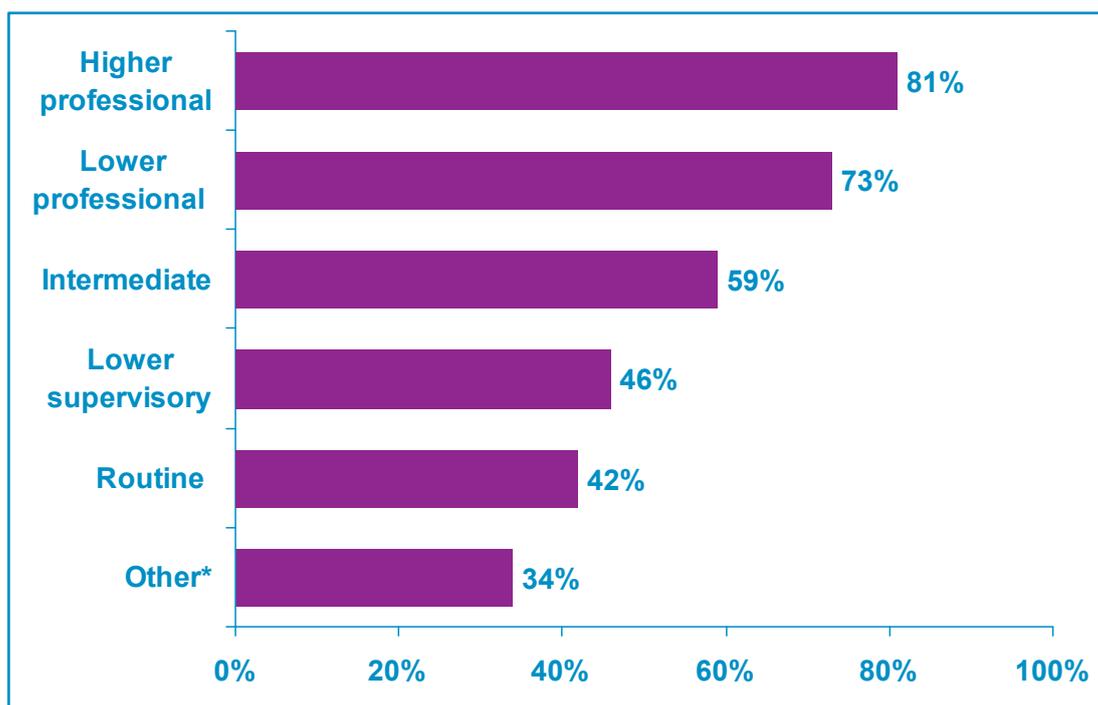
Demie, F and Lewis, K. (2010). *Raising Achievement of White Working Class Pupils: School Strategies*, Research and Statistics Unit, London Borough of Lambeth, January.

Section 1: Introduction

1. Background to the Study

This study aims to examine the key barriers to learning and the school strategies to raise achievement of White British pupils with low income backgrounds. There is increasing evidence that the performance of pupils from a White British background in inner city schools is beginning to fall behind that of some of the other ethnic groups. Yet the educational underachievement of White British working class pupils in schools has seldom been discussed in the achievement debate and national policy formulation.

Figure 1. 5+A*-C GCSE Results by Parents' Social Class in England 2006



* Never worked and long term unemployed

Source: The Youth Cohort Study (YCS) 2004; <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000560/Addition1.xls> (accessed 3 November 2007)

Recent research on social class and attainment provides a useful means of understanding and talking about social class and social class inequalities (Reay, 1998). Social class has been shown to have a significant impact on educational outcomes and future life chances even when educational achievement is high (Marshall, 2002). Working class pupils are less likely to achieve 5+A*-C passes at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) than their middle class peers and are less likely to go on to higher education (Babb, 2005; OFSTED, 2005). They are also less likely to attend a popular and successful school (Sutton Trust, 2005).

The above findings are also supported by the national Youth Cohort Study (YCS) of England and Wales, which provides some of the useful data on attainment and social class background using parental occupation. Figure 1 and Table 1 show a clear picture of how different social class groups shared unequally in GCSE attainment.

The data reveals that social class is strongly associated with achievement and there is a considerable difference in attainment between pupils with a professional and a

working class background. It confirms previous findings that pupils with parents with a higher and lower professional occupation do significantly better than those with parents in a manual occupation at GCSE. The proportion of pupils with 5+A*-C in the highest social class was at least twice as great as pupils with a manual working class background.

Trend YCS data also shows a rise in the proportion of young people gaining five or more GCSEs amongst all family backgrounds. Thus the percentage of 16 year olds with parents in routine occupations achieving this level has more than doubled between 1999 and 2006. However, large differences remained in 2006, with nearly 81% of higher professional occupation gaining 5+A*-C compared to 42% in routine occupation, with a gap of 39 percentage points. Nevertheless despite the high proportionate increase (see Table 1), there is still a long way to go before young people from lower socio-economic groups narrow the achievement gap with those from the higher socio-economic groups.

Table 1. GCSE performance by parental occupation

Parental Occupation	1999	2001	2003	2006
Higher professional	75%	77%	76%	81%
Lower professional	62%	64%	65%	73%
Intermediate	49%	51%	53%	59%
Lower supervisory	34%	34%	41%	46%
Routine	26%	31%	33%	42%
Other/not classified	24%	26%	34%	34%

Source: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b000795/index.shtml>

A statement from the then Department for education and Skills (DfES) in 2006 also acknowledges that there is a long-standing association between social class and educational achievement:

'There is a strong, direct and long-standing association between social class and successful achievement in education.' (DfES 2006:7).

DCFS figures for many years (1997-2006) show that pupils from advantaged backgrounds (managerial, professional) were more than three times as likely to obtain 5+ GCSE A*-C grades than their peers at the other end of the social spectrum (unskilled manual). Indeed, although children from both social groups have improved, in percentage terms, in obtaining 5+ GCSE A*-C grades, the gap between them is getting larger every year.

