



O'Neill Hemmings, Headteacher of St Saviour's Church of England Primary School, Lambeth

### At a glance

- A report from Lambeth Education looks at schools that are raising achievement with black Caribbean pupils.
- It shows that these schools work closely with parents to understand cultural differences.
- They also encourage all staff, black and white, to act as role models.
- Schools are moving beyond the national curriculum to incorporate cultural experiences.
- Newly-arrived Caribbean pupils have different needs from British black Caribbean children.

# Bucking the trend

In Lambeth, the education authority with the highest number of black Caribbean pupils, 22 schools are bucking the trend of underachievement for this group. Abi Newman reports on what these headteachers are doing right.

Entering St Saviour's Church of England Primary School in south east London, you are greeted by a sea of young faces. Portraits of 204 pupils adorn the walls alongside certificates they can achieve for excellent work, politeness and trying their best.

The inspiring display embodies the school's mission statement: "Excellence for all and respect by all". Headteacher O'Neill Hemmings says this ethos has been an essential tool for raising achievement among his black Caribbean pupils who comprise a third of the school.

His school is one of 22 schools in Lambeth that have bucked the national trend of underachievement among black Caribbean pupils in the past four years.

Key Stage 2 results have improved in the primary schools by an average 34 per cent at level 4+ compared with 14 per cent nationally. Meanwhile the number of black Caribbean teenagers achieving five A\* to C GCSEs has jumped by an average 22 per cent, in stark contrast to three per cent nationwide. There have also been minimal exclusions.

### Successful formula

Evidently leaders of these Lambeth schools have found a successful formula for enabling black Caribbean youngsters to thrive, proving that underachievement among this minority ethnic group is not an irrefutable fact.

Their good practice is currently being shared with school leaders across London in a report, *Raising Achievement*, published by Lambeth Education, which interviewed pupils, parents and teachers at 13 of the 22 schools.

In March the report was sent to all Lambeth headteachers, the main teacher unions, Ofsted, the DFES and chief education



# Minority ethnic achievement

► officers, sparking discussion at national level.

A spokesman for the department says the key messages from the Lambeth research have been integrated into its Aiming High strategy, designed to combat underachievement of all black minority ethnic pupils. The strategy is currently under consultation.

However Feyisa Demie, Lambeth Education's Head of Research and Statistics, says decisive action is needed.

"We have demonstrated that a good headteacher and a good programme can boost the achievement of black Caribbean pupils. We are now challenging the government to change its policy with ring-fenced funding to support local initiatives in geographical areas or LEAs."

'Colour-blind' national priorities such as Excellence in Cities and the numeracy and literacy strategies have not addressed the needs of black Caribbean pupils, particularly regarding teaching and learning styles, says Demie.

He explains: "There is a lot of work to be done with teachers and management in understanding the roots of Caribbean culture and black Caribbean pupils as learners – how and why some underachieve and what teachers can do about it. This is a major challenge for school leaders."

## Parents on board

At St Saviour's, Hemmings says an effective relationship with parents has been key to raising achievement.

"Different cultures discipline children in different ways so you need to make sure the messages are the same at home as at school. Once you have the parents on board, whatever you do will impact on the child."

Pupils, parents and teachers enter into a home-school agreement setting out what is expected of each party and students sign a behaviour contract which they help to write during class circle time.

Hemmings has been fortunate in recruiting black teachers as role models. When he joined St Saviour's he was the only black male teacher.

Three years on he has a diverse team including auxiliary workers to ease the burden on teachers. Among them are six black and white parent classroom assistants and two learning support assistants. He also has a black male learning mentor who supports five boys each week and who is developing a mentoring role for a female administrative worker.

"As a black head, I hope to provide a role model but when children are breaching the rules I have to lay down the law. They can talk to the mentor in confidence. He has been successful in providing

the black Caribbean boys with coping strategies and liaising with parents.

