

# Raising Achievement of Black Caribbean Pupils: Barriers and Good Practice in Schools

## RESEARCH BRIEF SUMMARY

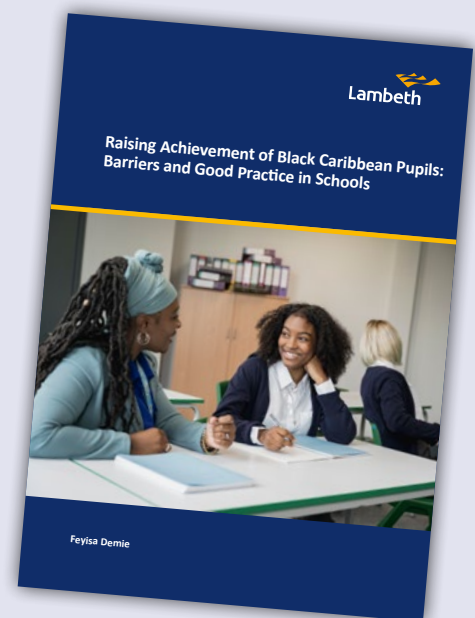
### 1. Introduction

This study aims to examine the key barriers to learning and the school strategies to raise achievement of Black Caribbean pupils in Lambeth schools. Three overarching research questions guided this research, namely:

- What does the survey data us about the barriers of learning that contributed to the underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils?
- What does the survey data tell us about the success factors that contributed to the achievement of Black Caribbean pupils?
- What is the implication for policy and practice?

A complementary methodological approach was used in the research including reviewing literature, analysing trend attainment data to explore changes as well as a survey of barriers of learning and success factors in schools involved in raising the achievement of Black Caribbean pupils.

There are a number of key messages from the survey. The main findings of the surveys are summarised below:



### 2. The attainment of Black Caribbean pupils

The main findings from the study confirm that the English school system has produced dismal academic results for a high percentage of Black Caribbean pupils over the last 40 years (Demie and Mclean 22; Ofsted 2002). Over the past four decades, national research has shown that their achievements persistently lag behind the average achievement of their peers and the gap is growing at the end of primary and secondary education. The data also shows that Black Caribbean underachievement is real and persistent with consistently low levels of attainment, and the difference between their performance and that reported nationally is the largest of any ethnic group. In 2022, Black Caribbean pupils did not achieve in line with the wider Lambeth pupil population at KS2 or KS4. Comparing data from 2016 through to 2022, we can see that the attainment gap between Black Caribbean pupils and their peers has fluctuated but shown little indication of closing over time, both at KS2 and KS4 (see table 1 and 2). The discrepancies in achievement between Black Caribbean pupils in Lambeth and their peers are also worse than those same discrepancies at the national level.

**Table 1 KS2 attainment 2016-2022 (RWM combined)**

KS2	Lambeth Black Caribbean	Lambeth all Pupils	Gap	National Black Caribbean	National all Pupils	Gap
2016	51	62	-11	43	53	-10
2017	61	70	-9	54	61	-7
2018	57	70	-13	55	64	-9
2019	60	71	-11	56	65	-9
2022	47	61	-14	49	59	-10

**Table 2 GCSE attainment 2016-2022(English and maths 9-4 %)**

GCSE	Lambeth Black Caribbean	Lambeth All pupils	Gap	National Black Caribbean	National all pupils	Gap
2016	45	62	-17	51	59	-8
2017	50	60	-10	51	59	-8
2018	43	60	-17	49	59	-10
2019	47	59	-12	48	60	-12
2022	51.8	64	-12.2	55.7	64.3	-8.6