A recent research review commissioned by the DCSF has also revealed that;

'The attainment of White British pupils is polarised by social class to a greater extent than any other ethnic groups. White British pupils from managerial and professional homes are one of the highest attaining groups, while White British pupils from working class homes are the lowest attaining groups.' (Strand, 2008)

The body of available research suggests that most previous studies have focussed on reasons why working class children are underachieving but with scant research on positive experiences of white working class pupils in British schools.

In recent years the need for detailed case studies of successful schools in raising achievement has become apparent as a means of increasing our understanding of the ways in which schools can enhance pupils' academic achievement. The key challenge is to find out what successful schools are doing and why these strategies are proving to be effective in raising the achievement of white working class pupils. For these reasons, recently a number of studies have looked at examples of schools that provide an environment in which Black Caribbean pupils (OFSTED 2002; Demie 2005), Bangladeshi pupils (OFSTED 2004), African heritage pupils (Demie et al 2005) and Somali Pupils (Demie et al 2007) succeed.

We have not been able to identify successfully published evidence of what works in raising achievement of white working class pupils but a recent National College for School Leadership (NCSL) report into '*successful leadership for promoting the achievement of white working class pupils*' records encouraging signs of improvement in the ways schools are addressing the underachievement of the white working class (Mongon and Chapman 2008). Key findings in this study show that the case study schools have strong leadership and strong systems. The headteachers did not accept social class as a reason for failure. They all had high expectations of their students and a profound respect for the people and areas they were working with. Several headteachers came from low income backgrounds and claimed working class roots. Many of the success factors highlighted by the NCSL research report into raising the achievement of white working class pupils are based on the findings from mainly White British schools. However, there is little research into raising the achievement of white working class pupils in mainly multi-racial schools where schools are preparing children to live in a multiracial society by giving them an understanding of the culture and history of different ethnic groups to reflect the communities they serve.

The rich ethnic and linguistic diversity of British society is clearly evident in many classrooms today and there is a need for schools and learning environments to reflect the cultures of the communities they serve. The review of previous research highlighted a clear need for detailed case studies of barriers and successful strategies in raising the achievement of white working class pupils in multi-racial schools as a means of increasing our understanding of the ways in which schools can enhance pupils' academic achievement. However, little research has been carried out to study barriers to learning or to explore case studies of successful schools in raising the achievement of this group of pupils. This research is a case study in Lambeth Local Authority and reflects an emerging concern in the literature that the achievement of pupils from a White British background in inner city schools might have started to fall behind that of some ethnic groups. The key questions raised in the research include:

- What is the attainment of White British working class pupils in schools?
- What are the key barriers to learning?
- What strategies do schools use to raise achievement?

The methodological approach for this research comprises case studies of thirteen selected schools, extensive data analysis and focus group interviews. Using an ethnographic approach, detailed case study research was carried out to study the school experiences of white working class pupils including the reasons for underachievement. A structured questionnaire was used to interview headteachers, teachers, parents and pupils to gather evidence on barriers to learning, how well white working class pupils are achieving and pupils' views about the school and its support systems. Parent, pupil, governor and headteacher focus groups were also carried out to ascertain their views and to identify whether their experiences mirrored the views of those participants in the case study interviews.

Section 2: Barriers to Learning

The worryingly low achievement levels of many white working class pupils has been masked by the success of middle class white children in the English school system and failure of Government statistics to distinguish the White British ethnic group by social background. Official education statistics rarely include an accurate measure of a social class and economic background which are still the best indicator of life chances in Britain. This study confirms that one of the biggest groups of underachievers is the white working class. The national data shows that at GCSE, 35% of White British pupils eligible for free school meals achieved 5+A*-C, compared with 67% of pupils who were not eligible. There is a gap of 33 percentage points for White British compared with a 23 percentage point gap for mixed White/Black African, 20 percentage point gap for mixed White/Black Caribbean, 15 percentage point gap for Indian, 15 percentage point gap for African, 14 percentage point gap for black Caribbean pupils, 9 percentage point gap for Pakistani, whilst the gap for Bangladeshis and Chinese pupils was smaller at 6 percentage points. (Table 2).

Table 2. GCSE Performance by free school meals and ethnic background in England 2008 (5+ A*-C percentage)

Ethnic Background	Non FSM	FSM	GAP
Chinese	85%	79%	6
Bangladeshi	65%	59%	6
Pakistani	61%	52%	9
Black Caribbean	57%	43%	14
Black African	65%	50%	15
Indian	80%	64%	16
White and Black Caribbean	60%	40%	20
White and Black African	69%	46%	23
White British	67%	35%	33

Source: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000822/SFR322008-allKS4noNITables2.xls#Table>

The Lambeth data also suggests that there is a strong association between poverty, social class and successful achievement in education (Demie and Lewis, 2010 a,b). White British pupils are the ethnic group most polarised by the impact of socio-economic disadvantage. While poverty makes little difference to the achievements at school of some ethnic groups, it makes a vast difference to White British children on free school meals. Making comparisons between the educational attainments of different ethnic groups without explicitly considering the impact of economic disadvantage, effectively treating White British as a single group, is extremely misleading.

There are a number of reasons why white working class pupils are underachieving. As part of the interview headteachers, governors, parents, pupils and teachers were asked, **'what are the main barriers to achievement for white working class pupils in schools?'** The main findings are summarised below. They include a lack of parental aspiration and engagement in school life, poverty and inadequate housing stock, marginalisation and perceived loss of culture and language deprivation.

A lack of parental aspiration for their children's education: Of major concern to those involved in raising the achievement of white working class pupils in schools is the perceived lack of aspiration amongst parents for their children's education and future. Headteachers expressed their concern about the gap between the high aspirations for children's learning at school and the lower aspirations of the parents. Many highlighted the lack of education amongst white working class parents as a causative factor for low aspiration. Many parents were described as young with a legacy of hostility to school that makes it difficult for them to even step over the threshold of a school. They do not feel themselves to be stakeholders in education. In the words of a headteacher:

'They are seen to lack aspiration with an attitude of dependency; why should I work if the state will pay for me? That's not for me- I'm not going to sacrifice so much.'

