

White Working Class: New research highlights barriers and successful strategies to raise achievement

Research Brief: 27 January 2010

A new research report released in Lambeth highlights barriers and successful strategies to raise achievement of white working class pupils in schools. The research was carried out by Feyisa Demie (Adviser for school self-evaluation and Head of Research and Statistics) and Kirstin Lewis (Raising Achievement Research Manager) over two years period.

The study "***Raising the Achievement of White Working Class Pupils***" was commissioned by the council against a background of growing national concern surrounding educational performance of the white working class. The study was published on 27 January 2010.

The aim of this research project was to study the experiences of white working class pupils in schools. The study looked specifically into the achievements of white working class pupils and identified reasons for underachievement to develop strategies to raise success.

The research draws on detailed statistical analysis as well as evidence from parent and community focus groups, as well as 13 schools from Lambeth that were used as case studies. The main findings suggest that 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.

The study confirms that one of the biggest groups of underachievers is the white working class and their outcomes at both key stage two (seven to eleven years) and key stage four (14 to 16 years) are considerably below those achieved by all other major ethnic groups at national level. One of the main reasons for pupil underachievement is low aspirations from their parents regarding education and social deprivation. The root causes of underachievement have also been identified within factors such as low literacy levels, feelings of marginalisation within the community, low level of parental education and lack of targeted support to raise achievement.

However, despite underperformance at a national level, the research has found that white working class pupils in a number of the case study schools in Lambeth are bucking the trend. The study identifies a number of strategies to overcome some of the barriers of achievement which face white working class children in schools, such as successful leadership that recruit an effective diverse workforce, parental engagement, rigorous monitoring systems which track individual pupils performance against expectations, personally tailored support and flexible intervention programme. What is particularly special about the case study schools are that they tend to employ a range of strategies and targeted support to challenge poverty and underachievement through extensive use of teachers, teaching assistants and learning mentors.

The study concludes that white working class pupils as a group lacked targeted support in school to tackle a generation of low aspiration and to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage in white working class communities. White working class people interviewed felt that no-one is listening or speaking for them. 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. There is a need for additional funding to support targeted initiatives to raise the aspiration and achievement of white working class pupils.

The study also argues that Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) is well targeted to support EAL and ethnic minority pupils who are not fluent in English and underachieving in schools. What is needed from national policy makers is to commit new ring-fenced additional

funding to target white working class pupils as a group, without reducing current funding to minority ethnic groups.

Contact

The findings are published in a series of reports which are available at www.lambeth.gov.uk/rsu (click title below):

- [White working class achievement: Barriers to learning in schools](#)
- [Raising achievement of white working class pupils: School Strategies](#)
- [Raising achievement of white working class pupils: Executive summary](#)

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