"Once the boys can deal with conflict, they can concentrate on their work and achieve," Hemmings explains. The strategy appears to be working.

One Year 6 pupil told researchers: "When there are no black teachers you feel uncomfortable...It's much better now. There is lots of support for learning."

Christine Eames-Jones, Headteacher of Elm Wood School, spent six years establishing a system for collecting and interrogating pupil data by multiple criteria.

In addition to gender, ethnicity and number of terms at school, she distinguishes between British black Caribbean pupils and newly arrived Caribbean children who have different needs.

"Tracking children according to more specific criteria to assess their needs has been the most challenging. It has enabled us to target specific groups of children who were failing in specific areas. Classroom assistants focus on that need and we re-evaluate after six weeks," she says.

## Cultural curriculum

Eames-Jones offers an inclusive curriculum which teases out children's cultural experiences and creative



Christine Eames-Jones, Headteacher of Elm Wood School (centre) encourages confidence in her pupils

talents. Her teachers, driven by a common vision, regularly consult parents so lessons are relevant to minority ethnic groups.

"It's about taking risks with the national curriculum," says Eames-Jones, who invites parents and black Caribbean artists into the school. She funds after-school drama and music activities which boost pupils' confidence through partnerships with arts organisations and the National Lottery.

Above all, she says celebrating children's achievements is key. She has a Gold Compliments Book in which pupils and teachers can write comments which are read out at weekly family assemblies. In addition Eames-Jones operates a privilege hour for fun activities that children earn by behaving well during the week.

She has also created a mentoring climate which helps pupils become emotionally literate, boosting their chances of achieving academically. She runs playground and reading buddy schemes, a mentoring partnership with an independent school for boys,

Dulwich College, and peer support in class. A British black Caribbean pupil will look after a newly arrived Caribbean child, for example.

## Reduced exclusions

At Archbishop Tenison's Secondary School, Headteacher Brian Jones places more emphasis on the form tutor as learning mentor so he can spend more on good teachers. On joining the 606-pupil school (where a quarter of pupils are black Caribbean), he inherited a demoralised staff, didactic pedagogy and poor pupil-staff relations.

"I had to exclude 78 children in the first term. There were daily confrontations and the teachers failed to capture the children's imagination," he explains.

In 11 years he has revolutionised the school by instilling discipline, replacing 90 per cent of staff with "young, capable and committed" teachers and introducing streaming, small classes and paired reading systems to improve literacy and learning.

He has been successful. Last year 75 per cent of boys

gained five A\* to C GCSEs compared with the Lambeth average of 33 per cent.

Jones does not emphasise diversity. Indeed only three of his 37 staff are black minority ethnic. "We do not stereotype our boys. What is of paramount importance is good teaching. All children, irrespective of their ethnic background, will respond to that."

■ For a copy of the *Raising Achievement* report, email [fdemie@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:fdemie@lambeth.gov.uk)

## Raising achievement

Schools in Lambeth applied the following strategies to raise achievement in black Caribbean students.

- Sophisticated performance data and detailed monitoring of pupils' learning styles to design tailored interventions
- Strong leadership demonstrating commitment, energy and vision for raising achievement
- A redesigned curriculum that meets the needs of a multi-ethnic society

■ Use of the arts to raise self-esteem and engage the imaginations of black Caribbean pupils

■ Effective use of black and white teachers as role models and employing a diverse workforce

■ Learning mentors to support primary school pupils

■ Raised awareness among staff, parents and governors of underachievement issues and the emotional challenges facing black Caribbean pupils, such as poverty, family breakdown and mobility

## Information

For information about Equal Access to Promotion?, an NCSL leadership course for aspiring school leaders from minority ethnic backgrounds, visit [www.ncsl.org.uk/](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/) programmes or email [maria.bakari@ncsl.org.uk](mailto:maria.bakari@ncsl.org.uk). The programme, which starts again in the autumn consists of a two-day residential, an in-school development project and a further follow-up day.