There was a sense in the governors' focus group that many families held the *'belief that good verbal skills and commonsense were valued because they are necessary for everyday life, but much of what is taught in school is irrelevant.'*

Amongst school staff there was an opinion that the high value that other community groups place on education in Lambeth, the high aspirations that they have for their children would seem lacking in many white working class families. One teacher commented that the white working class parents in the school did not *'possess the immigrant mentality- the positives we see in this we don't see in the white community, their aspirations, for example.'*

A lack of aspiration might also originate in a lack of knowledge and understanding of the world amongst many white working class families in the borough. Many pupils know little of a life beyond their home and school. Many appear polarised in their outlook on life and, *'don't go anywhere. They stay in their flats watching TV. They do not travel, they don't go into London. Many don't even go to the local park. This might be a cost issue or it might be that they are perfectly happy here. I'm fine in my world. Why do I need to go any further? There is a self imposed glass ceiling. My mum and dad didn't go to college, they did alright.'*

Families demonstrated a lack of aspiration in their lack of forward thinking for children's futures. One headteacher commented:

'With the materialistic culture of Thatcher's time everything exploded and now everyone wants their bit. There is no concept of saving up for things, saving for a 'rainy day'; everything is about instant gratification. Children seem to have the best in material things; two boys, their mother showers them with whatever she has, yet their behaviour and attitude towards learning is appalling. We just want someone to see past tomorrow. Even many children's diet shows a lack of thought for future health.'

The culture of instant gratification also manifested itself in the role models that many white working class children aspired to, such as reality TV stars. One headteacher noted: *'If the working class do well, they are not working class anymore. Who are their role models? They cannot necessarily relate to me as a white middle class woman, I dress differently, I talk differently.'*

A lack of aspiration reflects in children's attitude to learning at school:

'These children are passive in the classroom. Education does not have a high priority at home and this has an impact on what children feel about their work at school. It is not on the cards to go to University. If you are generally ok you don't need to worry about this.'

Poor school attendance amongst white working class families was a recurrent theme throughout discussions in schools, as was a lack of take up for opportunities provided for children out of school hours. A teacher stated that, *'One white mother always talks about her child getting tired so she won't send her to extra lessons, e.g. 1:1, booster.'*

Marginalisation and a perceived lack of culture: Demie et al (2010 a,b) state that since 1998 there has been a 10% decline in the White British population in Lambeth schools and it no longer represents the largest group. School staff talked of a marginalised group who *'huddle together in the playground, a white minority in a majority black school who only engage with the school when there is a problem.'* One headteacher suggested:

'Twenty years ago half the school population was White British- now most of them have disappeared. Many have moved out to Kent or Essex or Croydon.... We are left in the area with groups who have no social mobility and no way of getting out. Many of them were born and brought up in the immediate area.'

Another staff comment struck a similar chord:

'They themselves (mothers) feel marginalised; They tend to only engage with the school when there is a problem. It could be because they see the school as 'authority', despite the school providing many opportunities to involve parents in social and curricular evenings.'

Many staff in the case study schools reflected upon the impact of this marginalisation upon some children.

'I think it is very difficult for the white children to identify culturally with the other, more dominant, cultures in the school. They aspire to Eminem or street culture and I would say that a lot of their role models are Black. They speak with South London patois. The white girls hang out with other white girls, when they are in dance club it is noticeable that they are not as grown up as the black girls, emotionally or physically. They do not dance as well, neither do the boys.'

A teacher in one case study school who described herself as 'part of a minority' recognised the unusual situation that white pupils now find themselves in as an ethnic minority in the school:

'there can be an emotional barrier and a lack of self-esteem; it can be true of any minority. If you feel undervalued within the whole school community, it can have a profound impact from an early age. Children can feel confused about where they fit into the world. In our school we are very good at diversity, but may be there is an assumption that because you are British and White, you are already included in things. But do we celebrate being British? It is very subtle and from an early age you can be affected by it and it can affect how you perform and how you engage in school. We are aware of the White British being a minority in the school. Last week we had a staff meeting looking at attendance and achievement, but the issue of social class is a difficult one.'

A Year 4 teacher in the same school echoed these sentiments:

'We are very explicit in celebrating other cultures, but there is always that difficulty in identifying what is British culture? How many of our pupils would understand what Maypole Dancing is about? We had a Memorial Day celebration yesterday, but we stressed all the people who died. We celebrate Christmas and Easter but even that is done in a diverse way.'

'I think white families are expected to just fit into the curriculum, it is seen as the norm for them and we focus on the children new to the country/EAL children. We can't assume that the white children get taken anywhere.'

One parent governor expressed his concern about the huge take up of local community facilities by the white middle class, but not the white working class families, the target audience. This area has a thriving local neighbourhood centre, which is the designated Children's Centre for the area which also has strong links with the school. Yet it would appear that few of the poorer white families use it. Children's Centres aim to improve outcomes for children under 5 years old. They are service hubs where children and their families receive seamless and integrated early education and childcare, support for parents e.g. advice on parenting, health services and helping parents back into work. Yet this governor states:

'The purpose of the Children's Centre is to enable parents of young children to get back into work but what you get is your Children's Centre full of middle class parents who are working.'

On the subject of marginalisation a headteacher reflected on bonds that tie other community groups together that do not exist in the white working class group:

'In the Caribbean community there is an ethos of hard work, with Church and music providing a strong focal point for families. Whereas the White British probably have nothing but the pub...there is no pride in the white community, no strong sense of a cultural identity.'

There was concern that although schools are good at celebrating diversity within the curriculum it might be that, *'white families are expected to just fit into the curriculum, it is seen as the norm for them and we focus on the children new to the country/EAL children'* and many staff were beginning to ask, *'do we celebrate being British?'* Schools recognised the bonds that tie other community groups together e.g. the church, the mosque that do not exist in the white working class group.

