

## **THE ACHIEVEMENT OF AFRICAN HERITAGE PUPILS: GOOD PRACTICE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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# THE ACHIEVEMENT OF AFRICAN HERITAGE PUPILS: GOOD PRACTICE IN LAMBETH SECONDARY SCHOOLS

## Abstract<sup>1</sup>

*The underachievement of Black pupils has been a persistent problem facing national policy makers in British schools for many years. However, in recent years, the need for detailed case studies of successful schools in raising the achievement of ethnic minority pupils has become apparent as a means of increasing our understanding of the ways in which schools can enhance pupils' academic achievement. The aim of this research paper is to investigate how pupils from Black African backgrounds are helped to achieve high standards in schools and to identify the factors that contribute to the success of raising achievement. Two complementary methodological approaches were adopted, each contributing a particular set of data to the study. First, General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) empirical investigation were undertaken to draw lessons from the last seven years by examining in detail the attainment of Black African pupils in the authority. This was followed by detailed case study research to illuminate how the complex interactions of context, organisation, policy and practice helps generate effective practice in raising the attainment of Black African pupils. Five case study schools were selected. A structured questionnaire was used to interview headteachers, staff, governors, parents and pupils to gather evidence of African heritage pupil achievement. The main findings of the research show that GCSE results have improved significantly in the case study schools in the last seven years and that in all schools Black African pupils are performing above national average and in the case study school 79% percent of Black African pupils achieved 5+A\*-C GCSE's compared to 56% overall nationally and 57% in Lambeth schools. Black African pupils in the authority also achieved better than White British pupils at national level. The study has also identified a number of good practices in successful schools. Among the key features that contribute to the success of raising the achievement in the case study schools are: strong leadership; effective use of performance data for school self-evaluation; diversity in the workforce; a highly inclusive curriculum that meets the needs of African heritage pupils; a strong link with the community; well co-ordinated support and guidance; good parental support and high expectation of their children; teachers high expectation of African heritage pupils and a strong commitment to equal opportunities. The final section gives policy implications for school improvement. Based on this study it is argued policy makers should design strategies and programmes to raise the achievement of African heritage pupils in schools.*

## Introduction

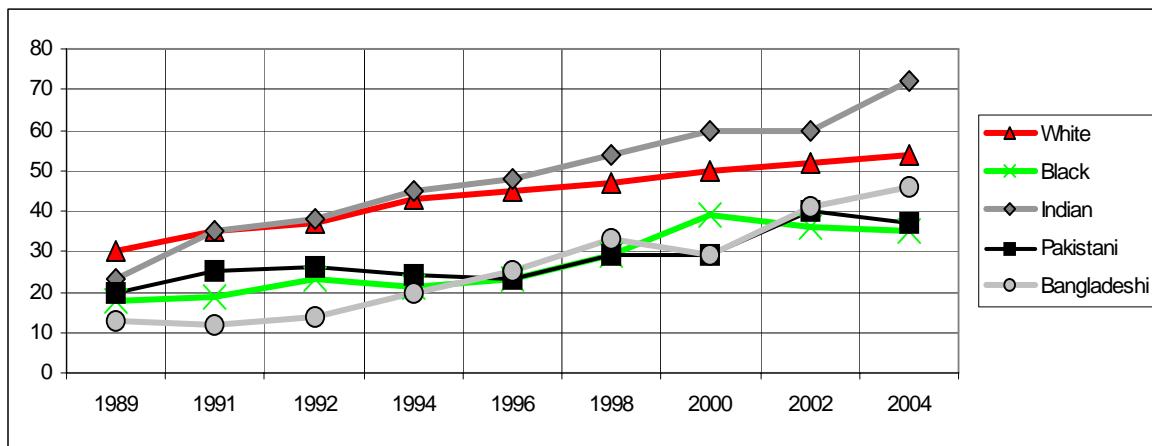
The central core of this study is the achievement of African heritage pupils in British schools. Over the last three decades considerable attention has been devoted to the issue of underachievement of Black pupils in British schools. There is now much research to show that African and Caribbean pupils are underachieving within the education system and that they are less likely to achieve their full potential at school (Gillborn and Gipps, 1996; Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Blair, 2001; Demie, 2001; OFSTED, 2002). 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 Gipps, 1996; Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Demie, 2005, 2003b, 2001). Each of these studies appeared to show considerable underachievement of Black Caribbean and Black African pupils in comparison with the achievement of White and Asian pupils.

The above findings are supported by the national Youth Cohort Study (YCS) of England and Wales, which provides some of the useful trend data on education and ethnicity. National statistics show that the proportion of 16 years olds attaining at least five higher grades passes rose from 33% in 1989 to 56% in 2005 (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000). However the YCS data in Figure 1 suggests that not all ethnic groups have shared equally in the overall improvement in attainment at the 5+A\* to C level. In particular nationally Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils are markedly less likely to attain five higher GCSEs than their Indian peers. A striking finding from the Youth Court Study is that the improvement in the attainment of Black pupils was not enough to keep pace with their White peers. The main conclusion

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from the YCS data is that African and Caribbean pupils have drawn the least benefit from rising levels of attainment and the gap between them and their White peers is bigger now than a decade ago.

**Figure 1: Changes in GCSE Attainment by Ethnicity in England, 1989-2004 (5+A\*-C)**

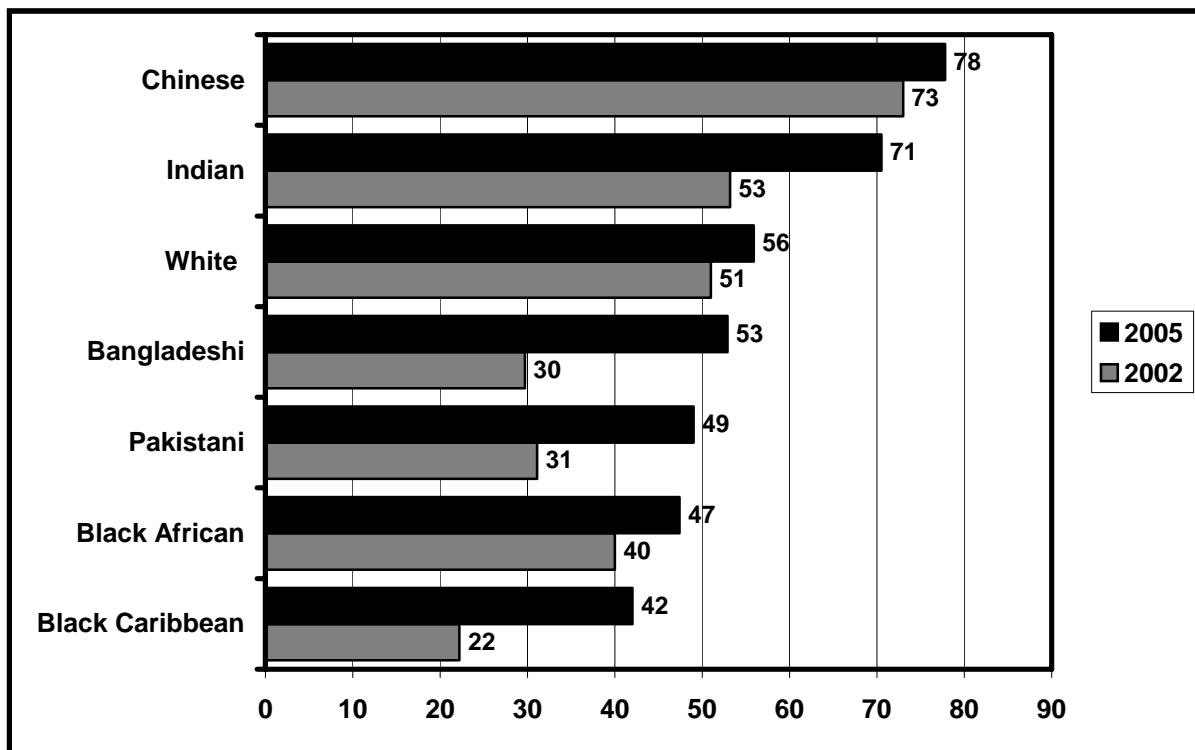


Source: Youth Cohort Study, Department for Education and Skills, 2004

Recent empirical evidence at the national level also shows that Black heritage pupils lag far behind the average achievement of the majority of their peers and that the gap at the end of primary and secondary education is growing. The DfES Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) suggests that the gap in performance is widening and many Black African children in England's schools are not sharing the higher educational standards achieved over the last decade. In 2005 it was identified that amongst those ending their compulsory education in UK, Black Caribbean and African heritage pupils were least successful academically with only 42% of Black Caribbean and 48% of Black African pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grade A\* to C. In contrast around 78% of Chinese, 71% of Indian and 56% of White British pupils achieved 5 or more A\* to C grades at GCSE. Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils also achieved better than African heritage and Black Caribbean pupils. Concerns persist and there is now a need for a detailed case study of successful schools in raising the achievement of Black African heritage pupils as a means of increasing our understanding of the ways in which schools can enhance pupils' academic achievement.

