



# **RAISING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF WHITE WORKING CLASS PUPILS: BARRIERS AND SCHOOL STRATEGIES**

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**27 January 2010**

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# Outline

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2. Underachievement of White Working Class Pupils: Previous Research and Policy Makers Concerns
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- 5. Barriers to learning in schools and the factors contributing to underachievement**
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# **Raising Achievement Research Projects: The context**

## **1. Projects completed:**

- **Raising Achievement of Portuguese Pupils-2001**
- **Raising Achievement of Black Caribbean Pupils-2003**
- **Raising Achievement of Mobile Pupils-2004**
- **Achievement of African Heritage Pupils-2006**
- **Raising Achievement of Somali Pupils-2007 & 2008**
- **Raising Achievement of White Working Class Pupils 2008/2009**

## **2. Projects in Progress 2010/2011**

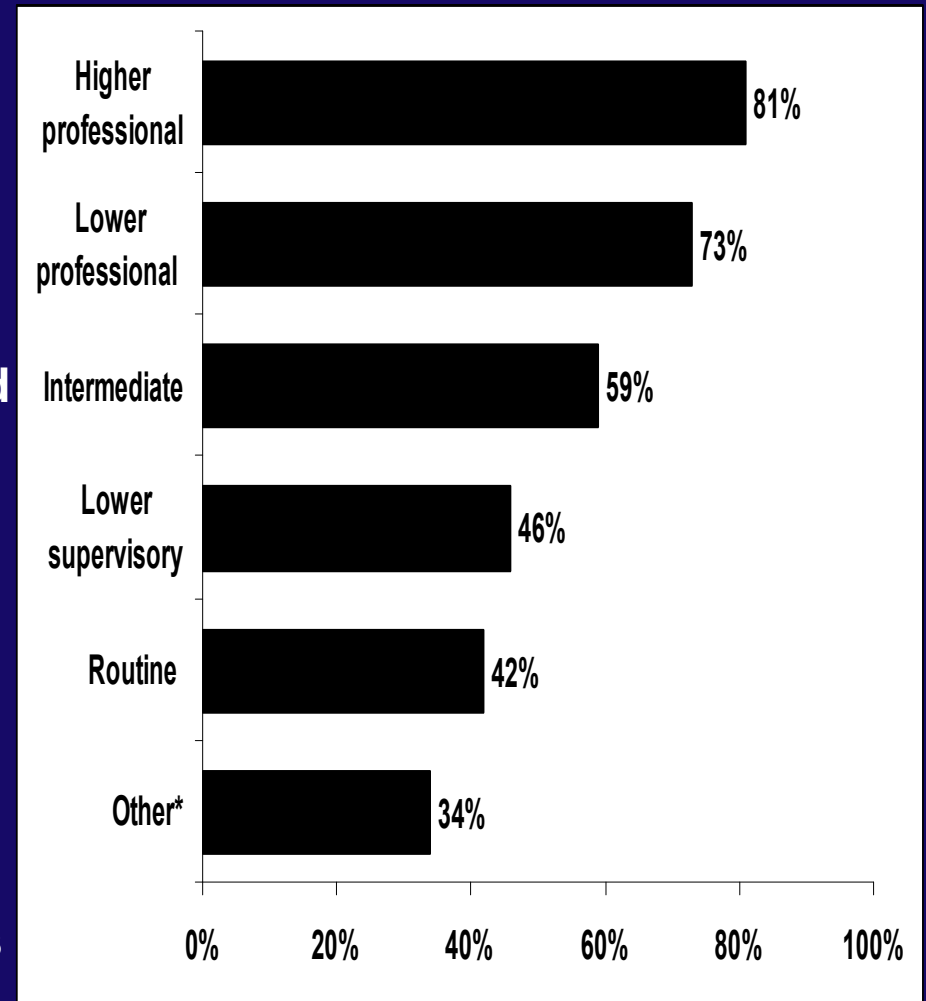
- **Raising Achievement: A study of Outstanding Schools**
- **Raising Achievement of Mixed Race Pupils**

## **Underachievement of White Working Class Pupils: Media Concerns**

- **‘White British pupils achieved better GCSE results than Bangladeshi, Pakistani, black African & black Caribbean’ (TES 4 July 2003) .**
- **‘Poor white British boys are persistent low achievers’ (TES 6 July 2007)**
- **‘White working class boys among worst achievers’ (Guardian Dec 2008)**
- **‘GCSE data on pupils receiving free school meals show only 15% of white working class boys in England got five good GCSEs including maths and English last year’ (BBC 31 January 2008)**
- **‘While pupils from many minority ethnic groups have seen attainment rise in recent years, white working class children are often stuck in a cycle of under-achievement’ (The teacher magazine, NUT, March 2009)**
- **‘Stop the extra cash for ethnic minority pupils and spend on raising achievement of white working class’ (TES 5 June 2009)**

