

BLACK CARIBBEAN ACHIEVEMENT IN SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

Research Brief

The underachievement of Black Caribbean heritage pupils has been a persistent problem facing national policy makers in schools in England for many years. Two new ground-breaking research reports which are now published, highlight the reasons for underachievement and strategies used to raise achievement. The research was carried out by Dr Feyisa Demie, Head of Research and Adviser for School Self-evaluation at Lambeth LA and Christabel McLean, former Headteacher and Education Consultant.

1. The Underachievement of Black Caribbean Pupils in Schools in England

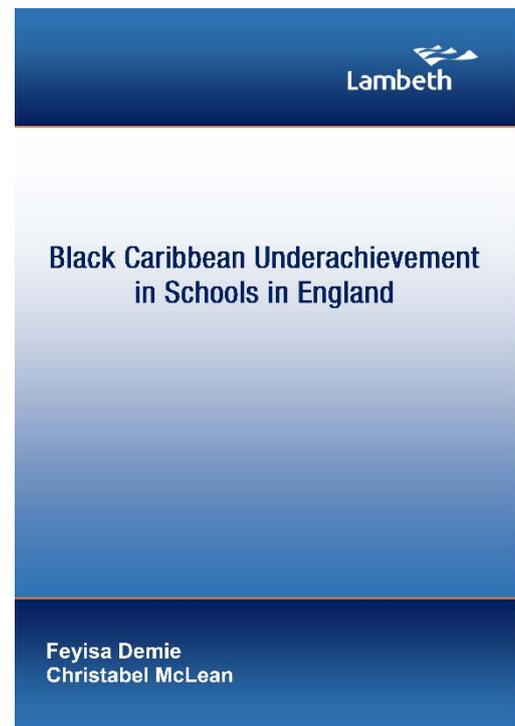
The first research report **“Black Caribbean Underachievement in Schools in England”** aims to examine in detail the empirical evidence for educational underachievement and to identify the factors responsible in English schools. Three complementary methodological approaches were adopted, comprising of detailed statistical analyses, case studies and focus group interviews. A total of 124 people participated in the interviews and focus groups, consisting of a range of school staff, pupils, parents, governors, educational psychologists and church leaders. The majority of the staff interviewed were White British, whilst almost all of the parents and pupils were of black or mixed white and black heritage. Seven schools took part in the case studies and 22 participated in the focus groups.

The strength of the research is its data source of the National Pupil Database. The National Pupil Database (NPD) is a pupil level database which matches pupil and school characteristic data to pupil level attainment. This analysis was comprised of 558,432 pupils who took GCSE examinations and 544,220 pupils who took Key Stage 2 tests.

The main findings of the research confirmed that the English school system has produced dismal academic results for a high percentage of Black Caribbean pupils over the last 60 years. Over the past four decades, national research has shown that their achievements persistently lag behind the average achievement of their peers and the gap was growing at the end of primary and secondary education. A key finding from the analysis showed that 46% of Black Caribbean pupils gained 5+A*- C including English and maths at GCSE, compared with 54% of all pupils nationally. Furthermore, the KS2 data revealed a similar pattern, with Black Caribbean pupils having the lowest levels of achievement of any ethnic group. Overall, the data has shown that Black Caribbean underachievement is real and persistent with consistently low levels of attainment and the difference between their performance and that reported nationally is the largest of any ethnic group.

The reasons for the underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils are wide-ranging and complex. Seven key factors were identified as main reasons for persistent underachievement in English schools:-

1. Headteachers’ poor leadership on equality issues
2. Institutional racism
3. Stereotyping



4. Teachers' low expectations
5. Curriculum barriers and relevance
6. Lack of diversity in the work force
7. Lack of targeted support

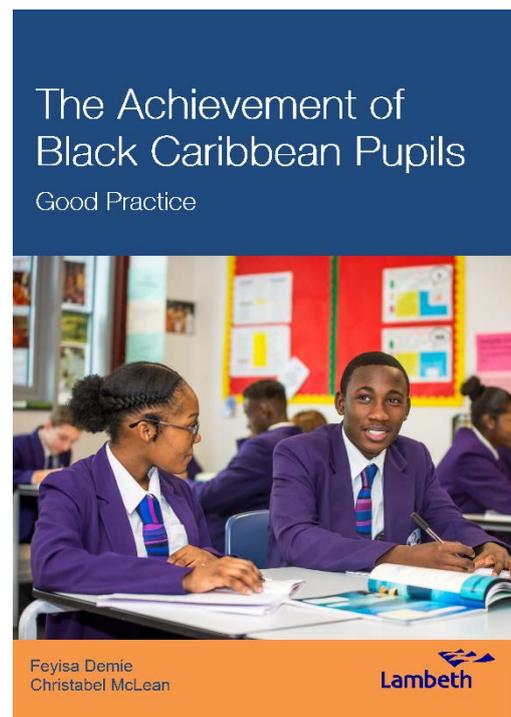
The study also lists other factors reported by the respondents during the interview and focus groups including:

8. Exclusions issues
9. Lack of parental aspiration and low expectations
10. Low literacy levels and language barriers
11. Absent fathers
12. Single parent families
13. Socio-economic disadvantage
14. Poor housing
15. Social class issues
16. Lack of role models and peer pressure
17. Negative peer pressure
18. Cultural clashes and behaviour
19. Schools ability grouping and lower tier entry issues
20. Cultural and identity issues
21. Media negative picture and stereotyping
22. Police stop and search and its negative impact on race issues
23. The pressure of the government's school standards agenda
24. Recruitment and training issues of teachers, Education Psychologists and SENCOs

All of these factors can perpetuate low attainment and disengagement from learning for Black Caribbean pupils. However, the situation is not all doom and gloom. There are good schools that did not accept these factors as a barriers. In successful schools they buck the national trend.