Previous research within the authority into ethnic and gender differences in achievement, pupil mobility, underachieving groups and Black Caribbean achievement (Demie 2006, 2005, 2003b, 2002, 2001; McKenley et al, 2003) also identified serious concerns about the success of the education system and schools in meeting the needs of ethnic minorities pupils and argued the need for addressing underachievement in schools. These research reports concluded, '*while there were pockets of sound practice, many schools were not nearly as effective as they needed to be in tackling the underachievement of, for example, Black Caribbean, African, Portuguese and mobile pupils in its schools'* (Demie 2006:4). The reasons for underachievement of Black pupils at national level are wide-ranging and complex. '*Within education literature recently four main school related factors has emerged stereotyping, teachers' low expectations, exclusions and headteachers' poor leadership on equality issues can perpetuate low attainment and disengagement from learning by ethnic minority pupils'* (Demie 2003:243). Others researchers also noted that the lack of adequate support to schools from Black parents, institutional racism and the failure of the national curriculum to reflect adequately the needs of a diverse and multi ethnic society (MacPherson, 1999; Gillborn 2002) and the lack of knowledge and awareness of teachers and decision makers about the culturally diverse nature of the ethnic minorities communities served by the school system in England as one of the major reasons for underachievement of Black pupils in schools

**Figure 2: GCSE Performance Trends by Ethnic Groups in England, 2002 and 2005 (% 5+A\*-C)**



Source: DfES (2004). The Statistical First Release: National Curriculum Assessment and GCSE/GNVQ attainment by pupil characteristics, in England, 2002 and 2004 at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000448/index.shtml>

Overall the body of available research suggests that most of previous studies have focussed on the reasons why Black Caribbean or ethnic minority children are underachieving. However, in recent years, the need for a detailed case study of successful schools in raising the achievement of African and Black Caribbean pupils has become apparent as a means of increasing our understanding of the ways in which schools can enhance pupil's academic achievement. For this reasons a number of previous research looked at examples of schools that provide an environment in which Black Caribbean pupils flourish and identified key characteristics of successful school in raising achievement including strong leadership, high expectation, effective teaching and learning, ethos of respect with clear approach to racism and bad behaviour and parental involvement (see for details Demie 2005, DfES 2003b, McKenley et al 2003, OFSTED 2002, Blair and Bourne 1998). Demie (2005) and DfES (2003b) argued there is no 'pick and mix' option. An effective school will seek to develop all these characteristics underpinned by the practical use of data to monitor the achievement of particular groups of pupils to pinpoint and tackle underperformance. Much of the previous British research in this area again is on Black Caribbean pupils and there is a lack of research into the factors which contribute to educational success and high attainment of African heritage pupils in schools.

### The aims and objectives of the research

The aim of this research paper is to investigate how pupils from Black African backgrounds are helped to achieve high standards in school and to identify the factors that contribute to the success of raising achievement. Specific objectives were:

1. To study the achievement of African heritage pupils at the end of GCSE.
2. To examine the school experiences of African heritage pupils in relation to the classroom experience, relationship with teachers, relationships with peers and support from home.
3. To identify a number of common themes for success in raising achievement of African students.

## Research methodology

Most previous research has focussed on the reasons why African heritage, Black Caribbean or Ethnic minority children are underachieving. However this research looks at the success of African Children in schools against all odds. Two complementary methodological approaches were therefore adopted, each contributing a particular set of data to the study.

Firstly GCSE empirical investigation was undertaken to draw lessons from the last seven years by examining in detail the attainment of Black African pupils in the authority.

Secondly, detailed case study research was carried out to illuminate how the complex interactions of context, organisation, policy and practices helps generate effective practice in raising the attainment of Black African pupils. Of the ten secondary schools in the authority, five case study schools were selected on the basis of performing academically above average or are improving schools at KS3 and GCSE. Selection of high performing schools was a prerequisite because the research concerns itself with educational success. The selected schools also needed to have a minimum of 15% Black African heritage pupils to ensure that research evidence are statistically valid and not distorted by small cohort sizes. The z-score disadvantage index factor and socio-economic data such as ethnic groups, free school meals, fluency in English, main African language spoken and mobility rate was used to cover a range of factors and ensure a good spread of schools. However in trying to get a more detailed insight into good practice for raising achievement in schools, qualitative research approaches such as interviews and focus group were used as appropriate.

Each of the case study schools were visited for two days between July 2005 and March 2006. A structured questionnaire was used to interview headteachers, staff, governors, parents and pupils to gather evidence on how well African heritage pupils are achieving and the factors contributing to their achievement. These included: the school curriculum, the quality of teaching and learning, how the school monitors pupils performance, how it supports and guides pupils, the school's links with parents, parents' and pupils' views about the school and its support systems, race and ethnicity in the curriculum, quality of school leadership and management, positive views of diversity of life in Africa and how teachers have the confidence, competence and materials to use the existing flexibility within the curriculum to make subjects more relevant to African pupils' own experiences and to reflect their cultural heritage.

The term Black African is used in the paper to identify pupils with Black African heritage. The great majority of these pupils in Lambeth schools have Nigerian or Ghanaian family backgrounds. It also includes a smaller number of pupils whose families originate in Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Kenya and Tanzania. Because the greater number of pupils come from families of West African heritage, their views and those of their parents are given greater emphasis in this report. However many of the cultural attitudes, especially towards education, are shared by families from across Africa. It was also noted during the research that in terms of ethnic background all these groups considered themselves as African rather than their country of origin. This view was clearly summed up by one parent during the interviews:

*'In terms of our identity in Britain, we all see ourselves as African rather than Nigerian, Ghanaian or Ugandan ... We are Africans it doesn't matter which country ... I identify myself as African. We are trying to combine the British culture with the African culture, it has to work together, but always we have to try to instil into the children where they are from, so they do not lose their African identities. We have to instil their roots but still they have to embrace the British culture, it has to go hand in hand.'*

When asked about their identity and ethnic background the above views were also shared by all pupils and parents interviewed in the case study schools, again confirming their strong view of their African identity.

## Attainment of African heritage pupils in the case study schools

## The Local Authority context

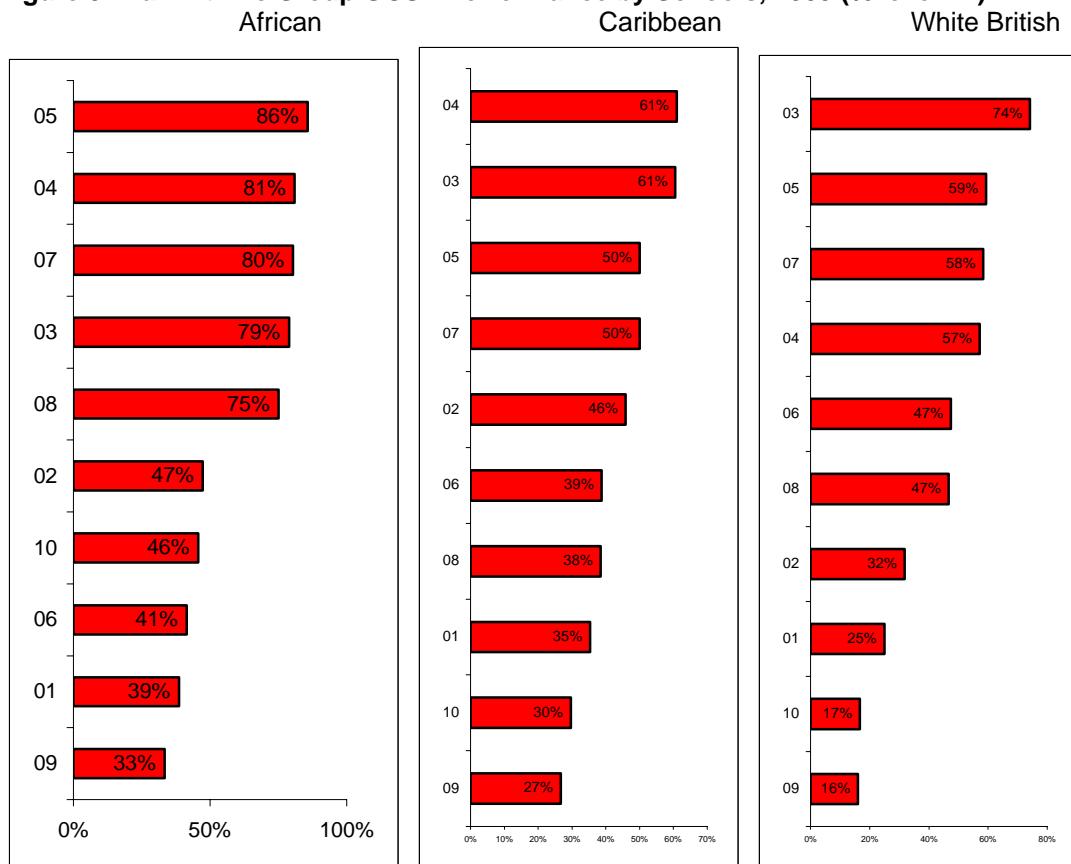
The case study Local Authority is one of the most ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse boroughs in Britain. The number of pupils who are eligible for a free school meal is 41% and well above the national average. About 81% of pupils are from Black and ethnic minority groups. The 2005 Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) in the authority shows that Black African pupils formed the largest ethnic group 24%, followed by Black Caribbean at 20% and White British at 19%. African pupils have comprised the largest group in the authority for the last three years, with an upward trend, whilst both of the other two largest groups declined over the period (Demie 2005).