### 3. Barriers to learning for Black Caribbean Pupils

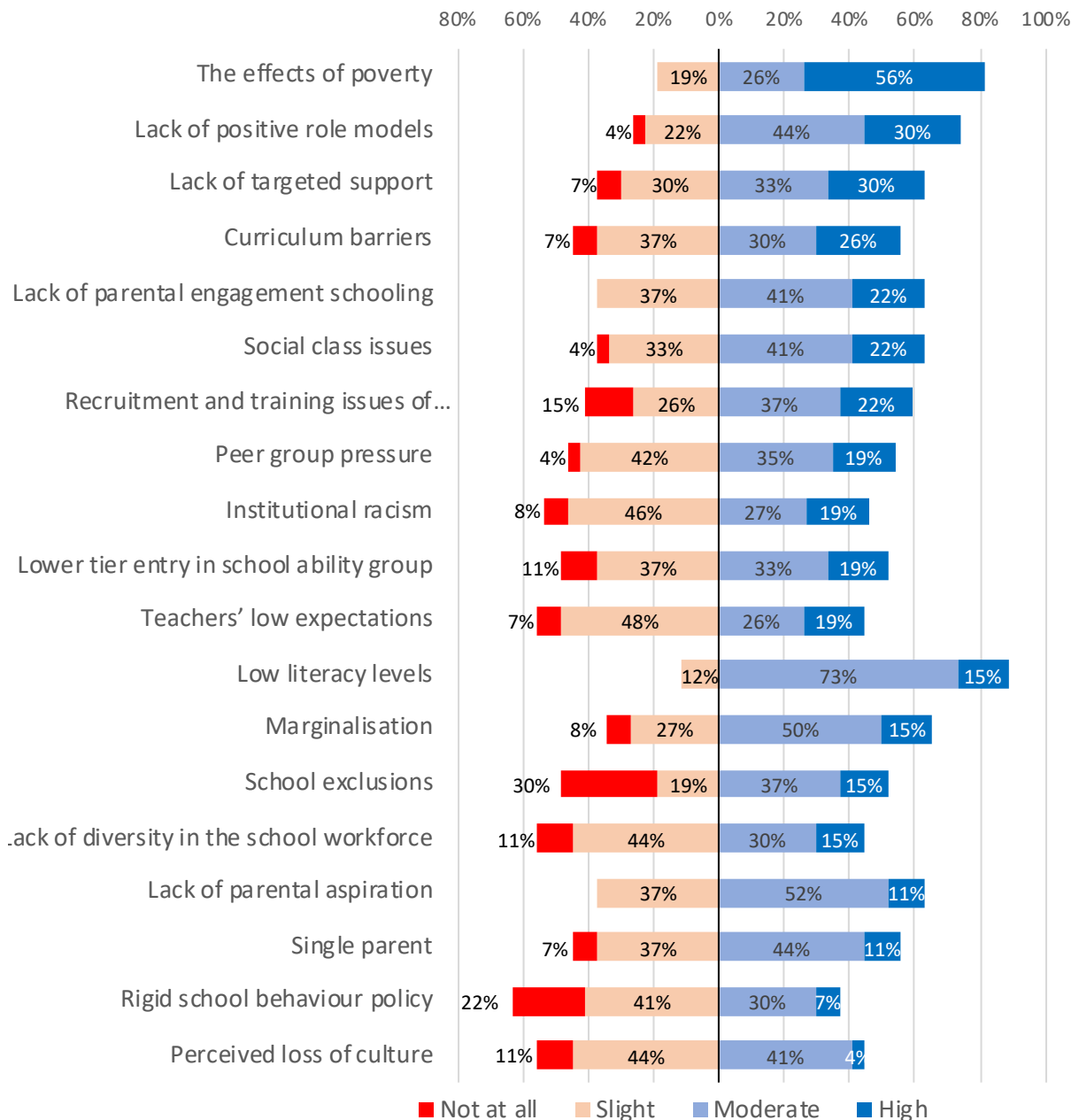
A growing body of research suggests there many factors that contribute to underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils in schools (see Demie, 2022a,b,c,d; Crozier, 2005; Maylor et al., 2006; Rhamie, 2007; DCSF, 2008b; DfE 2015; Cabinet Office, 2007;EHRC, 2016; Macpherson, 1999; Parekh, 2000; DfES, 2006b; Curtis 2008; Strand 2008;Demie 2005, 2003; Demie and Mclean 2017). Within education literature recently underachievement has been found to be influenced by the following school, home, and pupil related factors:

- Teachers' low expectations
- Marginalisation
- Institutional racism
- Lack of diversity in the school workforce
- Lack of parental engagement in schooling
- Lack of parental aspiration
- Single parent
- Low literacy levels
- The effects of poverty
- Lack of positive role models
- Social class issues
- Curriculum barriers
- Lower tier entry in school ability group
- School exclusions

Researchers used case studies and an ethnographic approach of research to come to this conclusion (see Demie and Mclean 2017a,b; Ofsted 2002,2009). However, with the survey approach used in this

study, we were able to compare the relative contributions of each of the above factors. Of the above barriers the factors that respondents rated as having most contribution to underachievement, were low literacy levels (88%), the effect of poverty (82%), followed by lack of positive role models and social class issues (74%), marginalisation (65%), lack of parent parental engagement and parental aspiration, lack of targeted support, social class issues (63%), single parent (56%), peer group pressure and school exclusions (52%).

**Figure 1 A survey of the factors that contributed to underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils**



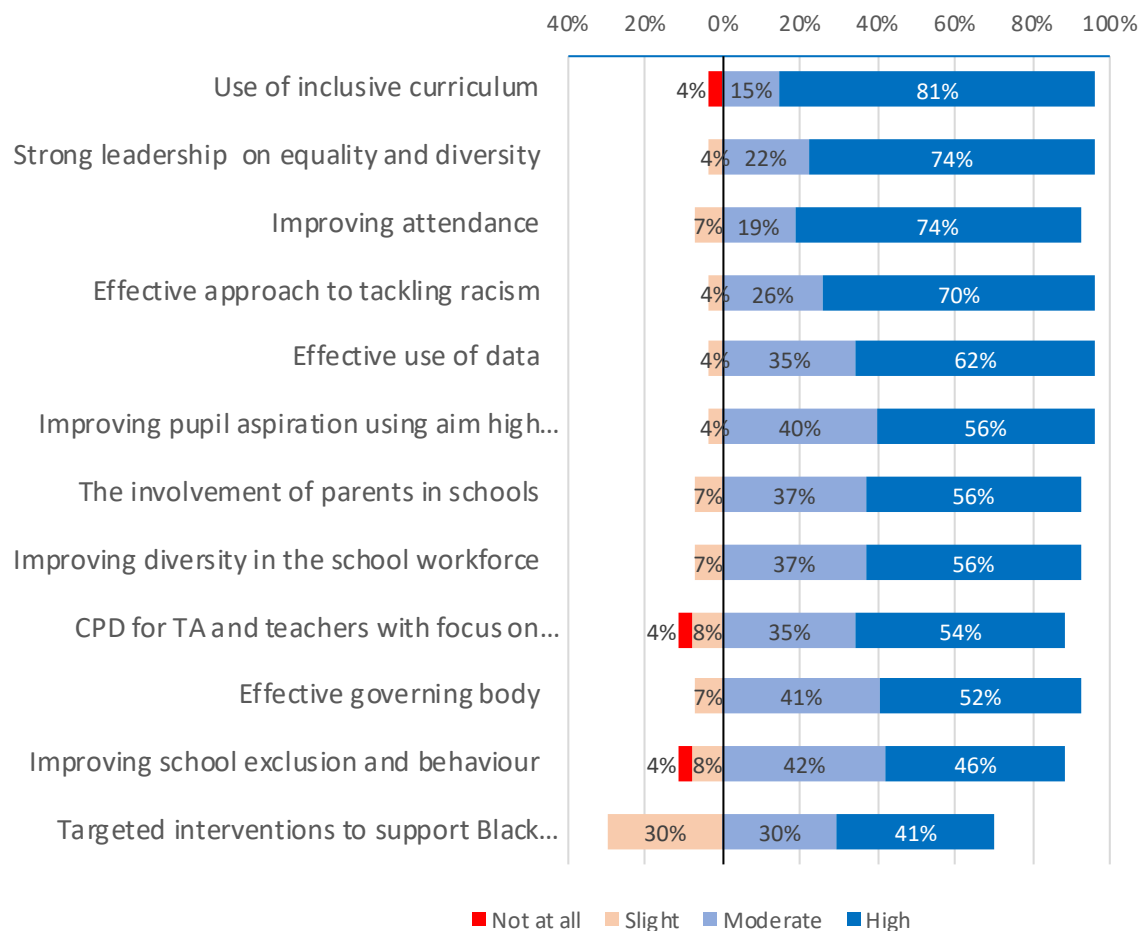
#### 4. Factors that contributed to Black Caribbean achievement

