

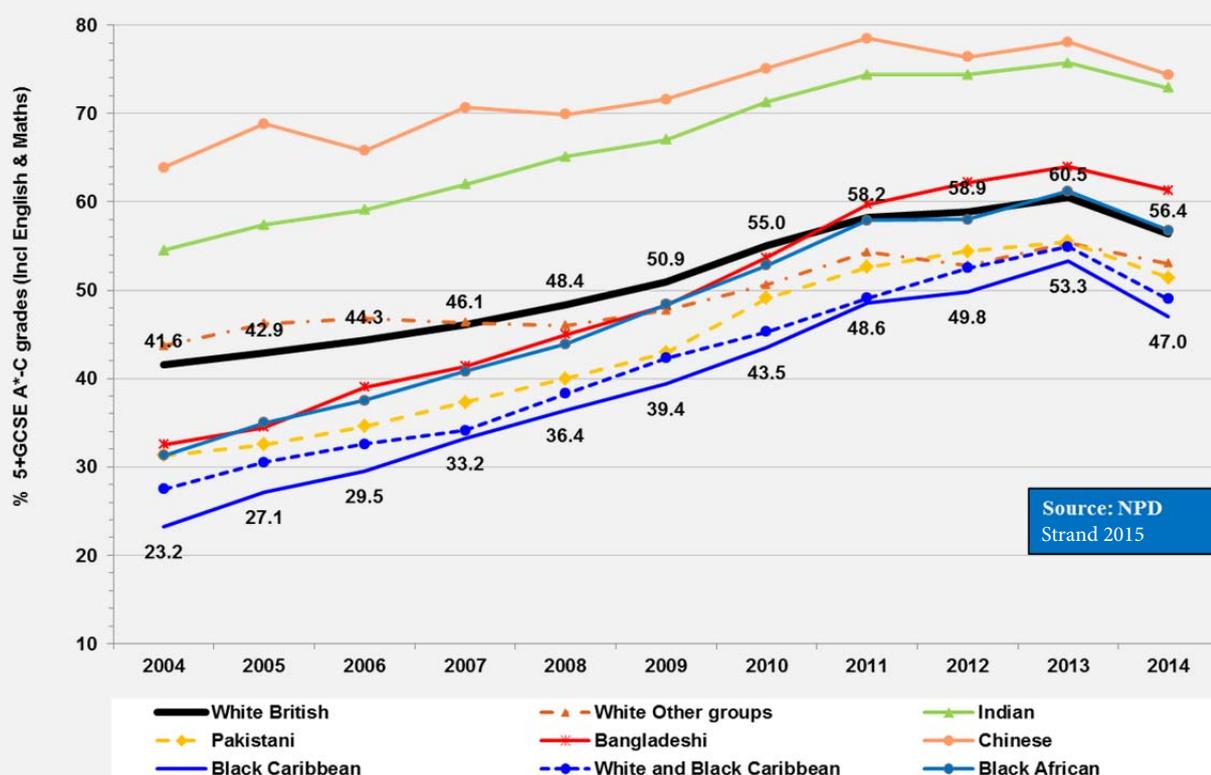
THE UNDERACHIEVEMENT OF BLACK CARIBBEAN HERITAGE PUPILS IN SCHOOLS

Research Project Brief

Introduction

The underachievement of Black Caribbean heritage pupils has been a persistent problem facing national policy makers in British schools for many years. Over the past four decades national research has shown that Black Caribbean heritage pupils' achievements persistently lag behind the average achievement of their peers and the gap is growing at the end of primary and secondary education. This underachievement issue is a question that has stirred emotions from as early as the 1950s when the Black Caribbean Community grew concerned about their children's education. Coard (1971) argued that they encountered widespread lack of understanding about the needs of Black Caribbean pupils, *'fuelling the widely-held belief that black children were somehow educationally subnormal'*. He explained how the low expectations of teachers damaged pupils' motivation and confidence thus dooming them to a life of underachievement.

Figure 1 Black Caribbean Achievement in England (5+A*-C including English and Maths)



Research in the 1980s gave a good deal of attention to the underachievement of pupils of Black Caribbean backgrounds and *'confirms that they are underachieving as a group within the education system'* (Rampton 1981, Swann 1985). Other research in the 1990s also reflected earlier findings with Black Caribbean and African pupils continuing to make less progress on average than other pupils (Gillborn and Mirza 2000, Demie 2005; 2003; 2001; GLA 2004). Each of these studies appeared to show considerable underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils in comparison with white and Asian pupils.

The national data in England also suggests that Black Caribbean underachievement in education is real and persistent and they are consistently the lowest performing group in the country, and the difference between their educational performance and others is larger than for any other ethnic group (Figure 1). This educational disadvantage has led to various other experiences of inequality. For example, the DfE (2014) data shows Black Caribbean pupils are three times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than their white peers. Only 16% of all Black Caribbean men go on to University. They are nearly 8 times as likely to be stopped and searched by the Police as their white counterparts. What is worrying is that 15% of black Caribbean men are unemployed compared to 5% of their white British counterparts and 30% of Black Caribbean individuals currently live in poverty. There is also now greater disproportionality in the number of black people in prisons in the UK than in the US. Out of the British national prison population, 10% are black. For black Britons this is significantly higher than the 2.8% of the general population they represent (Prison Reform Trust, 2014). NHS (2011) statistics also consistently highlighted that rates of admission and detentions in Mental Health institutions were higher for Black Caribbean and African groups than for the rest of the population with around 70% of inpatients being from these groups.