## Underachievement of White Working Class Pupils: Previous research and policy makers concerns

- In a number of LAs there is increasing evidence that the performance of pupils of white British background is beginning to fall behind that of other ethnic groups
- Strand 2008 research shows that "The attainment of white British pupils 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"
- DfES Youth Cohort Study (YCS) data confirms that the proportion of pupils with 5+A\*-C in the highest social class was at least twice as great as pupils in the working class.
- Poverty and social class is most influential factor in predicting a student's performance (DfES 2005)



# GCSE Attainment in Lambeth and England by Ethnic Background (5+A\*-C)

	Lambeth	National	GAP
Indian	86%	82%	3%
Chinese	85%	88%	-3%
Mixed White/Black African	83%	70%	13%
Black African	81%	70%	11%
White other	81%	67%	14%
Bangladeshi	79%	70%	9%
Black other	78%	64%	14%
Pakistani	75%	67%	8%
White Irish	75%	74%	2%
Mixed other	70%	73%	-2%
White British	68%	70%	-2%
Mixed White/Black Caribbean	67%	63%	4%
Black Caribbean	64%	63%	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>73.0%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>3%</b>

**Attainment of Pupils from Low Income Background: GCSE Performance by Free School Meals in England 2008 (5+ A\* - C)**

<b>Ethnic Background</b>	<b>Non FSM</b>	<b>FSM</b>	<b>GAP</b>
<b>Chinese</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Bangladeshi</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Pakistani</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Black Caribbean</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Black African</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Indian</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>White and Black Caribbean</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>White and Black African</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>White British</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>32</b>

# Attainment of White Working Class in the Successful Schools

- The national data shows that at GCSE one of the groups of under-achievers is the white working class. However, despite underperformance at national level, the research has found that white working class pupils, in a number of Lambeth case study schools, are bucking 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.
- A recent national study carried out by Mongon and Chapman 2008 also shows that in good schools white working class children are bucking the trend. Key findings in this study show that the case study schools have strong leadership and strong systems. The Headteachers did not accept social class or poverty as a reason for failure. Several headteachers claimed working class roots.



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# Research Questions

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- **Many of the barriers to learning and success factors highlighted by the previous research are based on the findings from mainly White British schools**
- **The rich ethnic and linguistic diversity of British society is clearly evident in many classrooms today and there is little research in mainly multi-racial schools.**

**Key questions raised in the research include:**

- **Why do white British children from low income backgrounds underachieve?**
- **What are the strategies used to raise achievement?**
- **What are the implications for policy, funding and raising achievement?**

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# Research Methodology

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Three methodological approaches were adopted to explore the views of headteachers, teachers, parents, pupils and governors

1. **Case studies and observations:** Case studies were carried out in 13 schools. A detailed questionnaire was used to interview headteachers, staff, parents and pupils to gather evidence on the experience of white working class pupils in the school
2. **Focus groups:** Headteacher, parent, pupil and governor focus groups were carried out to ascertain their views about the experiences of white working class pupils in the borough
3. **Attitudinal survey:** Questionnaires were used to get the views of pupils

## **Barriers to Learning and Experiences of White Working Class Pupils in Schools**

- **Marginalisation and a perceived loss of culture**
- **Lack of aspiration amongst some white working class families**
- **Lack of engagement with the school amongst white working class parents**
- **The impact of poverty on white working class achievement**
- **Lack of targeted support to raise achievement**

# Marginalisation and a perceived loss of culture

- Since 1998 there has been a 10% decline in the White British population in Lambeth- they no longer represent the largest group
- Other groups change and move on and out. This group is stuck.’  
(headteacher)
- We are the ethnic minority now’ (parent)
- ‘I am the only white person in my housing block’ (parent)
- ‘Where I am now there is only me and every other culture and country’
- ‘There are bonds that tie other community groups together- the church as a family focus, the church places expectations on you of helping and supporting...the mosque...the ethos of hard work. There is nowhere for the white community...no sense of cultural identity...(headteacher)
- The British identity is lost. It’s not celebrated anymore....Our children have to celebrate everyone else’s culture....What about ours? (parent)
- We think it’s good to learn about other cultures, but no one celebrates ours. We just want a balance.....’ (parent)
- There may be an assumption that because you are white you are included in things- but do we celebrate being British? (teacher)
- Hopelessness and a lack of self esteem