There has been a change in the overall composition of the Black and ethnic minority population in the Local Authority schools. The 1991 census showed that overall 66% of pupils in the LA's schools belonged to Black and other ethnic minority communities compared to 81% in 2005.

The social and cultural diversity noted in the ethnic composition of the school is also reflected in the languages spoken. Around 150 languages are spoken in the LA's schools. 38% of students speak a language other than English as their main language. The most common being Yoruba, Portuguese, Spanish, Twi, French, Ibo, Ga, Krio, Tagalog and Luganda. The Local Authority therefore has a large proportion of bilingual pupils that need support in English as an additional language.

This diversity is a strength of the Local Authority which should be celebrated and reflected in all aspects of schooling. These statistics also clearly demonstrate that in order to succeed in raising levels of educational attainment, we must raise attainment amongst the Black and ethnic minority students in the Local Authority.

**Figure 3: Main Ethnic Group GCSE Performance by Schools, 2005 (% level 4+)**



Review of previous research on the educational achievement of underperforming groups of pupils revealed that the Local Authority has a number of successful secondary schools that offer good levels of education to Black African heritage pupils (See Demie 2006 and Figure 3). Figure 3, also shows the difference in performance by the main ethnic groups for all Local Authority secondary schools and how well the schools are doing compared with the authority and national averages. Overall, the findings

show how well schools can perform whatever their circumstances. They also confirm that there is a wide range of performance within the LA's schools.

### The GCSE performance in the case study schools

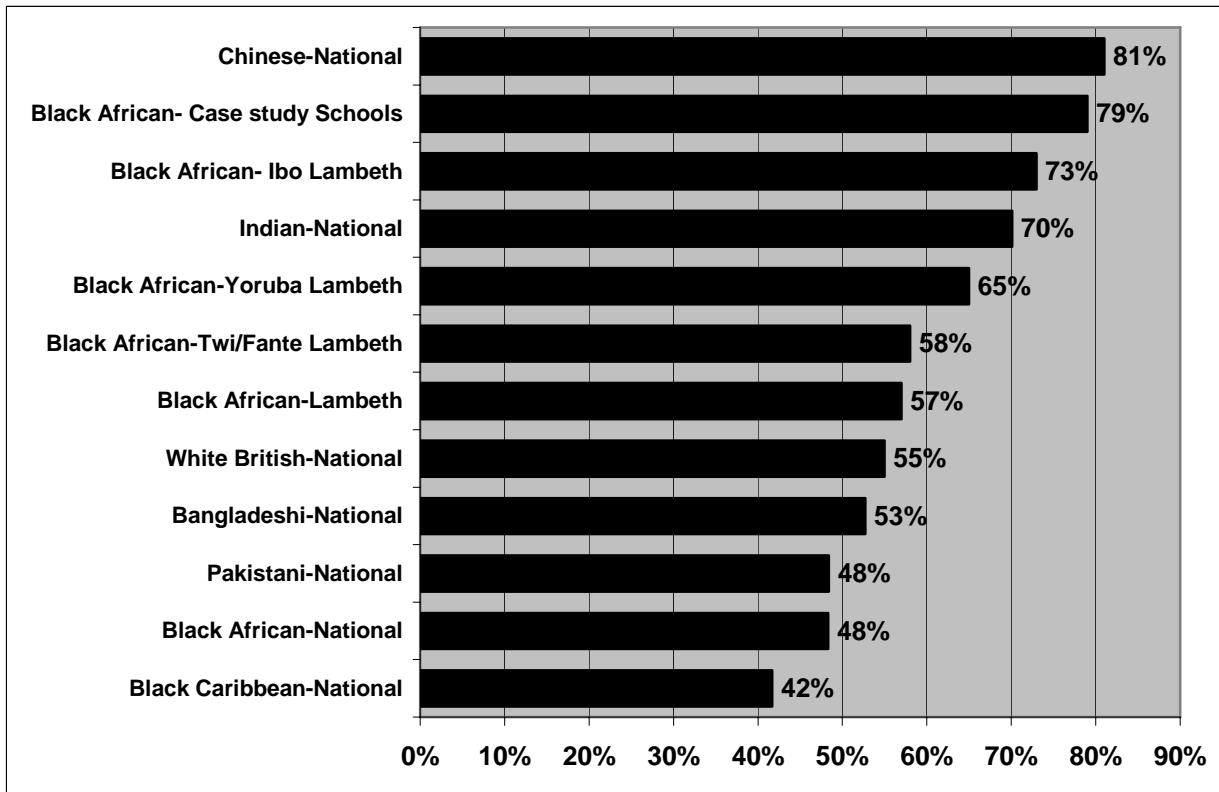
Table 1 and Figure 4 show the attainment of Black African pupils at GCSE in the case study schools compared with the other Local Authority schools. Standards of performance of Black African pupils in the case study schools have improved steadily and faster than in other schools in the Local Authority and nationally. The following features are of note in this table:

- 79% percent of Black African pupils in the case study schools achieved 5+A\*-C GCSE's compared to 56% overall nationally and 57% in Lambeth schools.
- There has been a substantial rise in GCSE performance of Black African pupils in the case study schools between 2000 and 2005 with a 23% improvement rate compared to a national overall improvement rate of 7%.
- Black African pupils in the authority achieved better than White British pupils at national level.
- Black African pupils in the case study schools achieved better than White British and Indian pupils at national level.
- Ibo speaking pupils in Lambeth achieved better than all ethnic groups including Indian pupils at national level, with the exception of Chinese pupils.

**Table 1: GCSE Performance Trends of Black African pupils in the case study schools**

GCSE 5+A*-C	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Improvement
African in Case Study Schools	56%	60%	61%	72%	64%	79%	23%
African - Other LA Schools	29%	37%	32%	36%	43%	42%	13%
African - All Authority Schools	38%	44%	42%	49%	48%	56%	18%
LA Average	32%	36%	40%	42%	48%	52%	20%
National Average	49%	50%	52%	53%	54%	56%	7%

**Figure 4: GCSE Performance of African heritage Pupils in all Case Study Schools Compared with LA and National Results 2005**



## Good Practice for Raising Achievement: **Case Studies of Schools**

### Introduction

The previous section covered the attainment of Black African pupils in context of overall performance in the Local Authority and shows that in the case study schools Black African pupils are performing above national and authority averages, the majority of which have high levels of disadvantage. However, in recent years the need for a detailed case study of successful schools in raising the achievement of Black African pupils has become apparent, as a means of increasing our understanding of the ways schools can enhance pupils' academic achievement (see Demie, 2005; McKenley et al, 2003; OFSTED, 2002). The key challenge for the Local Authority is to find out what strategies successful schools have in place and why these methods are proving to be effective in raising the achievement of Black African pupils. In the comprehensive research carried out into good practices in the five secondary schools, researchers have identified a number of key features as the reasons for success.

### Leadership and management

The findings from our research and observations in the case study schools show that all schools demonstrate strong leadership by the headteacher and senior management teams (SMT). Leadership and management in all case study schools are excellent and a great strength. Headteachers and deputy headteachers have worked closely together for many years and are very well supported by a committed team of teachers and support staff. Through excellent role modelling the headteachers provide a clear, shared vision of where the school is heading. There is a strong commitment to continuously raising standards and effective monitoring of the curriculum at all levels

For example, interviews in one school revealed headteachers are passionate about the contribution schools can make to the lives of Black African pupils and their parents. Commitment is seen as non-negotiable and drives the school. A parent, who felt leadership of the headteacher and the Christian ethos of the school were critical in her choice of school, characterised the leadership style as '*infuse and enthuse*' She felt the powerful message of the gospel choir's theme song: 'So Strong' by Labi Siffre was indicative of the schools' commitment and passion. Pupils in one school acknowledged the importance of the headteacher, seeing her as a third parent in their lives. Staff felt it would be difficult to work in this school if you did not share this approach. Staffs are expected to take their jobs as role models seriously. In both contexts they feel very proud of their school and its achievement. One teacher stated:

*'It has become a very enjoyable school in which to teach and learn and that is reflected in the vitality of the school which shines out from the outstanding quality of display that graces the walls of the school. Outside the school is misleadingly understated, inside there is a vibrant learning community.'*

An assistant headteacher described one of the objectives of his school being, '*to make our children feel beautiful*' Both Black African pupils and parents acknowledge and appreciate the work being done on their behalf. A re-emerging theme in this school is its '*commitment to nurture the individual*' One member of staff stated '*It is a passionate school – comfortable with the emotions, expectations and consequences of its mission 'to make every student feel special' and this is reflected in the ethos of the school*' A Black parent governor noted the individualised responses to students as, '*each child is respected individually within an inclusive and confidently diverse community*'

The strong mission of all schools' leadership teams is powerfully transmitted through the tools and processes adopted to monitor the performance of pupils in the school. Strategies to overcome the barriers to learning and access to the curriculum have been reframed within an overall commitment to building an inclusive, godly, learning community. Data is used across the school within departments, by form tutors, year directors, achievement coordinators, ethnic minority achievement grant (EMAG) teachers, the small team of learning mentors, the senior leadership team and by governors. All members of the workforce play their role in monitoring the academic and emotional well being of pupils in this school. This consistent approach and strong sense of purpose is shared across the schools.