The impact of poverty: Poverty was seen to play a major role in the underachievement of white working class pupils in the case study schools. Low incomes, benefits and the pressure of not having any money were seen to play their part, impacting the stability of family life. It was reported that for recreation parents turn to cheap alcohol. This can often have a destabilising affect upon regular bedtimes and family meals. Schools reported low self esteem, mental health issues, safeguarding issues, learning difficulties, exclusion, prison, a lack of parenting skills in the family and families having little chance to extricate themselves from the environment with a general *'feeling of hopelessness.'* Many families do not meet the threshold of Social Services so do not get this support.

A lack of suitable housing appeared to be the first concern of many white parents in the borough. A parent governor commented:

'If you don't have a safe place you can call home then everything else is difficult. There are 1.7 million families waiting for a suitable home in this country. It really worries me that the British National Party (BNP) play on this issue. We need to take a holistic approach to this, housing affects achievement.'

School staff stated that Housing related issues had a depressing impact on children's achievement at the school.

'Their housing is temporary; there is little space and they are cramped, there is too much noise, there is nowhere for them to play, there is often little security. Even when they live in private accommodation which the Council pays for, they live with the threat of eviction because a private tenant might come along who can pay more to the landlord.'

It would also appear that many parents are in the benefit trap because if they worked they would not be able to afford the rent that the council pays for them. Also much of the new housing that's been built in some areas is for key workers not for the local community. This was reported to divide communities because young people are being forced out thus the white working class population decreases.

Anecdotal evidence also suggests a perception amongst some white working class parents that they are positioned as the losers in the struggle for scarce housing resources, whilst minority ethnic groups are the winners. This is however questioned by one parent interviewed who stated that:

'As a white working class parent, I have never felt excluded. I feel I am treated equally. I am eligible for any housing needs and financial help as every one in my situation who is on low income.' (Parent)

Housing allocation may be easy to represent as a site of unfairness, white working class. Because of a scarcity in the housing sector only people who are homeless, and disabilities, or dependent children, can aspire to be housed by local authorities.

Low literacy levels and language deprivation: Primary colleagues reflected that many white working class pupils do not have the academic language or language enrichment with which to access the school curriculum, especially as they progress throughout their school career. Many write in a colloquial way. They *'do not progress in the way that many English as Additional Language (EAL) pupils do, they do not have the mindset of EAL learners who take on new vocabulary all the time, for whom learning English is on a continuum.'* Staff from two secondary schools reflected that a lack of academic language is the greatest barrier to achievement and a causative factor in behaviour problems and low achievement throughout their school life. One headteacher suggested that language deprivation starts in the Foundation Stage stating, *'many of the white children come into school well below average, they haven't got the skills, they can't recognise their own name, some can only grunt.'*

It was suggested that the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) needed to be rethought as there is currently no money to support the language deficit within the white working class community. Although schools are working creatively to support those who are most in need of language support some EMAG co-ordinators felt that their hands *'are tied. I am only really supposed to be supporting the EAL children.'*

Curriculum Barriers: It was felt by schools and parents alike that the curriculum does not reflect the culture and lives of white working class children and that this might well have led to a marginalisation of this group of pupils. In fact, *'the curriculum that has been on offer has not been meeting the needs of White British pupils. There has been much emphasis in recent years on elements of black history and a celebration of cultural days such as Portuguese Day. There has been nothing for the British culture. This might have led to a sense of them losing their identity.'* (headteacher)

Similarly the Secondary curriculum did not always meet the needs of the white working class cohort.

'We have to look at a more vocational type of education in our secondary schools for our young people, as we did years ago, when if you didn't go to College you could do an apprenticeship somewhere or work in an office or factory. The worrying thing is no-one seems to care about them and there is nothing going for them at all.' (headteacher)

Lack of targeted support: There was a general feeling amongst staff, governors and parents that little support was targeted at white working class pupils.

'White working class people feel no one is listening or speaking for them. They have been shaved by politicians of all parties as part of broader strategy to woo middle class voters and occupy the political centre. As a result there are few national strategies or little targeted support to tackle generations of low aspiration and to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage.' (Governors and Headteachers focus group)

Governors also wondered whether all teachers have the skills and knowledge to support these pupils (as they may be few in number and could be overlooked because they are White British) and that white working class children often fail to achieve their potential because of cultural identity and that their behaviour at home or on the streets is so different from what is expected of them in school.

Governors believe the current system of additional funding means some schools serving white working class estates do not receive adequate financial support. The question of social class and poverty has remained in the background. It is a hidden barrier but the negative impact of poverty, disadvantage and inequality upon achievement cannot be underestimated. One governor commented:

'Disadvantage also undermines the resilience of communities and depresses aspiration in a destructive cycle.' (Governor)

Parents also expressed concern that their children did not always get the support they deserved. Parents themselves lamented a lack of white culture reflected in school life which perpetuated for many the marginalisation they felt within their communities. They were frustrated at what they saw as the unfair weighting of resources towards immigrant children and an unfair allocation of housing stock.

Members of staff felt that the EMA grant needed to be rethought as there is currently no money to support the language deficit within the white working class community.

There is a need for targeted support for tackling low aspiration and disinterest in learning among the white working class community. Despite much academic debate the needs of white working class pupils have not been addressed and have been overlooked by local and national policy makers. The main obstacle to raising achievement is the failure of central Government to recognise that this group have particular needs that are not being met by the school system. Through discussions a picture of a community that is isolated, that does not have the resilience to cope with inner city life anymore emerges.

Section 3. School strategies to raise the achievement

Despite underperformance at the local and national level, in a number of case study schools, the white working class pupils buck the trend. For example in one case study school, despite challenging circumstances and low attainment at entry, 100% of white working class pupils with a low income background attained level 4 and above at KS2. In another primary school, 94% achieved level 4 and above. In the two case study secondary schools GCSE results have shown significant improvement and the percentage of pupils achieving 5+A*-C is 86% and 77% respectively. The value added of the schools was also in the top 5% nationally.

There are a number of reasons why white working class pupils and other groups are doing well in the school despite low attainment at entry and challenging socio-economic circumstances in the area served by case study schools. The evidence in this study demonstrates the many ways in which they work to support pupils, from all ethnic backgrounds, using a wide range of imaginative and inclusive strategies.