# The Lack of Aspiration Amongst Some White Working Class Families

- *'They have low aspirations, a family history of little school success, a lack of employment and employability within the family. There is a fast pace of change in Lambeth but these families don't change. There is a feeling of hopelessness in some families.'* (headteacher)
- *'We have families here that have not worked for 100 years. I remember when the Vietnamese boat people came and the West African families- they knocked the socks off the others in terms of achievement.'* (Headteacher)
- *'Gap between the high aspirations of the schools and low aspirations of the families'* (Headteachers focus group)
- *The children can be passive.....education does not have a high priority at home and this impacts on how they feel about their work at school....a boy in Year 1, 'I don't need to get a job.'* (Teacher)
- *Lack of knowledge and understanding of the world, a 'self imposed glass ceiling, they don't go anywhere, they stay in their flats watching TV.'*
- *Lack of forward thinking coupled with a culture of instant gratification. This manifests itself in e.g. behaviour, diet.*

# A Lack of Engagement with Children's schooling

- Although parents expressed a desire for their children to do well, *'There is a culture of it's up to the school to educate the child. There is little concept that the parent is the child's first teacher.'* (*Headteachers focus group*)
- Parents described as *'young, with a legacy of hostility to school which makes it difficult to step over the threshold. They are not stakeholders in education.'* (*learning mentor*)
- Concern expressed about a lack of structure in lives of white working class families. Different expectations from home and school regarding behaviour. *'The children are out on the streets in their uniform. The behaviour they exhibit on the street is not accepted at school'* (*Governors focus group*)
- Low level of parental education, *'has a negative impact on the parents' ability to help with school work.'* (*Governors focus group*)
- Lack of engagement with Family Learning opportunities- *'parents see this as blaming them and become defensive but also with Adult learning activities it might be a lack of confidence to have a go.'* (*learning mentor*)
- Lack of take up with Breakfast clubs, extended day, booster classes.

# The Impact of Poverty on White Working Class Achievement

- *Poverty can never be used as an excuse but the stark fact is that it is a reason for low achievement and aspiration within the white working class group.* (Governor focus group)
- *Social deprivation is very high- safeguarding issues, learning difficulties, exclusions, prison, lack of parenting skills- a general feeling of hopelessness amongst many families.* (headteacher)
- *Low incomes, benefits and the pressure of not having any money were seen to impact on the stability of family life. 'For recreation parents turned to cheap alcohol, this impacts on regular bedtimes, family meals.'* (learning mentor)
- *Housing concerns have a depressing impact on children's achievement '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 always the threat of eviction.'* (Teaching Assistant)
- *The teenagers keep me awake at night....but I lie in bed worrying about what will happen to them.* (Year 3 child)
- *One parent felt that this had made no difference to her nephew's achievement*
- *There is a sense of being down trodden. I hear a little voice 'what about the white people' on the estate. It worries me that the BNP will take advantage of this.'* (parent focus group)

# A Lack of Targeted Support

- *'White working class people feel no one is listening or speaking for them. There is little targeted support to tackle generations of low aspiration and to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage (Governors and Headteachers focus group)*
- *'An unfair weighting of resources towards immigrant children or those learning English' (Parents focus group)*
- *'There should be support outside the classroom for children coming into the school not speaking English. It disrupts our children.'* (Parents focus group)
- *Low income families have never been a target for initiatives for achievement*



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## **Strategies to raise the achievement of white working class pupils**

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- Strong and visionary leadership
  - Use of a relevant inclusive curriculum
  - Targeted support
  - Use of data to raise achievement
  - The work of Learning mentors
  - Support for primary to secondary transition

# **Strong and visionary leadership**

- **A culture of achievement with a positive can do attitude**
- **High expectations, regardless of pupil background, and intensive support for pupils to meet them**
- **Many expressed working class roots and spoke of a firm commitment to raising achievement and aspiration in disadvantaged communities**
- **All have an immediate knowledge of the needs, aspirations and challenges in the local community- make every attempt to create a workforce who have detailed knowledge and can act as role models**
- **Regard liaison with parents as vital in the school's drive to raise standards- good relationships with parents**

# Use of a relevant and inclusive curriculum

- An curriculum that widens horizons, raises aspirations and gives pupils access to many opportunities
- *'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. (head teacher)*
- Opera visits, Mandarin lessons, horse riding lessons
- Experiential curriculum *'We do not take anything for granted, just because a child might look like me he/ she might not have had the same experiences as me.'* (Assistant headteacher)
- Planning a curriculum to include white working class identity/ lives- a 'Community based curriculum'/ 'creative curriculum' to 'explore their own heritage'.
- Explicit – Year 5 'evacuation' trip to a WW2 heritage; Queen's Golden Jubilee street party in 2002
- Secondary school- Supported curriculum in Year 7; Increased Flexibility project in Y 10/11.