A key success of the case study schools is due to the trust the headteacher inspires and has built in parents and staff. Black African pupils and families still model the aspirations of first generation economic migrants, a powerful discourse for the school to build upon. The general hypothesis is that African students achieve well when there is a strong partnership between the ethos of the school and the home. If relationships are strong at home underpinned by a strong faith, a virtuous circle is created and this is frequently the case with Black African heritage pupils in these schools. The majority of families attend local churches, which have a strong focus on self-improvement and the importance of education.

### Effective teaching and learning

Teachers in the case study schools are innovative and make every effort to make lessons more creative to access learning for African heritage pupils and other groups of pupils in the school. In these schools the quality of teaching is seen as crucial to the process of raising achievement of African heritage pupils. The emphasis on quality teaching and student achievement is accorded by evidence from student interviews. When asked what they value most about the school, a common response was to identify good teachers who were effective subject teachers and who delivered interesting lessons and responded sympathetically to students needs.

Our classroom observations in the case study schools confirm that high quality teaching is a feature of these schools. There is good teaching which is supported by a well balanced, academically robust, multicultural curriculum that reflects the African pupils heritage, culture and experiences. The views of one school headteacher on the quality of teaching and learning summarise the feeling of many in the case study schools:

*'We have a staff who are really committed to their teaching and their pupils and multicultural curriculum.'*

In all case study schools a high priority was placed on supporting language acquisition amongst African students not fluent in English and this often appeared to be the dominant feature of curriculum developments in these schools. The teaching and class support for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) is well organised and led by able EMAG teachers or achievement co-ordinators. The individual support for EAL pupils is good and has enabled the pupil to take full part in school life. Every year a few pupils arrive in the school with little knowledge of English. The ethnic minority achievements grant co-ordinator assesses their language needs and works with subject teachers to help meet them. Pupils' success in English language and literature at GCSE demonstrates that this approach works well. Many pupils who arrive with little English are able and highly motivated. Once they reach a level of fluency in English which enables them to cope with the whole curriculum, they forge ahead.

### Well co-ordinated support and guidance

All case study schools adopt a holistic approach to supporting and guiding Black African pupils and parents. This is manifested in various ways. The use of the ethnic minority achievement grant (EMAG) in raising achievement is seen as a core task of the form tutor and much of the focus of the EMAG department is on English as an additional language (EAL). One case study school is involved in the London Challenge 'Making the Grade' a project. In another school the head of EMAG, reframed as the achievement co-ordinator in this school, works with a team of two learning mentors and home-school liaison officers in some cases. There is a systematic use of data to trace pupils and design interventions to ensure students are on track. Although Black African pupils are targeted for EAL support as some come from French-speaking African countries or East Africa, they are a small minority of the 'case work' of the team. However it is felt that early interventions with those Black African students who are referred, tend to have immediate impact.

All schools have a gospel choir which have grown in popularity particularly, but not exclusively, with Black African pupils. Both students and teachers consider the choir to have had a motivating and positive impact on students who are involved. In one school the gospel choir now involves over 70 pupils who are invited to lead assemblies and do early evening recitals but who are also encouraged to be part of the main school's classical choir.

All schools have mentoring arrangements in place. Almost all staff are recruited from the local community. One school has two learning mentors and a school counsellor and another informal mentoring from staff. Pupils feel that teachers look out for them and provide a range of opportunities for individual special talents to emerge. One girl recently arrived from Burundi having spent 6 years in a refugee camp, has been encouraged to develop as a long-distance runner and now represents the county. Her prowess at running was something that had only been noticed at this school.

The range of extra curricular opportunities is seen as a great strength. Examples include intervention programmes e.g. booster and catch up classes, homework clubs, breakfast clubs, the Oxbridge Access programmes, Saturday coursework clinics, a good range of sporting and cultural extra-curricular activities, a strong programme of arts and drama opportunities and a range of supplementary additional activities under the Aim Higher widening participation banner. These include trips to Higher Education institutes, Houses of Parliament, the South Bank and opportunities to travel and perform. The success of these is evident in the display boards which are an exceptional feature of one school. On every corridor the school displays students' achievement within class and beyond. The media resources officer does an excellent job at capturing the school at work and play, which reinforces the ethos of the school. The new sports hall and new sixth form provision also signal that the school cares about the experience of students and is ambitious on their behalf. Widening participation and raising students' expectations are considered within the Aim Higher framework. A pupil in one focus group looked round at her six other peers and described in each case the '*special talent*' the school had brought out and nurtured. For example, '*X is an amazing actress who recently performed in a school play in a theatre in Croydon; Y was noticed by the physical education department and now sees herself as an athlete, she now runs for the county and wants to become a doctor.*'

One school has devised a 'parallel curriculum' for those pupils who are having difficulty in Key Stage 3. Each term the school runs a short programme (students are withdrawn from five lessons) of yoga, drama therapy, circle time, and anger management to support students who are underachieving. Students are referred by form tutors to the head of year who liaises with parents. The emphasis is on supporting students to become better and more focused learners. Initially this was a response to poor or deteriorating behaviour, but is increasingly seen as a key tool for working with students with low self-esteem and coping strategies. It tends to be most effective in Year 7 and Year 8; Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) and timetabling makes it more problematic in Year 9 but the programme is generally seen as effective. Parents are often initially resistant but once fears are allayed, the programme is supported. Learning mentors and teaching assistants are encouraged to attend parents' evenings as part of the team and their role also includes supporting parents of children who are having difficulties.

Many Black African families go to church a number of times in a week including midweek and weekends. Pupils and staff often attend the same local churches. Not only does this provide a sense of family, but ensures the strong Christian or Muslim ethos is supported by the school.

This school has highly affective pastoral systems which are linked to achievement. These include the full range of intervention programmes listed above. Staff often uses mobile phone text messaging to notify parents of good behaviour and suggest treats as a reward. Sanctions are framed within an achievement culture so if students transgress, their punishment is linked to catching up on work missed. Interventions include compulsory attendance at Key stage 4 (KS4) Saturday morning classes to catch up on missed work and meet coursework deadlines.

There is excellent follow-up support given to students who are suspended or permanently excluded, sanctions genuinely used as a last resort. Early intervention with individual pupils always involves parents at an early stage. The school's philosophy is that parents are partners and have to be involved in sharing the problem and the solution and data is part of the evidence used to underpin such processes.

Interviews with pupils in all schools confirmed the support and guidance described above. Students described the aspiration that there is no such thing as an unreachable case and that an achievement culture is applauded in school. Schools see its goal as one in which achievement is given the same respect as 'street cred' and this makes pupils strive to be a success. Teachers were said to give up their Saturdays to help with coursework to build '*that learning mentality*' in pupils. If you fall behind it is noticed. Students noted that in Black African families everyone has a role to play in achieving the

family goals. Students are seen as role models to siblings and to family back home. Many families know the reality of poverty in Africa for those who did not have access to or succeed in education, hence the aspiration and the discipline. Schools also '*support my belief that God is central to my life and purpose.*' One student summed up the school's strengths with the following words: '*solid foundation, community, loving, diverse and Christian. The schools are sensitive to the pressure that some Black African students face to conform and deliver their parents' aspirations and concerns about domestic workload of some students, while their parents are out at work in the evening, is seen as unreasonable and has to be mediated with parents.*'

The way one girl described the support and guidance received from her school summarises how these schools support their pupils:

*'At the beginning your parents and teachers are running alongside you and coaching/driving you with their aspirations e.g. Aim Higher visits etc, but at some point in Year 11, you begin to run on your own, and want their goals for yourself. Even after that the school is still looking out for you – monitoring.'*

This was qualified by her parent who stated:

*'The school has given her the confidence, it has helped her to discover her direction. I feel that I do not have to impose it, the school has helped her to come to that knowledge and understanding herself. I have become merely the taxi driver.'*

### Effective use of diverse multi-ethnic workforce

The school has a diverse multi-ethnic workforce including some staff of African heritage represented across the school and within the leadership team. Two teachers of African heritage agreed to be interviewed and asked for their perspective on the achievement of African pupils at their school.