Strong and visionary leadership: The one essential feature that is shared by the most successful schools is strong leadership. The quality of management and leadership at all levels within the schools is generally good and in some cases outstanding. Their leadership has been the driving force behind change, new expectations and inspirational success. They have a culture of achievement with a positive can do attitude. Central to their work is high expectations and the provision of intensive support so that pupils meet them. All schools served by the headteachers are multi-racial schools and the diversity of pupils' backgrounds and circumstances are viewed as positive and not as barriers. Whatever backgrounds the pupils come from, headteachers want to ensure they succeed and do not accept background factors such as race, ethnic background, gender or social class as an excuse for underachievement. They regard liaison with parents as vital in the school's drive to raise achievement and have developed a strong relationship with the parents and the communities they serve. A number of these headteachers have working class roots and spoke about their firm commitment to raising achievement in disadvantaged communities. These headteachers have also employed a number of staff who have a good understanding of working class pupils' backgrounds, through first hand experience of teaching them or because they live locally in the community. Many have immediate knowledge of the needs, aspirations and challenges in the school community.

Use of data to raise achievement: In the case study schools the ‘*use of data for school improvement*’ is a strength. Data is used to promote effective self-evaluation and high standards of learning and teaching by clearly indicating areas of development; identifying underperforming groups; monitoring the effectiveness of initiatives and strategies; challenging the aspirations of staff, pupils and parents; supporting the allocation of staffing and resources and informing target setting and professional discussions with key partners such as the Local Authority, Ofsted, governors, parents and staff.

The use of data involves all interested parties: staff, governors and parents. One of the core elements of school success in raising achievement is a robust focus on tracking and monitoring of individual pupil progress and achievement in the widest sense of the term. The schools have well developed pupil tracking systems and have detailed Foundation Stage, Key Stage data, GCSE and non statutory optional assessment data at all year groups followed by background data such as ethnic background, language spoken, level of fluency in English, SEN stage, date of admission, attendance rate, eligibility for free school meals, mobility rate, years in school, types of support, and postcode data.

Senior managers play a key role in supporting and challenging teachers to raise the performance of every pupil. One senior manager explained:

‘Data is critical in raising achievement. We use it to prompt action, to make sure that each child is doing well.’

Data is used to look at whole school, whole class and group issues and to drill down to individual learning needs e.g. attendance of a particular child and the impact that this might have on their learning. The school data tracking systems can identify ‘threshold’ students and so trigger interventions. Using for example a traffic light system; red, amber and green to indicate actual against expected levels of progress, attainment is clear and easy to grasp, which is useful for discussion with teachers, senior managers and parents. Children who are not on track with their learning are highlighted and interventions e.g. booster classes, pupil groupings, additional support including one to one are put in place.

Rigorous monitoring enables schools to plan interventions where needed to support children’s language, Special Educational Needs (SEN) and poor progress. There are regular pupil progress meetings with Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), class teachers, heads of departments and senior managers, ‘*We focus in on individuals causing concern; if they are not achieving, we ask why? What can we do? Its about bringing children into our consciousness, having a professional conversation, is there something going on at home?*’ (Senior manager). At the end of the year many schools often do provision maps looking at targeted support across the school.

In one primary school in order to facilitate the effective use of data, the school holds a Learning Assessment Forum Week. Each class teacher is released for a day, three times in a year to analyse, with the headteacher, their class data and then with the Inclusion Manager and SENCO to discuss targeted support, ‘*the groupings, whether particular children would benefit from extra reading support or to start the statementing process for a particular child. It’s about balancing out the resources we have. (SENCO) There are target groups of children, 6 in reading, 6 in writing and 6 in maths. The idea is that teachers must turn these children from red, at the beginning of the year, to green (national age related expectation colour on the tracking chart).*

The class teacher and TA need to take ownership for the learning of those children. I want them to be empowered to make the difference. I want them to say this is the resource I need to make the difference to this child. I want this to be self-perpetuating rather than all from me, I want the phase leaders to take over this role and report back to me.' (headteacher)

Overall there are excellent systems for monitoring the work of White British pupils with low income backgrounds. Schools identify those who need additional help or extra challenge and then provide them with appropriate support. More importantly, in these schools they realise the potential of every pupil. They know the data and they identify the percentages as individual children. They use data effectively for school self-evaluation and tracking pupil performance.

Use of a relevant inclusive curriculum: Schools use the curriculum to give children different experiences that widen horizons, raise aspiration and give them access to opportunities that they may take up later in life. Examples include visits to the opera, horse riding lessons, lessons in Mandarin, visits to corporate businesses and sightseeing trips in London.

'We never let money be a barrier to achievement. We use the curriculum to kill class barriers. We find positive ways of transcending the class barrier, of widening their horizons. We also provide a range of first hand experience for children to learn from. They must know that London is their wider community, those buildings belong to them.' (Headteacher)

Staff do not make assumptions about the life experiences that children have had, whether they were born here or not. Recognising that many families do not venture very far from their estates, many schools adopt an experiential approach to the curriculum to give children a practical experience of what they will be learning about and a chance to be immersed in the vocabulary before they begin to write, thus giving all children equal access to the curriculum.

'We make sure that they have different experiences in different ways, visits, school trips and children bringing in things from home. There is an emphasis on slowing down and broadening out the curriculum, quality not quantity.' (Headteacher)

Recognising the need to include 'white working class' within school life, schools are reflecting on what this means and how this should be done. For some, this means a move towards a more community based curriculum which incorporates history within the local and wider community and in some a creative curriculum in which children explore their own heritage. In some schools there is a conscious effort to include White British culture in the life of the school. This included a Year 5 'evacuation' visit to the World War Two (WW2) heritage site Lincolnsfields Centre, Bushy for a World War Two, 1940's war time experience of life as a child evacuee. The same school also celebrated the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2002 with a 'street party' in the playground with decorations and food outside.'

Secondary schools have thought carefully about the flexibility of their timetables and curriculum in order to ensure that all students '*get something out of their schooling.*' In one secondary school there is a supported curriculum for students that are achieving below National Curriculum levels when they enter in Year 7. There is also curriculum support enabling children to work on independent learning skills around the five Social Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) themes. For example, empathy, how to articulate your frustration or how to approach different situations.