## Use of data to raise achievement

- To promote self evaluation and high standards of learning and teaching by indicating areas of development, identifying underperforming groups, monitoring effectiveness of initiatives; supporting allocation of resources
- Robust focus on tracking and monitoring of individual pupil progress and achievement – identify threshold students and trigger interventions
- *'Data is critical in raising achievement. We use it to prompt action, to make sure that each child is doing well.'* (Senior manager)
- Pupil Progress meetings/ Learning Assessment Forum Week- *'If they are not achieving, we ask why? 'It's about having a professional conversation.'* (headteacher)

# Targeted support

- Language support- Primary EAL pilot strategies within all curriculum subjects e.g. collaborative talk, planning specific language structures, talk partners. (Teachers/ Teaching Assistants trained)
- Secondary 'Language in Literacy training' aimed at Stage 3 learners- to make lessons more language focused. MFL teachers teach other subjects...
- *'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 children as it is for the EAL.'* (EMA co-ordinator)
- Full time Speech and Language therapist- *'We know that it is a pre requisite for high quality literacy.'*
- Teaching Assistant support- basic skills e.g. reading support
- Shine- King's College London
- Secondary- Y8 pupils- intervention for social skills; Y9- Effective learning project; Year 10 Coaching for Success.

# The work of the Learning mentor- 'breaking down barriers to pupils' learning'

- Imperative to raising achievement
- LM know communities well and demonstrated a '*common sense, empathetic*' approach
- Family engagement- '*We have built a good relationship with parents, the school has become a meeting place for everything. We have their children from 16 months to 11 years. Many come back again after 5 years, as parents.*
- Reading club- '*I've never read a book before in my life....I can't put it down. (parent).It's good for their children to see them reading and many began to read with their children at home.*' (*Learning Mentor*)
- Peer Mediation Service
- Solution focused brief therapy
- Family Support worker- '*advocacy for children and families.*'/ Uses a wide network of people to support children and families- art therapist, Children's Country Holiday Fund to give '*parents a sense that their children's education is wider than just coming to school.*'

# Support for primary to secondary transition

- Concern in primary schools over the size of many secondary schools- some children who need much nurturing fall victim to this
- One secondary school proactive in developing relationships with primary schools- dedicated transition co-ordinator in Year 7
- Co-ordinated visit to each primary school to obtain information regarding children- provision map of support is made for each child, *'We don't set them up to fail.'*
- Road show lesson
- Induction Day, Parents' evening before September
- Summer School for Year 7s at the beginning of the summer holidays

# Conclusions

- The worryingly low achievement levels of many white working class pupils has been masked by the middle class success in the English school system and Government statistics that fail to distinguish the white British ethnic group by social background
- This study confirms that one of the biggest groups of underachievers is the White working class
- While poverty makes little difference to the achievements at school of some ethnic groups, it makes a huge difference to white British children on fsm. **A gap of 32 percentage points for white British compared to 20.4% gap for Black Caribbean pupils, less than 15% gap for African, Indian & Bangladesh.**
- 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.



# Recommendations – LA and Schools

## LA

- Facilitate the sharing of good practice across the borough
- Continue to raise awareness through effective use of data and training programmes
- Support schools to develop culturally sensitive curriculums
- Continue to promote community cohesion and celebrate diversity

## Schools

- Use performance data to raise awareness about underachievement
- Ensure aspects of the cultural heritage of white working class pupils is reflected in the curriculum
- A flexible approach to implementing intervention strategies e.g. specialist language programmes
- Adopt creative strategies for engaging parents in school life and children's education
- Promote community cohesion so that all pupils understand and appreciate others from different backgrounds e.g. through the curriculum

# Recommendations for DCFS

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- 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 & profoundly serious challenge.
- The research suggests a series of strategies need to be developed by the Government to **break the cycle of disadvantage and poverty, a legacy of low aspiration and disinterest in learning that prevents white working class pupils and parents from fulfilling their potential**
- There is a need for additional funding to support targeted initiatives to raise aspiration and achievement of white working class pupils. **However, this should not be twisted to mean devaluing or taking away EMAG fund to support white working class. We would argue EMAG is well targeted in supporting underachieving ethnic minorities groups & EAL pupils who are not fluent in English.**
- There is an urgent need to collect social class data in the school census to monitor the underachievement of white working class
- There is a need to study successful practice in raising achievement of white working class and share between schools

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## Contact details

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