The reasons for the underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils are wide-ranging and complex. *'Within education literature recently four main school -related factors have emerged: stereotyping; teachers' low expectations; exclusions and headteachers' poor leadership on equality issues. All of these can perpetuate low attainment and disengagement from learning by Black Caribbean students' (Demie 2003:243).* Other researchers also noted that the lack of adequate support to schools from parents, economic deprivation, poor housing and home circumstances (Rampton 181, Swann 1985); teachers' low expectations by entering for lower or foundation tier or ability groupings (Gillborn and Youdell 2000, Strand 2012), institutional racism and the failure of the national curriculum to reflect adequately the needs of a diverse and multi ethnic society (MacPherson 1999, Gillborn 2000); lack of targeted support and negative peer pressure (Demie 2003, GLA, 2004).

Overall the body of available research suggests a worrying picture of a failure to address the underachievement of at least three generations of Black Caribbean pupils in British schools. There is an urgent need to increase our understanding of the factors which lie behind this underachievement.

The Aim of the Research

The aim of this research project is to investigate the reasons why pupils from Black Caribbean heritage backgrounds are underachieving and identify the factors that are contributing to their lack of success in the school system. The research examines in detail:-

- The historical background of Black Caribbean settlement in Britain;
- The extent of Black Caribbean pupils' educational underachievement;
- The factors responsible for Black Caribbean pupils' educational underachievement;
- Whether the problem is significantly worse for Black Caribbean boys than girls;
- What steps schools can take to improve the educational attainment of Black Caribbean pupils;
- What role the Government can play in delivering improved educational outcomes.

Research Methods

This research is an ethnographic study of schools in Lambeth. Three complementary methodological approaches will be adopted, each contributing a particular set of data to the study.

Firstly, key stage 2 and KS4 empirical investigation will be undertaken to draw lessons from the last two decades by examining in detail the achievement of Black Caribbean heritage pupils in the local authority and nationally. National NPD and Lambeth data will be the source of the evidence.

Secondly, a questionnaire survey of these pupils will be carried out to establish how they feel about school, pupil attitudes to schools and learning and support from home and what practical steps, in their view need to be taken in order to improve their achievement.

Thirdly, detailed case study research will be carried out to illuminate the complex interaction of school context, organisation, and policy and practice and how these impact on the achievement of Caribbean heritage pupils. Four primary and three secondary schools will be selected for case studies. Each of the schools will be visited in the Spring and Summer Term 2016 and structured questionnaires will be used to interview headteachers, teachers, staff, governors, grandparents, parents and pupils to gather evidence on how well Black Caribbean pupils are achieving.

Finally, pupil, parents (1st, 2, 3rd generations), governors, teachers and community focus groups will be undertaken to ascertain their views on the reasons for underachievement and what can be done to improve. These focus group interviews will look in more detail, bringing new insights into issues related to underachievement such as:

- Family and home factors (aspirations and expectations, social capital, parental engagement)
- School factors (whether school can make a difference, curriculum barriers, exclusions, cultural clashes and behaviour, lack of targeted support, negative peer pressure)
- Wider social issues and other factors (race and class issues, poverty factors, marginalisation)

This will further triangulate with the findings of the case studies and the questionnaire survey to identify reasons for underachievement and examples of good practice.

The Research Team



Feyisa Demie is Head of Research and Adviser for School Self-evaluation at Lambeth LA. Prior to this, he was Head of Research and Statistics and a university lecturer. Feyisa is a school governor and has worked extensively for the last 25 years with Local Authorities, government departments, schools and governors on the use of data and sharing good practice to raise achievement. He was responsible for pioneering work on developing school profiles, contextual and value added analyses that are widely used for monitoring, challenging and supporting schools. He is a passionate champion of school self-evaluation and an advocate of using data and research as a tool for supporting school improvement. He runs bespoke school focussed training programmes on the use of data to raise achievement and an annual national school improvement conference at UCL Institute of Education (IOE) for headteachers, teachers, governors and policy makers to share good practice in schools. With longstanding research interests on what works in raising achievement in schools and equity issues in education, he has written a number of research reports and articles on school improvement, EAL, Ethnicity, social class, assessment and what works in raising achievement in schools.



Christabel McLean is an Education Consultant and has worked with HMI/Ofsted at national level. She has also worked extensively on the inspection, improvement and management of educational establishments. Christabel started her teaching career in Camden and Westminster in inner London and went on to become headteacher of Sacred Heart School in Hammersmith. Christabel's unshakeable belief that all children can achieve their best no matter what their background, language or circumstance, also led to a successful period as a full time Ofsted inspector. From this she was specifically recruited as a key member of a school improvement team of Advisers by a new Director of Education, to deal with a large number of schools in special measures in Lambeth. Then as an Education Adviser in

Lambeth she took part in an extensive range of school improvement activities linked to schools facing very challenging circumstances and led a number of very successful school improvement projects. More recently she has been involved in a number of research projects and contributed to books advising parents on education.

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