**Teacher A:** Joined the school last year and was struck at the sense of community which pervades the school and to which she felt welcomed. She had worked as a supply teacher in other London secondary schools in the previous three years so felt well placed to make comparative judgements about the ethos. She feels the headteacher is a community leader whose open door approach makes both staff and pupils feel acknowledged. Teacher A enjoys the diversity of the African school population in the school and has blossomed in the aspiring culture of the school community.

**Teacher B:** Has worked in the school since joining as a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) in 1996 and has felt supported by colleagues throughout his time. He feels the leadership to encourage and support staff is an explicit part of their brief. In his view the school's shared unity of purpose is the secret of its success.

The opportunities are clear and African parents appreciate the school's efforts. African parents are generally school-supportive and try to present this approach to their children. If they do wish to challenge the school, they do that with teachers in private and not in their children's presence. Some African families struggle with the comparatively permissive nature of English education and the freedom enjoyed here is hard for those parents who were brought up in much more disciplined, respectful and less equitable pupil-teacher relationships. Most students manage to walk that rather tricky tightrope of school and home expectations and remain on track in eight out of ten cases, but for those one or two the freedom leads to underachievement. For those small number of pupils routine trips back home are used to reinforce the general view that opportunities on offer in the UK are not to be squandered. The school operates a Student Learning Centre with counsellors and mentors to support those pupils who stray from their family's script.

African teachers are often asked by parents for advice and this has to be handled carefully so as not to contravene school procedures. There is a cultural assumption that teachers are the 'third parent' and have their children's interests at heart, this is a real asset for African teachers who enjoy their role model status and their insider knowledge. They are also keenly aware of the sanctions many parents operate in desperation when their children refuse to comply with home or school discipline, such as sending students back to Africa. In one instance Teacher B was asked for advice when a father wanted to send his daughter back to Sierra Leone for good. Teacher B suggested that the father take his daughter back to Sierra Leone for the whole 6 weeks of the summer holiday. His advice was taken and the girl returned in the autumn in a more constructive frame of mind.

Each school celebrates diversity in every sense of the word. In one school a range of social and cultural activities such as royal visits, representation of students and teachers hard at work in drama, on courses, in school and beyond are pictured and framed on departmental doors and on the corridors. This is regularly reinforced in behaviour and interactions in corridors and in classrooms. In one school the work of the media resources officer in organising the quality of display throughout the school is outstanding.

Diversity is also represented in the profile of school departmental teams. All staff, Black and White, are clear about the importance of teachers as role models. Good relationships are observed and modelled by both staff and pupils. Black African teachers treat all pupils the same but share 'village life' stories with Black African students which reinforce the virtues of working and studying hard. There is a strong identification with African cultural norms and desire for achievement for children which are reinforced by the school and teachers. The wide and diverse range of Black staff in the school are happy to be seen as role models and those include non-teaching staff. One teacher sees the older woman who collects the dinner vouchers at the entrance to the dining area as equally important. He notices lots of students come to her at lunchtime for a hug. He defines his teaching as '*passionate but strict*.' His knowledge of Black history and the experience of African Diasporas is key to his sense of himself as an effective Black teacher. He feels the school embraces the heritage of the students very positively within the curriculum. Staffs feels a professional sense of pride and reward at seeing children achieve above and beyond what they themselves thought they were capable of. The Ghanaian view that every teacher is your parent prevails. New staff are inducted into the ways of the schools which gives parents confidence.

### Using relevant inclusive curriculum

As shown in previous sections the case study schools have achieved high standards in key national curriculum subjects including English, Maths and Science at KS3 and all subjects at GCSE. However, emphasis on these subjects has not deflected these schools from the provision of a curriculum rich in other aspects that are not covered by national curriculum. In these schools headteachers encourage teachers to use their creative intuition to deepen the quality of learning. Schools are engaged in curriculum development and innovations using the diversity of the their local communities to enrich the national curriculum and to bring greater relevance for African students. Schools have no problem in questioning the national curriculum. There is a wide range of activities to enhance the curriculum in teaching African history, the celebration of Black History Month, arts events, arts based curriculum, African music and drama, choice of texts that promote positive models about Black people, African cultural celebrations and links with African schools which are discussed below.

When the head of English in one school was interviewed he spoke about the curriculum. He mentioned the very strong sense of Black heritage that should be embraced and enjoyed in school which is demonstrated in the choice of texts and ethos of the department. This includes choice of authors who promote positive models of Black people and external writers and poets who visit the school. An EAL six-month intervention model is used at KS3 to enable students to access the curriculum. There are cultural focus evenings on key countries and regions across the world. Evidence in displays around the school of past evenings on Cuba, Japan, Egypt and Portugal reflect the cross-curricular, cross-departmental approach taken, for example pictures of Black students dressed in kimonos during the Japanese event. One school is keen to extend its curriculum links with Africa, perhaps in collaboration with two other schools. The church communities work in South Africa and the Cameroon which could be developed more as a resource to the school. The headteacher of this school also tried to build links recently with a French Lycee in Paris to engage in dialogue on secularism and the state.

Another school has developed a powerful arts-based curriculum, which is consciously designed to broaden students' horizons and enrich both the lives of pupils and the professional expertise of staff who work in the school. Specialist status has been used to underpin the school's curriculum. Engaging more deeply with the arts, media and music, working with Creative Partnership and being part of the pilot DfES Aiming High project (2003-5) has given staff the confidence and tools to develop an arts-based whole school curriculum.

The school set up a working party to review the diversity of the curriculum in 2003-4. Led by two of the deputy headteachers, the school used INSET and curriculum writing workshops to develop a  
**THE ACHIEVEMENT OF AFRICAN HERITAGE PUPILS**

responsive pedagogy. As a result the school increased the range of extra and cross-curricula activities in Key Stage 3 which build pupils' confidence and their ability to work in project teams, this approach pays dividends in the quality of relationships and capacity to work together in Key Stage 4. The school feels that the focus on curriculum builds an element of sustainability in contrast to concentrating efforts in mentoring programmes.

The link with Creative Partnerships has been very productive. Each term a set of arts projects, activities and opportunities are provided to target groups across the school as part of strategies to raise achievement, broaden horizons and challenge pupils so that their aspirations can be high and achievable. London's rich cultural life is harnessed to the school's cause. Examples of the range of projects include: trips to the Royal Ballet School, live jazz performances at the Royal Albert Hall, dance courses at Waverley school in Southwark and participating in the Re-imagining Africa film and media project.

The use of the arts-based curriculum is evident in the range of activities displayed on corridors around the school including visit of the Education Minister to an arts event; Citizenship Day, Maths air, Bigger Science Day and A Day of Sport.

Other subject departments are encouraged to be more creative. The head of design and technology asked the textiles teacher to visit the Horniman Museum for an INSET session on African materials. The music department has worked hard to broaden the range of musical traditions studied in both key stages.

Like many Local Authority schools, another case study school celebrates Black History Month each year. This gives a high profile to the experience and achievements of Black people in Britain. In recent years the focus has been more on the African Caribbean experience but pupils and parents show a keen interest in their African heritage. One teacher runs an after-school discussion group – the Bulla Club, where boys come to discuss issues of particular relevance to them. In 2004 they compiled an anthology of Anansi stories, drawing on family traditions and turned them into a performance. Parents were delighted. Those spoken to on the visit acknowledged the pleasure with which they heard Nigerian songs at a concert given by pupils. They indicated that they would be glad to see more aspects of African culture celebrated. In this school pupils acknowledge that they consider their Black teachers as role models, and sometimes as friends with whom they can share their concerns.

The school is also a partner in the authority link to schools in Takoradi, Ghana. In recent years staff from the school have visited their partner school in Ghana and exchanged letters. The head of science has set up a curriculum link. At present this is in abeyance as the headteacher in Ghana has moved on and the link between the two schools needs to be revived. However, the head of science has produced a lively video of his visit to Ghana which has been shown in assemblies. A class of Year 8 pupils watched it for the first time during the researchers visit were very interested in Ghanaian children's school experience. One pupil said that it made him feel proud that he was Black because the film showed Ghanaian children asserting their own pride in being Black. Such links with schools in other countries bring home an international dimension to children in the UK. For pupils with their own African heritage, it can be a source of learning and pride.

The school is also a participant in the General Teaching Council's Aim Higher initiative. Its purpose is to raise awareness of higher education and to encourage more pupils from ethnic minorities or whose families have not traditionally experienced higher education, to aim for this as part of their career path. The school maintains links with Kings, South Bank and Greenwich University and Goldsmiths College. In Year 11 pupils are given information about the school's sixth form consortium and about other providers within reach. Many pupils choose to go to colleges such as Richmond, Westminster or St Francis Xavier in Clapham.