2. The Achievement of Black Caribbean Pupils: Good Practice

The second research report "***The Achievement of Black Caribbean Pupils: Good Practice***" aims to examine the success factors behind outstanding achievement and improvement of schools that serve disadvantaged inner city areas. This research is an ethnographic study of successful schools. The methodological approach of the research was comprised of case studies of selected schools and focus group interviews. The case studies were supported by a qualitative study of the school strategies used to raise achievement. Eight primary and six secondary schools were selected for case studies. The schools were chosen to reflect schools of different types in the Local Authority which have relatively high numbers of pupils on free school meals. The key criteria for the selection of schools were those with a very high proportion of pupils with Black Caribbean heritage, good KS2 and GCSE results and outstanding Ofsted inspection reports. As part of the research, a variety of members of school staff and parents were interviewed in order to get a range of perspectives on the main practices in schools over a four year period. These included headteachers and deputy headteachers; class teachers; English as an additional



language teachers and special educational needs coordinators; teaching assistants and learning support teachers; family support workers, governors and pupils. The main findings of the research showed that KS2 and GCSE results have improved significantly in the case study schools, despite a national trend of underperformance. There were a number of reasons why Black Caribbean pupils were doing well and key features and success factors included:

- Headteachers' excellent leadership on diversity and equality issues
- Effective teaching and learning
- Use of a relevant inclusive curriculum
- Parental engagement
- Link with the community
- The work of learning mentors in supporting Black Caribbean families
- Church and community support and guidance
- A clear stand on racism
- Diversity in the school workforce
- Celebration of cultural diversity
- Effective use of pupil voice

Overall the good practice study suggests that Black Caribbean pupils do well in multicultural schools with a strong school leadership on diversity and equality issues.

3. Recommendations

The challenge from this research for national policy makers is for the government to recognise that dealing with the underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils is an important part of raising standards in schools. Although there is now a greater recognition of the underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils in schools, there is less intervention work on the ground to support this group. It is now rare these days to find nationally a project relevant to the needs of pupils of Black Caribbean heritage. To tackle underachievement, the DfE and schools must develop targeted initiatives to identify and address their needs. The recommendations emerging from this study for the DfE and for schools with an ethnically diverse population are given below:

Department for Education (DfE)

Establishing Raising Achievement Projects and Ring-Fenced Funding

1. The DfE needs to establish a national Black Caribbean Raising Achievement project where there are the highest concentrations of Black Caribbean pupils, in order to support schools and LAs to address their underachievement.
2. The DfE should introduce ring-fenced targeted funding to schools where Black Caribbean pupils are underachieving and where schools are able to demonstrate the capacity for effectively leading the work, carrying out an audit and developing and delivering an action plan to redress any inequality and narrow the achievement gap.
3. The provision of funding delivered by schools and community groups which is focused on raising the attainment of Black Caribbean pupils, including training on parental rights and responsibilities, understanding exclusions and working in partnership with class teachers.

Addressing Black Caribbean Exclusion Issues

4. The DfE should review its guidance to schools on exclusions. The DfE should set national and regional targets for reducing Black Caribbean permanent and fixed term exclusions.

Tackling Racism and Addressing Diversity Issues

Many of the people we interviewed in the focus groups reported that they had experienced racism in varying forms and that institutional racism is one of the factors that hindered the achievement of Black Caribbean pupils. To tackle these issues:

5. The government should provide leadership and guidance to tackle institutional racism in public service and schools.
6. The government needs a curriculum that reflects this nation's rich cultural diversity. We need more teachers from ethnic minorities in our classrooms and we need them to be more than role models. We need to recognise that certain groups of students will need extra support and that the schools teaching them will require increased funding as a result.

Schools

To help raise the achievement of Black Caribbean children, schools should:

7. Audit the current workforce and pursue strong diversification at all levels to ensure that it reflects the community served by the school.
8. Discuss openly, race issues and ethnic diversity within lessons and as an integral part of the whole school staff professional development.
9. Celebrate cultural diversity through assemblies, Black History Month and International Days.

Local Authority (LA) and Multi Academy Trusts (MAT)

10. Local Authorities and Multi Academy Trusts should audit the current workforce and pursue strong diversification at all levels including senior management and ensure that it reflects the community served by the LAs and MATs. Diversity in the workforce is particularly important for those LAs where there are high numbers of Black children.
11. LAs should continue to use data effectively to identify underachieving groups and to improve teachers' and managements' awareness in understanding the roots of Black history in general and in particular Black Caribbean culture. This should aim to improve teachers' understanding of Black children as learners, how and why some underachieve and what teachers can do to target these issues.

Teacher Development Agency (TDA), School Teaching Alliance (STA) and Universities

12. The TDA and STA should develop mandatory training and guidance for trainee teachers concerning the barriers to achievement facing Black Caribbean pupils in particular and Black pupils in general, on effective classroom strategies for overcoming these as part of a whole school approach.
13. Universities do not train enough Educational Psychologists from BME communities and need to set targets to recruit more Educational Psychologists from the Black Caribbean community.

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