

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION: LESSONS FROM LAMBETH

Research Brief

1. Introduction

New research in Lambeth tells the remarkable story of how one of the worst local authorities in England transformed its schools through passion, leadership and commitment, by putting learning at the centre of its priorities and by engaging with the community it serves. The research was carried out by Dr Feyisa Demie, Head of Research and Adviser for school self-evaluation and Christabel McLean, Education Adviser and former Headteacher at Lambeth LA.

The main purpose of the research was to examine the success factors behind the outstanding improvement between 1997 and 2013. It draws lessons from a decade of research and asks the following questions:

- What does KS2 and GCSE trend data tell us about the achievement in the LA?
- What are the factors contributing to this success?
- What are the lessons for school improvement?

Lambeth became a Local Education Authority (LEA) in 1990 after the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority and serves a diverse multi-ethnic community in the heart of inner London. Before 1998 many schools in Lambeth were judged to be performing unfavourably against national figures for standards of achievement at KS2 and GCSE. Ofsted ranked Lambeth as the worst performing LA and in 1996, 14 schools were put into special measures. However, by 2008 the position was transformed in Lambeth. KS2 and GCSE results were above the national average and none of its schools were in special measures.



2. Key findings and lessons from Lambeth

The transformation of Lambeth has continued apace such that in the last decade, attainment at GCSE has risen much faster in Lambeth than nationally and the LA has closed the gap and was six percentage points above the national average for 5+A*-C including English and Maths in 2013. A similar level of improvement is also evident at KS2. 90% of schools were judged 'good' or better by Ofsted. A number of reasons have emerged as to how this transformation and the bucking of the national trends were possible. Drawing on empirical data, case studies, focus group evidence and a survey of headteachers, governors, former Directors of Education and education advisors, this study identifies a number of key factors which appear to underpin the transformation of Lambeth, with huge improvement between 1997 and 2013 including:

1. Ambitious LA leadership at all levels
2. Strong school leadership
3. High quality teaching and learning
4. Effective school improvement service
5. Effective research and data service
6. Maintaining strong partnerships and trust
7. Effective support for schools causing concern and use of local initiatives
8. Tackling disadvantage beyond the school gates
9. Effective governing body
10. Effective support for pupils who speak English as an additional language



The lessons from Lambeth suggest that a well-managed and effective LA can make a real difference in raising achievement and narrowing gaps in the locality it serves. Key messages for policy makers have emerged from the Lambeth experience. The lessons from Lambeth suggest that:

Firstly, the transformation of the LA's schools has been a great success story which illustrates how, with strong leadership, a well-managed local authority can and does make a remarkable difference. The successes in Lambeth have been hard won. They are the result of successful partnerships between schools and the LA and reflect the extraordinary efforts of students, parents, headteachers, school staff and LA school improvement staff.

Secondly, the transformation of education in Lambeth did not happen overnight. It took over ten years of concerted efforts to close the gap to bring it in line with the national average.

Thirdly, the lessons from Lambeth go beyond school self-improvement. Schools needed strong professional leadership from the LA to challenge, monitor, and support them. Lambeth LA provided schools with top quality advisory support from its high calibre advisers all of whom had a proven track record of successful headship in London schools and experience of leading Ofsted inspections.

Fourthly, one of the core elements of the LA and schools' success in raising achievement has been the robust focus on tracking and monitoring individual student's progress and achievement through the effective use of data and good practice research. The LA established a dedicated Research and Statistics Unit to provide educational research and statistical information to schools to support them in their efforts to raise educational standards.

Fifthly, many of the individuals who were appointed as Directors of Education over the period from 1995 to date, and who contributed to the Lambeth story were considered to be exceptional leaders. The evidence from Lambeth suggests that exceptional education leaders at all levels are critical to the success of local and national initiatives and to the transformation of education in local areas.

Finally, rather than ignoring the issues of disadvantage and community cohesion, tackling them needs to be at the heart of any solution. They should not be left at the school gates and are best tackled at local authority level.

The overall conclusion of this study is that Lambeth LA has bucked the national trend through the use of a range of strategies to raise educational attainment at KS2 and GCSE, and has transformed education in its schools. The study argues that improvement in the LA's schools in the last decade is an exceptional achievement and offers a worthwhile example of a success story that is worth learning from by central government and local authorities.

3. Policy implications for central and local government

The research findings also contain a number of important messages for central and local government. There is a need to end the confusing and muddled structure of the English school system. Parents need access to a single, local body responsible for holding their children's schools to account. Every successful school system in the world has a middle tier of governance between school and central government. England should not ignore the lessons from the successful

school systems in the world. Our research identifies a need to strengthen local education authorities' role as the middle tier in the English school system, as a means of making the increasingly fragmented schools system better coordinated and more accountable to those it serves for the standards attained by schools. Local authorities are uniquely placed to play this role and to provide a number of key school improvement services including:

- monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervening in schools to ensure they meet statutory requirements
- engaging all schools in the local children's agenda
- performance categorisation for all schools through a School Improvement Monitoring Group (SIMG)
- providing performance data to support school improvement, to identify underachieving pupils and prioritise areas for development
- direct provision of local, high quality traded services

A number of successful local authorities are developing this education service in a variety of different ways, by strengthening and re-focusing its school improvement services or by creating 'education trusts' or 'learning trusts' as an autonomous department. Such approaches should be considered positively by central government as it provides local democratic oversight of the school system, while enabling the Director of Education to act swiftly and flexibly, no matter how schools are governed, when concerns are identified. It also ensures that the LA will be able to engage with all schools in the area including academies to improve community cohesion and to tackle disadvantage beyond the school gates.

Notes for editors

1. The findings are published in research report entitled "**Transforming Education: The Lambeth Story.**"
2. The research report was launched at the London Festival of Education on 28 February 2015: <http://www.londonfestivalofeducation.com/orange-zone>.
3. If you would like access to these findings, please contact Feyisa Demie fdemie@lambeth.gov.uk

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