The evidence from the data confirms tackling educational inequality and closing the gap is one of the biggest challenges faced by policy makers, teachers, and school leaders in England. Black

Caribbean pupils are consistently the lowest performing group, and the gap widens particularly at the end of secondary school. The data suggests little improvement and there is still a long way to go to in closing the gap in achievement. All the factors listed above can perpetuate low attainment and disengagement from learning for Black Caribbean pupils. However, despite underperformance at local and national level the situation is not always doom and gloom. In a number of successful schools Black Caribbean pupils buck the national trend. There are a number of reasons why Black Caribbean pupils are doing well in these successful schools (Demie and Mclean 2017b; Demie 2019a,b,2005;Ofsted 2002a,b; McKenley et al 2002;Tickley et al 2006). Key features and success factors identified from the literature review based on ethnographic studies and case studies includes:

- Strong leadership on equality and diversity by headteachers
- Effective teaching and learning
- High expectation for all pupils and teachers
- Diversifying the curriculum to meet the needs of Black Caribbean pupils.
- Close links with parents and increasing community support.
- Diversity in the school workforce
- Effective use of data to track individual pupils’ performance.
- Targeted support for Black Caribbean pupils
- Celebration of cultural diversity and a strong commitment to equal opportunities.

**Figure 2 A survey of the factors that contributed to improving Black Caribbean attainment.**



Our survey also support these findings from the literature as the main success factors to raise achievement with respondents rating highly factors such as strong leadership on equality and diversity (81%), use of inclusive curriculum (74%), improving attendance (74%), an effective approach to tackling racism (70%), the effective use of data (62%), improving pupil aspiration using Aim High events (56%), diversity in the school workforce (56%), the involvement of parents in schools (56%), CPD for TA and teachers with a focus on Black Caribbean pupils (54%), improving school exclusion rates and behaviour(46%)and targeted support for Black Caribbean pupils(41%).

The respondents in the survey spoke with enthusiasm about their positive experience particularly with Lambeth School Partnership initiatives such as

- Diversifying the curriculum
- Parental engagement
- Aim high events.
- Tackling Black Caribbean exclusions

Due to its interventions and the work of schools across Lambeth, there are now fewer permanent exclusions, stronger connections with parents, and more emphasis on a diverse curriculum that includes the lives of famous Black and ethnic minority people in Britain, the achievement of early civilization such as Benin in West Africa, Cushitic and Merotic civilization in North East Africa, the transatlantic slave trade and its abolition, the history of the Windrush generation, pre-colonial Black presence in Britain, migration patterns, ethnic and cultural diversity in Britain; the positive contribution people of all ethnicities have made to Britain and the role of the countries of the former British empire in both world wars, Black History month in the curriculum, Black Live Matters and the Civil Right movement in USA and elsewhere. The Black experience is used to enrich the curriculum in art, dance, music, geography, history, science, and technology (LSP 2019; Demie 2019). This is a great achievement and the LSP should be proud of the work that has been done in Lambeth schools in developing and encouraging schools to use diversified curriculum that meets the needs of Black pupils. The curriculum and parental engagement contributed to the outstanding spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development that prepares students for life in modern British society. The aiming high events have also helped to inspire pupils and to engage parents in their children's education.