Similarly the Increased Flexibility Project ensures that some students, many of whom are white working class, who by Years 10/11 want a more practical and vocational experience can go to college once a week to learn subjects such as Car mechanics or Child care.

'These might be students who sometimes struggle at school but yet are the first to change a wheel on the college course! They are always on time for college, they like it, they get treated like adults, it's a more relaxed environment. It's a bit of a carrot and stick- going to college keeps them on track at school and many of them go onto college full time at a later date. They catch up with their missed lessons in Curriculum Support time.'

Targeted support: Staff in schools recognise that many white working class pupils in Lambeth schools have not moved from Stage 3 in their language development and are struggling with the academic language needed to access the curriculum and to succeed in public examinations. Schools use the strategies within the EAL pilot to enhance language development across the school population and embed language development in all curriculum areas. This involves inclusive teaching styles and an awareness of the learning preferences of pupils (visual, auditory and kinesthetic). Lessons include collaborative talk and practical activities and an experiential approach to the curriculum. EMA co-ordinators have worked alongside teachers planning specific language structures for learning sessions, modelling the use of talk partners with a focus on response and using characteristics of the language structure e.g. hypothesising. In many schools the Teaching Assistants are trained in these methods too.

In one secondary school Cambridge Education Associates ran Language in Literacy training across the curriculum aimed at raising the fluency levels of Stage 3 learners. This was a theoretical and practical course in making lessons, whatever the subject, more literacy focused. Staff from the Modern Foreign Language department do some teaching in other departments as a model for teaching in all subjects. The EMAG co-ordinator in one secondary school told us:

'I do some geography teaching in year 8 and teach the lesson like an MFL lesson. This is really structured around the reading and writing elements. This is as critical for the White British as it is for the EAL students.'

Additional adults are used to target pupils with SEN, for example, higher level teaching assistants who support groups of children with basic numeracy skills. Many of these pupils were reported to have a negative attitude to reading:

'It might just be that they need ten minutes a day from a TA to give them a push in the right direction. Many TAs are trained on how to read with the children, they've had ECAR training, how to use the reading folder, how to use targeted reading time. The TAs use the reading session in two parts, the first part is to practice key vocabulary or sounds, the second part is reading the book, they have sheets to fill in to note children's progress.' (Assistant head)

One school, in response to the needs of the community, employs a full time Speech and Language Therapist. *'We know that it is a pre requisite for high quality literacy'*. Every child in Nursery and Reception and new arrivals throughout the school are screened by the Speech and Language Therapist, and they are then screened again in Year 3.

There is also a range of targeted and global support for students at secondary level. For example, at one secondary school all Year 8 pupils receive group work intervention around social skills, anger management, conflict resolution and restorative justice and mediation. The Year 8 reading mentor project is designed to raise the literacy levels of pupils with low reading ages. Not only does this raise literacy levels but also student confidence and a sense of responsibility. In Year 9 an effective learning project is aimed at students whose attainment levels have dropped and gives advice with learning strategies and exam guidance. As part of the Year 10 Coaching for Success project external coaches come into the school to meet with an allocated group of students in year 10 to raise their attainment levels.

Use of learning mentors: The main aim of the learning mentor is to break down barriers to pupils' learning. Examples of barriers might be; lack of self esteem or confidence and poor erratic or intermittent attendance. The work of the learning mentors was imperative to family engagement and raising achievement. Mentors knew their communities well and demonstrated a 'common sense, empathetic' approach which has worked with engaging some of the white working class families in the community, to the extent that some families will now refer themselves to the mentors for support.

One learning mentor in a primary school summarised the secret of his success:

'The greatest skill we have is empathy and following our own instincts. We reflect on our own practice and modify it according to the situation. We are always out there in the playground- accessible to parents. We talk to them at a lower level, not about the curriculum. We ask about their lives, how they are. We are non judgemental about what is going on in their lives. The children know us; the parents often use us as their intermediaries when they need to talk to school managers.'

Another mentor, who is part of the local community, builds strong relationships with the parents through empathy, 'I'm a parent too.' Parents see her 'out and about on the street' not as a figure of authority and this helps her to work with them more easily. Regarding parental engagement this mentor was aware that:

'We have to build a good relationship with parents, the school has become the meeting place for everything. We have their children from 16 months to 11 years, they go away for 5 years and then come back again, some as parents.' She goes on to say, 'I have given our children alarm clocks and shown them how to set them up. I have told parents if they can get their children out of bed and dressed, we will feed them at Breakfast Club. They wouldn't pay for it. I do think it is the parents' responsibility but in the same breath I see it as safeguarding the children.'

The learning mentor has also set up a coffee morning for parents. This includes eight white mothers, at which she suggested that they read a book together. They read a chapter each week and read a bit at home too. One parent commented, 'I've never read a book in my life before. I don't like books. I didn't think I'd like to read a book but I can't put it down now, I never knew I'd like it'. This offered some parents an 'alternative from going to bingo but it was good for their children to see them reading and many began to read with their children at home.'

This reading club led on to other literacy sessions, an example is the session the learning mentor led around how to fill in a form for a job:

'We just did one altogether. Some mums went onto work in the school kitchens; I gave them a reference, this has changed their attitude towards school, they are really on board now lots of our parents who were on these courses are now working in the school. One parent has five children in the school and she is now actually working here.' (Learning mentor)

Another learning mentor has set up a Peer Mediation Service (Solving Conflict in Peace). The mentor trains students in skills such as patience, diplomacy and empathy to support their peers. The students complete twelve weeks of training followed by an interview which equips them to resolve conflict during the school day.

'Students request mediation themselves. During mediation students sign an agreement. My mediators are role models for the school. They have to display positive behaviour with their uniform, their attendance. Mediation becomes a tool to monitor them. They lead fundraising e.g. Children in Need. Currently I have 34 White British mediators.'