Overall, schools in the case study are very committed to an innovative curriculum that motivates African heritage pupils and have developed links with Africa and rich artistic and sporting communities in London such as the Royal Ballet, the Royal Festival Hall, English National Opera, London Museums and London Artistic worlds. They have created an environment where African pupils feel their history, culture, languages, religion and individual identities are respected and valued within the school curriculum. Black History Month is part of the curriculum and well celebrated in all the schools.

## Parental involvement

### *Parental support and attitudes to the Authority*

African parents value education very highly. Some have themselves received a good education and gained professional qualifications although they may not be working in jobs in the UK that fully reflect this. Staff in schools recognise that parents, whatever their jobs, are able to build and support a culture of achievement at home to support their children's education. Many parents are themselves continuing their studies. One parent commented '*my child's father is Nigerian and he is very focused on learning. He never says 'I haven't got anything to do', he is always improving his skills-set. This definitely is an African thing; it is like that in Jamaica too.*' However, while this is well understood by staff and parents, some work in jobs with low pay and low status. They share the view that they need to work together to give children the best start in life. All see a good education as the key to their children's future success in life. This is shown in parents' comments:

- '*Africans invest in education because we need it. Back home we do not have the opportunity that these children have. Education makes a way for you.'*'
- '*My background was such that I wasn't able to go to school due to lack of money. When I sit down with my kids I tell them I do not want them to have the life I have had. Children now have choices – education is the key.'*'
- '*Without an education you cannot earn a decent salary, without qualifications you cannot get a good job. The best thing is to push your children as hard as you can.'*'
- '*Being a Black woman if you don't have education in this country, what job will you have to do, clean people's toilets?*'
- '*I have taught my children to get an education and you have choice, as a social worker I see children having choice in this society.'*'
- '*Without knowledge you are nothing. Even if you get money you wouldn't be able to manage it without wisdom.'*'
- '*Knowledge is a lifetime investment, money comes and goes but knowledge lasts forever.'*'

These attitudes are the driving force behind parents' support of their children and schools. Teachers recognise and welcome the shared values and aspirations:

*'I like to teach here because I know I have the support of African parents. If I advise them what to do they will do it, whereas other parents might not. African parents may sometimes be poor, but their standards are higher... standards regarding their aims for their children. They expect and want their children to achieve and they will do whatever they can to help them and make sure it happens. It is not so important to other groups. Because we promote this, and they already have this sense of the importance of education, we can work together. We know we have their backing so there are no behaviour issues to be resolved.'*

Parents also have strong views on the importance of mutual respect and respect for authority. When asked what parents expect their children to do at school a parent replied: '*Hard work, respect, discipline, listening to the teacher, working together. What you feed them at home is what they bring to school --- this is reinforced at school.*' In this they support the authority of teachers. A teacher with twenty years experience comments: '*parents show respect for teachers – they defer to professionalism...they want to know what they can do to help and this plays a big part in children's success...it is backed by action.*'

One of the most frequent ways that parents support teachers and their children is by ensuring that they do their homework. At primary age, parents often help pupils with homework. '*I will meet teachers at the end of the day. I want my child to get ahead and I ask for ideas about homework, especially in the holidays. I read to them even while we are away on holiday.*' At secondary level, parents check homework diaries and follow up comments made by teachers, ensuring that work is completed.

Parents regularly attend open days and evenings to discuss their children's progress with teachers. The attendance rate is generally very high because parents value the opportunity to discuss with teachers their child's progress. In secondary schools, teachers share performance data with parents who are included in discussions about target setting. In this way, parents feel well informed about the progress of their children and children feel that parents know of their success. As one Year 9 pupil at a school where tutors and teachers regularly telephone parents, commented '*When I do well they tell my parents. This reflects on me at home.*' A Year 13 pupil at the same school linked the common efforts

of parents and teachers: '*Parents give strong motivation from day one... Our head of year really pushes us – he's really behind a lot of pupils' success.*'

### *Partnership with parents and the community*

All the case study schools have strong links with their student communities. Each schools headteacher and senior management team have devoted substantial resources, both in terms of their time and commitment. A feature of these schools is that this is central to the core activity of the school and they get good support from parents. For example, interviews in one case study school revealed impressive parental support by staff and found partnership with parents is a key component of the school's success with African families. In this school parents feel a close alignment between their aspirations and the way the school engages with their children. Parents are involved early in any lapses of behaviour and appreciate the school's commitment to keeping them informed of their children's progress.

Interviews with African parents:

**Parent A:** Father of daughter in Year 9. Generally supportive of the school which was not his first choice but is supplementing his daughter's education with a home tutor. He also calls on his extended family, his oldest son who is a graduate is also expected to help. The family take regular trips home to Nigeria to maintain traditions, to let children know they have an obligation to fulfil their potential.

**Parent B:** Father of three daughters, two of whom have already left the school. One daughter is currently in Year 10. He is very pleased with the dialogue between family and school. He believes the school shares his expectations of his daughter and is respectful of Sierra Leone culture. Respect and responsibility are the two cornerstones of the parenting philosophy he conveys to his daughters. However he is also of the view that sanctions should be applied if his daughters 'step out of order' and then it's a case of 'tough love.'

Both parents feel that key features contributing to African achievement are maintaining African traditions at home; letting children know they have an obligation to maximise the opportunities available in the school and seeking to 'blend with the best of British society' and consciously protect daughters from its worst, more permissive, anti-education elements, as they perceive them. They have also argued the importance for home and school of early intervention to get students back on track. It is also interesting to note that both African parents are keen to continue their studies as well which models family commitment to education as a transformational tool.

Many schools in this country pay lip service to notions of school-parent partnership but it is a lived reality in these schools and is demonstrable in the engagement of Black African pupils and their parents in co-constructing an achievement culture in all schools. It is not a matter of the school doing all the work, Black African parents form a critical mass in the school and their commitment to education and their children's achievement is equally significant. Many pupils have parents who went to university, either here or in Africa. High achievement is part of the tradition of their families and if not, parents still maintain a strong desire for continuing education.

Partnerships between school and home are actively fostered and maintained. The headteacher is an active church going parent herself and makes common cause with other Black parents trying to enable their children to achieve their potential. This sense of kinship is much appreciated by Black African parents. Schools know their parents well, leadership has encouraged and promoted the involvement of parents of Black African pupils. Parents are passionate about church-school education. Most student have two parents at home who are focused on achievement. Typically both parents, but especially the father attends parents' evening. Aspirations are clearly set in advance of joining the school and their first statement is often their hope that their child can go to university.

Schools engage parents in key strategies to raise achievement. For example one school recently used external consultants to teach study skills to Year 7 and Year 8 students during the school day and offered this as a master class for parents after school as well. The strong faith backgrounds of families is recognised and supported and schools conform to African notions of a church-school with its formality and sense of pride. For example there are no tensions for Black African pupils around uniform. The formality of school processes reflects notions of respect and courtesy towards teachers

and between pupils e.g. always line up before entry to lessons, formal introductions and prayers before each lesson starts. This is the school's brand, its niche market, which is clearly communicated and endorsed by Black African parents.

The timing of parents evenings in this school at the beginning of the academic year encourages pupils and parents to review and evaluate the year that has passed and renew their commitment to targets for the coming year, reflecting the symbolic ritual of renewal. There are lots of social evenings for parents and staff to interact. When the parent-school relationship does not work, it tends to be that the parent has not responded to the invitation to be part of the community and is too distant from key processes and interventions. But even in these circumstances, recovery is always available. When the school does well, the headteacher writes to parents praising them for their contribution.

One mother, a recently arrived refugee has drawn on the school for support. She feels the school support is there not just for the child, but the parent too and feels the school has encouraged her daughter to exceed her expectations. This engenders powerful feelings of support and gratitude towards the school. She feels the school provides opportunities and activities which '*I cannot afford to do at home*' through field trips, social events and activity visits, most of which are educative. She likes the balance between social and academic and describes the school '*helping her daughter to make up her mind to become a doctor*' through their involvement in the 'Access to Medicine' programme. As a result her daughter knows she wants to be a paediatrician but she has also been able to take part in drama activities sponsored by the SHELL Company based in the authority.

For those parents who have not achieved their own educational goals, the school's shared aspirations are important:

*'To be a person in life, her education must be better than I was able to achieve. I want my daughter to achieve so many things in life so that they are a credit to you back home. I do not want to be ashamed in the future.'*

A parent who came to the UK as refugee explained:

*'I hope she becomes someone in life. She has decided to become a doctor and I was not confident since English is her third language. Miss B (a teacher) says she has made up her mind and sees that she can do it. The teachers have talked me through it and so I now believe she can do it.'*

This success has not come without a struggle, as one teacher acknowledges, '*the school is fighting the anti-education cultures of the 'street' and the 'estate' which is a strong pull even for Black African pupils with strong backgrounds.*' His aspiration is to make 'educational achievement' more powerful and credible which is no easy task, but his school is making significant inroads. Such possibilities and opportunities are regularly reinforced in the displays on corridors and in classrooms.