However, the survey respondents also reported that LSP Black Caribbean Raising the Game project has limited focus in the area of closing the achievement gap through targeted interventions using:

- Small group tuition
- Best teachers to teach English and maths for Black Caribbean targeted interventions groups.
- Well trained TA
- Booster class
- Improving attendance
- Enrichment programmes e.g., trips to cultural venues

The survey shows that Raising the Game focussed initiatives such as diversifying the curriculum, parental engagement, aiming high events and tackling Black Caribbean exclusions. As a result, it was not possible to close the achievement gap of Black Caribbean pupils.

Based what we know from existing literature and this research findings, we make the following recommendations to tackle the underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils in schools.

## 5. Recommendations

### The Department for Education:

1. We would argue that it takes a wide-ranging strategy with a strong lead from national government to reverse the trend of underachievement particularly of Black Caribbean pupils. The recommendations from our findings are that the DfE should establish a national Black Caribbean Raising Achievement Project and provide ring fenced funding to support a range of targeted interventions including:
  - Small group additional teaching
  - One-to-one tuition
  - Use of best teachers to teach intervention groups including English and Maths
  - Use of well-trained TAs
  - Parental involvement
  - Booster classes
  - Enrichment programmes e.g., trips to cultural venues
2. Develop a national curriculum and workforce that more reflects the UK's rich cultural diversity.

### Lambeth School Partnership:

- At present there is no evidence that the Lambeth School Partnership (LSP) has focused on the key priority of the project which was to raise the attainment of Black Caribbean pupils to close the achievement gap at each key stage. It is strongly recommended that the LSP focuses on the main challenge of improving the achievement of Black Caribbean pupils. This should be done through effective use of targeted interventions in the schools that are underachieving.
- The LSP should seek a grant from the LA, or an external grant, to improve the achievement of Black Caribbean pupils, by employing a headteacher, or suitable deputy head to support and challenge schools to close the achievement gap. This fund should also be used to support Black Caribbean intervention groups through extensive use of one-to-one support, booster classes and using the best teachers to teach English and Maths to improve outcomes. This grant would need to cover these costs for three years.
- The LSP needs to design the project to be able to monitor and evaluate the impact of the LSP initiatives in improving attainment in schools, whilst also comparing it with schools with and without targeted interventions to draw lessons.
- Schools should continue auditing their workforce and pursue diversification that reflects the local community.
- Discuss race issues and ethnic diversity within lessons as a part of staff CPD.
- Celebrate cultural diversity in schools.

### Implications for future research agenda

We would argue that learning from the research findings can make a difference to schools and policy makers where the underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils is a challenge. This research is mainly about barriers of learning for Black Caribbean and some of the good practice that is contributing to achievement. This research evidence offers a regularly replicated model of research that shows indisputably what works. Our findings are in line with other previous studies (Ofsted 2002,2008; Demie 2022,2005; Demie Mclean 2017a,b; EEF 2019). A number of researchers have also argued that our approach is useful for obtaining detailed in-depth information about the views, opinions of respondents, and group feelings. Despite this, our study has some limitations that have implications for further research.

First the study is a small scale one based on a small number of respondents completing a survey.

Secondly, our research or previous research in this area have not been able to undertake impact of targeted interventions in raising the achievement and tackling inequality of Black Caribbean pupils at national level. There is a need for more research to understand the success factors that contributed to improving the achievement using different research methodological approaches that includes survey, case studies, ethnographic and RCT methods. Well-designed research initiatives in this area can attract funding from national institutions that interested in the raising achievement of disadvantaged and underachieving groups in schools.

### Notes for editors:

1. The research was carried out by Feyisa Demie.
2. Details of the findings are published in a research report entitled '**Raising Achievement of Black Caribbean Pupils: Barriers and Good Practice in Schools**'.
3. For further information or for the copy of the report please contact: Feyisa Demie, Schools' Research and Statistics, Education and Learning, Lambeth LA E-mail: [fdemie@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:fdemie@lambeth.gov.uk)

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