In one school the learning mentor is a qualified teacher who also works as the EMAG co-ordinator. Her wide range of skills enables her to support pupils holistically with a firm vision of where they need to get to academically, for example, *'what they need for a level 4.'* With her EMA experience she also has a firm understanding of how EAL children linguistically develop. She monitors the work output of all the children she supports. With all the children that she supports the learning mentor uses solution focused brief therapy, focusing on what the child wants to achieve through learning mentor support rather than the problem itself. The learning mentor encourages the child to think about their preferred future and then to start working together to achieve this. Together, they make an action plan which all parties, including the parents sign.

One school has employed a Family Support Worker who has made a vast difference to the school and community. Her role is *'advocacy for children and families. Children know me because I talk to the classes, they come and find me and tell me if they are unhappy. It is not about individual parents, children or teachers; it's about the whole school community. Because of my experience I know which agencies to refer children and families to where necessary. I will carry on reviewing the situation with that agency, linking all these services up, family/agency/school.'*

The Family Support Worker uses a wide network of people to support children and families e.g. an art therapist comes to the school twice a week to work with children who find it difficult to express their feelings in writing, or verbally. Another resource, The Children's Country Holiday Fund, have developed their role from simply providing a country holiday once per year for children from inner city areas, to weekend breaks and whole class visits away together. She states:

'It develops life skills and socialisation, working in groups. The reality is that not all children have any of this before they enter school. They do not because they come from all sorts of backgrounds. The Children's Country Holiday Fund is branching out further and following up children who have transferred to secondary schools now. All of this gives parents a sense that their children's education is wider than just coming to school. It enables parents and children to see the bigger picture and how they can be part of it with their children.'

Engaging parents and breaking the cycle of low aspiration: The majority of schools in this research reported that the white working class families were the hardest to engage within the life of the school and their children's learning.

The schools expressed frustration at the mismatch between the high aspirations of the school and low aspirations of the parents for their children's learning and have therefore worked hard on strategies to engage white parents with a view to raising achievement. School staff were aware that they had to draw parents in for positive reasons as a counter balance for the negative experiences that many had experienced at school themselves.

'Our school targets families on free school meals. The rationale is to break the cycle of low aspiration, for adults to learn new skills, to be motivated to go on learning. Then this will have a positive impact on their children. There is a good deal of engagement with many white working class parents because we 'carry them'. We are the driving force, the first port of call for them when things go wrong. We are a source of support for all our families.' (Assistant headteacher)

'It's always about the relationship that you make with the family. We have a White British family who have Social Services involvement, there are drug issues, parents at odds with each other. The success of the children is totally about the relationship we have with the family now; even if it starts in Nursery and takes until Year 4. We are in it for the long haul, we invest in families—chatting, positive phone calls, saying thank you for the part you are playing in X's progress.' (Assistant headteacher)

Many staff at the case study schools were in the playground to greet families at the beginning of the school day; they were around to pre-empt issues and listen to parents. This was noted by parents who were interviewed who felt that staff were visible and approachable.

As well as the continual nurturing of some families, schools use specific strategies to bring parents into school. Examples are the 'Bring your dad to school day in the nursery', encouraging parents to come along to booster classes with their children and a Family Reading Project which is an excellent example of parental engagement, targeted at Reception and Year 1 children and their parents. The rationale behind the project is to encourage parents to join their children and be a part of their learning, promote the importance of reading and show the impact reading can have on individual children but most importantly to see reading as fun. The school designed the project in consultation with parents. It is run by Teaching assistants which is felt by the school to have a big impact on parental participation as the TAs live in the community and know the parents. An Assistant Head specifically targets certain parents to go on school trips. This is a way of getting them, *'to realise the opportunities that exist in London, to expand their horizons. It's all a case of how big is your world. One parent didn't realise that it was free to go to a museum. I know that she has been back since with her son!'*

Support for primary to secondary transition arrangements: Some primary headteachers talked about the impact of transition on white working class pupils who they had worked hard to nurture at primary school. Many primary schools provide a nurturing environment and excellent behaviour management strategies which provide a much needed security for pupils. It was felt by many primary school staff that the size and organisation of most secondary schools inhibits the formation of supportive relationships and some children fall victim as a headteacher describes:

Primary Schools do a great job but it is when pupils leave the problems start. When they get to secondary school pupils want to know that there is someone there who will listen to them, but in most cases there is not.'

However a new headteacher at a case study secondary school has become proactive in developing relationships with Lambeth primary schools and appointed a dedicated Transition Coordinator in Year 7 who co-ordinates the transition of Year 6 pupils to Year 7. She visits each of the feeder primary schools, often with another member of staff.

'Last year I took the Citizenship Co-ordinator to a primary school- she started the process of making masks with the children on the theme of Citizenship and survival. The children were left to finish their masks with their teacher so that it was like an ongoing project. We also take a range of Year 7 children back to their primary school- sometimes those that might have lost their way a little and may need pulling back in.'

While the road show lesson is taking place the Transition Co-ordinator discusses each child coming to school with the class teacher using a proforma. She is able to glean information such as *'family background', strengths and weaknesses, students who shouldn't be put with other students etc.'* This information gets discussed back at school between the SENCO, the Citizenship Co-ordinator, Inclusion Manager and the teacher in charge of the Every Child Matters agenda. Each child gets discussed and a provision map of support is made, examples being; social support, anger management, family liaison worker; behaviour support; learning mentor, *'we don't set them up to fail.'*

To further reassure pupils there is an Induction Day at the school and a parents' evening before September where parents have the opportunity to meet the form tutor in a more formal way. Many children due to start at school in September also attend a Summer school for a week at the beginning of the summer holidays.

Section 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

This study aims to examine the key barriers to learning and the school strategies to raise achievement of White British pupils with low income backgrounds. The main findings from the study confirm that the worryingly low achievement levels of many white working class pupils has been masked by the success of middle class white children in the English school system and the failure of Government statistics to distinguish the White British ethnic group by social background.