Overall these case study schools are unremitting in their efforts to maintain good motivation and have very good holistic and pastoral systems to support pupils and their families. This is an area of parent-school partnership which is of great importance in raising and maintaining high standards for Black African pupils. Other schools in other circumstances undoubtedly also find they have to counteract 'street culture.' What makes this authority partnership so strong is that parents, teachers and pupils share the same aspirations and the same values.

### Effective use of data for monitoring and self-evaluation

Use of performance data for school improvement is strength of the case study schools. Data is used as a driving force for raising standards and is central to the school self-evaluation process.

In all case study schools an experienced deputy headteacher or assistant headteacher leads work in monitoring pupils' performance. These schools are now in a data rich environment and children are assessed at age 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 using key stage assessments, Cognitive Abilities Test (CATs) and GCSE public examinations (see Demie 2003a for details). Schools use spreadsheets and school management software to keep careful records of all pupils. It is possible to look at attainment using baseline assessments / tests on entry, KS2, KS3 and GCSE by any combination of ethnic origin, gender, free school meal status, mobility rate, EAL stage, SEN stage, years in the school, term of birth, which teachers classes had been attended, previous school, number of schools attended, date of

admission and pupils address and postcodes. Schools produce their own internal CAT, KS3 and GCSE information that is widely used by senior managers, assessment co-ordinators, heads of year, heads of department and classroom teachers.

In addition schools effectively use the national Performance and Assessment (PANDA) report for self-evaluation. The PANDA is circulated to the senior management team. In the words of one of the deputy headteachers responsible for monitoring performance he pointed out that '*The PANDA is useful but it does not tell us anything we do not know. It confirms our judgements.*'

The schools also use a range of historical comprehensive benchmarking, contextual and value-added data provided by the Local Authority (see Demie 2003a: 449-461 for details). Schools use the Local Authority School Profile which provides a comprehensive set of benchmarking data to support governors and headteachers in developing their roles and exercising their responsibilities for the strategic management of schools. The school profile data is used to identify possible strengths and weaknesses of the school and asks a number of questions of overall school performance such as '*What does it tell me about my school? Do we know why we are in that position? Are we happy to be where we are? Where do we want to be in one or two year's time and how do we get there?*' (Demie 2003a:463).

In addition, the case study schools extensively use customised Local Authority contextual and value-added data (see Figure 6 for sample). The KS3 and KS4 contextual report provides analysis by factors such as gender, ethnic background, fluency in English, free school meals and mobility rate. Value-added data is also used extensively in schools to track the performance of individual pupils to monitor their educational progress<sup>2</sup>. This value-added information is '*seen in the schools, along with other pupil performance information, as essential to enhance teachers' abilities to analyse their effectiveness in terms of the progress their pupils have made and to enable them to take necessary steps for improvement*' (Demie 2003a: 453).

The schools and governors use contextual and value-added reports to monitor progress over time and to identify factors influencing performance, to identify key areas of action, to ensure improvements and to set targets and address issues of underperforming groups of pupils. Over time the schools own data, the Local Authority contextual and value-added reports and PANDA reports have been very useful in asking a number of the following questions in context of factors influencing performance in the school:

- How does the school compare to other borough schools in respect of performance at entry (KS2), KS3 and GCSE, by gender, free school meals, mobility rate, terms of birth and levels of fluency in English?
- What is the relative performance of different ethnic groups and mobile pupils in the school compared to the Local Authority average and similar schools?
- How many pupils appear to be achieving less than expected levels in the end of KS3 and GCSE tests?
- What are the school's strengths and weaknesses?
- What must be done to improve?

These questions are debated and discussed at staff and governors meetings as a basis for self-evaluation and raising standards in all schools. As a result the senior management team, teaching staff and governors are now well informed of the performance trends of the schools.

#### Example of the use of data in two case study schools

**School A:** This case study school is well known nationally for raising the achievement of underachieving groups through effective use of data. The school was featured in a series of Local

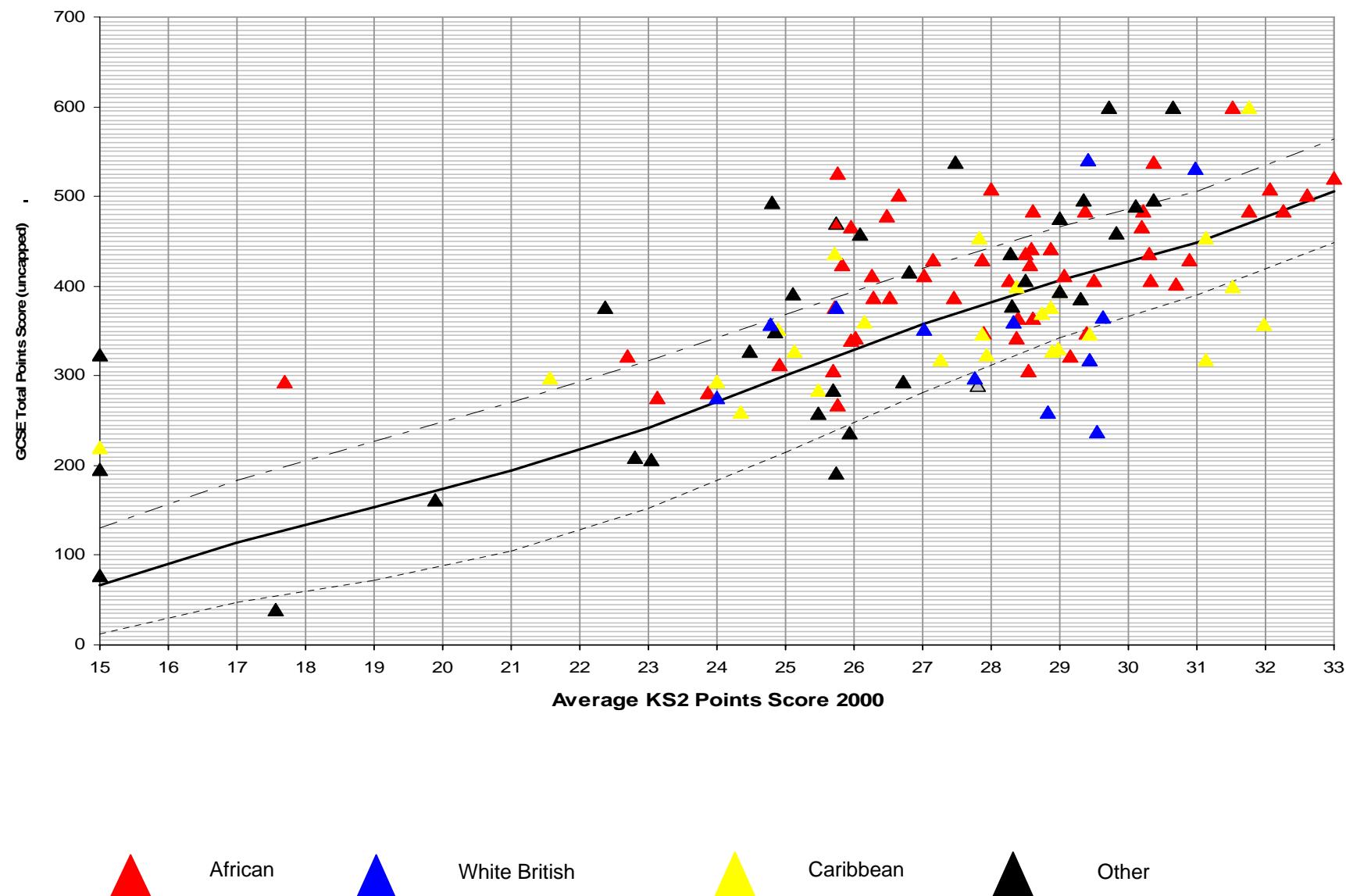
<sup>2</sup> The school uses value-added scatter plots for all subjects between KS2 and GCSE and KS3 and GCSE with a confidential code number for each pupil. In the attached sample of a median line value-added chart, the solid line shows the median performance, i.e. 50% of pupils nationally with a particular KS2 score achieved a GCSE results above the line, and 50% achieved the result below it. The two thin outer red lines represent the upper and lower quartiles, and pupils above the top line are in the top 25% nationally, conversely, the pupils below the lower line in the lower quartile and area making the least progress.