The empirical data shows that one of the biggest groups of underachievers is the white working class. One of the main reasons for pupil underachievement, identified from the case study schools and focus groups is a perceived lack of aspiration amongst parents for their children's future and a lack of engagement in their schooling and the failure of the National Curriculum to reflect adequately the needs of White British working class pupils. It is also perpetuated by factors such as economic deprivation; feelings of marginalisation within the community exacerbated by housing allocation; a lack of community and school engagement; a perception that their identities are not being affirmed in school; low literacy levels and parental low aspiration for their children's education. The study argues that the key to raising achievement is to have the highest expectations of pupils and the community, a series of measures which include developing strategies to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage, tackling generations of low aspiration and a disinterest in learning that prevents pupils from fulfilling their potential across a range of areas.

Despite underperformance at local and national level, in a number of case study schools the white working class pupils buck the trends. For example in one primary school, despite challenging circumstances and low attainment at entry, 100% achieved level 4 and above. There are a number of reasons why white working class pupils and other groups are doing well in the school despite low attainment at entry and challenging socio-economic circumstances in the area served by case study schools. Key features and success factors include:

- Strong and inspirational leadership by the headteacher;
- High expectation for all pupils and teachers;
- An inclusive curriculum that raises aspiration and meets the needs of white working class pupils and parents;
- Close links with parents and increasing community support, which earn the schools the trust and respect of parents;
- Effective use of data and rigorous monitoring systems which track individual pupils' performance;
- Good and well targeted support for white working class pupils through extensive use of teaching assistants and learning mentors;
- Effective support for language development amongst white working class pupils;
- Good support for pupil transition between primary and secondary;
- Celebration of cultural diversity and a strong commitment to equal opportunities.

These findings are also supported by the pupil voice and attitudinal survey. Generally pupils attending the case study schools spoke with enthusiasm about their experiences in school and gave good evidence about what successful schools do to raise pupil achievement. White British pupils were positive about the school and over 91% 'strongly agreed'/'agreed' with the statements that the case study schools are successful schools and in the main they enjoy learning at school. The children were clearly very happy with their experience. They felt valued and treated equally. They rated the care, guidance and support that the school provided as good during the focus group discussion. *'You get individual support with the teachers and teaching assistants and this helps you to do well at school.'* The children's confidence in their school is justified by their exceptional results, achieved in spite of very low starting points.

Policy implications

'Britain remains blighted by class division and economic background is still a strong predictor of life chances.' (Runnymede Trust, 2009). The empirical evidence confirms that White British pupils from working class backgrounds are the lowest attaining pupils compared with any other ethnic groups. The data also show that White British pupils from middle class backgrounds are more likely to attain 5+A*-C passes than those from Bangladeshi, Black African, Pakistani, mixed race, Black Caribbean pupils and other White backgrounds. The low attainment and poor progress of White British working class pupils is a key concern. Despite much academic debate and concern the needs of white working class pupils have not been addressed and have been overlooked by local and national policy makers. The main obstacle to raising achievement is the failure of central government to recognise that white working class pupils have particular needs that are not being met by the school system. Through discussions a picture of a community that is isolated, that does not have the resilience to cope with inner city life anymore, emerges.

The question of social class and poverty has remained in the background, a hidden barrier which is not discussed. National policy makers often seem to overlook the particular difficulties faced by white working class children. *'The government seldom talks about class in general and white working class in particular, preferring terms such as 'hardworking families' and 'social inclusion' as part of a strategy to attract middle class voters. This has alienated and affected the white working class.'* (Runnymede Trust 2009). It is important that this issue is addressed through additional funding. At present, entitlement to free meals is used to direct resources to schools. Many children in receipt of these meals are white from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Free School Meals (FSM) eligibility is a significant factor in funding to schools and there are also a number of programmes aimed particularly at schools in areas of generally high economic disadvantage including ring-fenced EMAG funding to provide support for EAL and ethnic minority pupils. We would argue that EMAG support is well targeted towards EAL pupils who are not fluent in English. However it needs to be recognised that funding through entitlement to free schools meals is not enough to tackle the huge challenge facing white working class pupils. There is now a need for additional ring-fenced funding to support targeted initiatives to raise aspiration and achievement of white working class pupils.

Recommendations

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)

The government needs to recognise that the underachievement of White British working class pupils is not only a problem facing educational services but a daunting and profoundly serious challenge. This research also suggests a series of measures which include developing strategies to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage, a legacy of low aspiration and a disinterest in learning that prevents pupils from fulfilling their potential across a range of areas. Key to raising achievement is to have the highest expectations of pupils and the community. To tackle the underachievement of white working class pupils in Britain:

1. There should be statutory national annual collection of social class data from schools through the school census including data on parental occupation.
2. The DCSF should introduce targeted funding to support schools and LAs to address underachievement of working class pupils. However, this should not result in redirecting EMAG funding to support white working class pupils.
3. Identify examples of effective practice in addressing white working class underachievement at local and national level.
4. Support schools and LAs to develop a multicultural curriculum that treats White British identity in the same way as ethnic minorities. This curriculum should give confidence to White British pupils so that they can proudly assert their identity as an ethnic group.

Local Authority (LA)

1. Continue to promote community cohesion and celebrate diversity so that all pupils understand and appreciate others from different ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds in the UK.
2. Commission research into the barriers and strategies to raise achievement of mixed race (White/Black Caribbean pupils and White/Black African pupils). Data from this research suggests that mixed heritage pupils are another fast growing group that is underachieving in schools.

Schools

1. Performance data is used to raise the awareness of any underachievement to monitor and guide pupils' progress.
2. Audit the curriculum to reflect the diversity of the school community and the needs of all pupils. In the light of this audit, all schools should map provision across years and subjects and ensure that coverage is coherent and addresses the needs of the white working class.
3. A flexible approach to implementing intervention strategies, including those by specialist language teachers, learning mentors and other staff.
4. A strong partnership is developed with a wide range of agencies to provide social, emotional, educational and practical support for white working class pupils and their families.
5. Use creative and flexible strategies to engage parents to make them feel valued, raise aspirations and to enable them to support their children's education.
6. Schools should promote community cohesion so that all pupils understand and appreciate others from different backgrounds with a sense of shared vision, fulfilling their potential and feeling part of the community. Specifically through the school curriculum, pupils should explore the representation of different cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious groups in the UK.

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