Authority reports and an OFSTED report Achievement of Black Caribbean Pupils: Good Practice in Secondary Schools (see OFSTED 2002, and McKenley et al 2003). The attainment of Black African pupils in this school is consistently high. The school's GCSE performance in 2005 at grades A\*-C was 73% and is the highest in the Local Authority. The standard of attainment of GCSE is high and the improvement rate has been impressive the last few years. Since 1998, the percentage of pupils gaining 5+\*-C increased from 30% to 73% in 2005. 81% African of African heritage pupils in the school achieved 5+A\*-C compared to 61% Caribbean and 57% White British. The value-added of the school is also very impressive and pupils in the school progress much higher than similar pupils nationally (see sample Figure 5) with a higher proportion of pupils in the upper quartile and inter quartile ranges. African pupils progress better than any other group as 29% are in the upper quartile compared to 25% nationally. The interquartile performance is even higher as 65% of African pupils are in this range compared to 50% nationally. Only 6% are in the lower quartile range making less progress, compared to 25% expected nationally. Previous studies and current evidence again confirms that good use of data is a basic feature of this schools practice. In particular:

1. Monitoring of pupil progress is seen as a core activity for class teacher and the school. The school undertakes extensive assessment using NFER tests at Year 7, CATs at Year 8, KS3 assessment at Year 9 and GCSE at Year 11 and keeps detailed records for tracking all pupils' performance. This data is analysed by ethnicity, gender, free school meals, mobility rate, EAL level of fluency in English, SEN stage and term of birth and which teachers classes had been attended. Data is used to provide baseline to monitor and review progress, especially to identify signs of underachievement and to help set targets for the pupils and subject departments. Data is made available across the school and is used by teachers, heads of department, assessment co-coordinators and the senior management team to help review the pupil progress. The data is also shared with the school governors who help to determine the schools' budget and priorities.
2. The school extensively uses KS3 to GCSE and KS2 to GCSE value-added data to improve the attainment of individual pupils in addition to monitoring the standards of year groups or the whole school. Each individual pupil is plotted on the chart according to their GCSE point score or KS3 point score and a level point score. The value-added charts offer the opportunity to probe the strengths and weaknesses within the group.
3. Ethnic monitoring is seen as an effective method of raising achievement levels. It is used positively as a means of identify learning issues and shortcomings in school provision to make target setting more responsive to the needs of students. Each year in this school, when KS3 and GCSE results are available, heads of departments prepare a very detailed response regarding academic achievement including their conclusions of ethnic background to target individual students.
4. Teachers use data effectively to review the performance and expectations of pupils, to identify groups of pupils who are underachieving and to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching. The school encourages teachers to plot their student results and set challenging, but realistic targets.
5. The senior management team sifts through the data to pick out highlights and address issues at least one weekend a year, as part of school away day. Every department then spends a day writing a departmental action plan, for which the department analyses the results of every cohort of students.

**School B:** This school also uses similar data as above but the successful use of data in this school owes much to capable and determined assistant headteachers who have sole responsibility for monitoring the effective use of data in the school. In this school the assistant headteacher is responsible for collating and monitoring trends, results and analysis of how well the school performed in relation to similar schools and schools nationally. Comparisons are made between subjects, mostly using value-added analyses. In this school heads of departments are held accountable for their examination results and this has helped to sharpen the focus to raise achievement. Heads of departments are expected to identify and target specific areas of improvement in their development plan. Teachers are also asked to identify and monitor the progress of individual pupils who are

**Figure 6. National Median line Relating Pupils' KS2 APS in 2000 to their GCSE Total Points Score 2005**



underachieving. The departments have developed a strong sense of pride and unity of purpose in their effort to improve teaching and learning through effective use of data.

The appointment of the assistant headteacher five years ago was key and the school now has an individual tracking system that is used to produce a termly class profile and to monitor the progress of individual pupils, class and groups at all key stages.

*'To build the process the school developed first a baseline profile on each student in order to establish their strengths, areas of improvement and identify future potential. This data is now used to set targets for each student and to monitor progress towards the target through out the year. We look at the information year by year and identify key issues that may need to be addressed.'*

The school is particularly proud of its approach to ethnic monitoring. It uses ethnicity data to identify individual strengths and weaknesses. This monitoring is done by all teachers and heads of departments. It was clearly noted during the assistant headteacher's interview and classroom observations that teachers are using data in a number of ways to motivate their class pupils:

*'Every child in the school knows their previous results and what they should achieve at GCSE. I use quite a lot to target Maths pupils at GCSE using KS2, KS3 and QCA option tests. Using this data I am telling children how far they are off the next grade. Our experience is that this helps pupils and motivates them. Having the information also does help the teachers to be able to focus on what they trying to achieve.'*

The use of data at all levels by teachers, the senior management team (SMT) and department heads also means that areas of weakness are picked up and can become a priority for early interventions. For example in 2004, based on data evidence, Black Caribbean pupils were identified as a major group underachieving at GCSE. Underachievement of this group became an issue in the school and has led the departments to consider reasons why, investigate good practice and target pupils for support through the Aiming High strategy which has led to a drastic improvement in their performance in 2005.

The school has been effective for a long time in using data to identify particular pupils who are underachieving. Schools look at the pupils who are underachieving at a very early stage against the KS2, KS3 results and this has led to a number of interventions and strategies where data analysis highlighted issues to be addressed in the school. The most commonly reported interventions in the school as a result of looking at the data were providing additional support including one to one, booster groups, tailoring teaching levels of the curriculum, mentoring and target setting.

Overall the use of data in the school for tracking pupils' progress, target setting, identifying underachievement, monitoring departmental performance and informing teaching and learning is widespread. A comment from the assistant headteacher captured the climate and views in the school about effective use of data, which supports conclusions raised in this paper:

*'Data is critical for raising standards. Without data it is difficult to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the school and track individual pupils performance to improve teaching and learning. Teachers need good data and it is a requirement for all schools. Not just having it but using effectively.'*

## Conclusions

Over the past three decades national research has shown Black African heritage pupils' achievements lag far behind the average achievement of the majority of their peers and that the gap is growing at the end of primary and secondary education. However, in recent years the need for detailed case studies of successful schools in raising the achievement of ethnic minority pupils has become apparent as a means of increasing our understanding of the ways schools can enhance pupils' academic achievement. The aim of this research paper is to investigate how pupils from Black African backgrounds are helped to achieve high standards in schools and to identify the factors that contribute to the success of raising achievement.

The study draws on detailed statistical analyses as well case studies based on schools visits. These draw on the views of headteachers, staff, governors, parents and pupils. The main findings of the research show that:

- The authority has a number of excellent secondary schools that offer good education to African heritage pupils.
- Seventy-nine percent of Black African pupils achieved 5+A\*-C grades in 2005 compared to 56% overall nationally and 57% in Local Authority schools.
- Standards of performance of Black African pupils in the case study schools have improved steadily and faster than in other schools in the Local Authority and nationally in the past five years. Between 2000 and 2005 the authority recorded a 23% improvement rate compared to a national overall improvement rate of 7%.
- Black African pupils in the authority achieved better than White British pupils at national level.
- Black African pupils in the case study schools achieved better than White British and Indian pupils at national level.
- Ibo speaking pupils in Lambeth achieved better than all ethnic groups including Indian pupils at national level, with the exception of Chinese pupils.
- Yoruba and Twi speaking pupils in Lambeth achieved better than White British pupils at national level.
- The leadership in case study schools is outstanding and the quality of teaching and learning is very high.
- African parents value education highly. Their support for the work and values of schools is one of the most important factors contributing to their children's achievement.
- The case study schools have expectations of high achievement for all. Black African pupils are as valued as others in these schools, teachers have high expectations of them.
- Parents share the schools' sense of mission and service, the caring values that support their children and the schools' involvement in the community.
- Pupils share their parents aspirations and their understanding that a good education is crucial to their success in later life.
- Parents respect authority and value the good discipline that schools instil.
- Parents, pupils and staff value the diversity of those who work in schools and welcome the very good role models that Black African and Black Caribbean staff provide.
- Schools use performance data very effectively in order to monitor pupils' progress.
- Schools enrich the curriculum with projects and studies that draw on pupils' family experience, and add to their growing pride in being African.

The overall conclusion of this study is that the Local Authority schools have bucked the national trend through the use of a range of strategies which include leadership, effective teaching and learning, parental involvement, partnership with parents and the African community, an inclusive curriculum, effective use of data, well co-ordinated support and guidance, effective use of diverse a Black and White workforce and a commitment to equal opportunities and diversity agenda. Black African students who attend the case study schools in the authority are performing well above the national average suggesting that with commitment, similar results could be achieved elsewhere. Our study also confirms, without a doubt that the education provided in the Local Authority schools is the reason for bucking national trends.

### Policy implications

The research findings in this paper contain a number of important messages for policy makers. Schools are concerned that the government has become over ideological on the question of what can be done at a local level and has restricted local innovations through its highly centralised national strategies such as literacy, numeracy and raising achievement of ethnic minorities pupils. The raising achievement of ethnic minority underachieving groups are local issues that are better addressed by innovative Local Authorities and school initiatives, such as the work of the case study schools, with the involvement of local communities. The findings that African heritage pupils do well in good schools provides positive messages as to what can be done to raise standards at national levels. There is strong evidence from the case study schools to suggest that some of these approaches are likely to have a positive impact on achievement levels. We would argue, however, that more needs to be done by the government to recognise extra burdens and responsibilities placed on staff in some schools caused by the concentration of pupils in their school facing multiple problems by providing additional resources to meet these needs. Based on this study it is suggested that policy makers should design strategies and programmes to raise the achievement of African heritage pupils in schools.

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