

Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

United Kingdom case study report 1 Aiming High: African Caribbean Achievement Pilot Project

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Aiming High: African Caribbean Achievement Pilot Project

Summary

This case study examines the ‘Aiming High: African Caribbean Achievement Pilot’ project (referred to as AH hereafter), a national government funded initiative set up to address the lower educational attainment of secondary school aged pupils of African Caribbean heritage. The case study specifically examines the reasons why the project was set up (Background) and the process involved. It offers an overview of the consultation process, which informed AH before describing the pilot project itself. Particular attention is paid to the aims of the pilot, the methodological process (or the format) and the funding allocation. Discussion then centres on the evaluation process, commissioned as part of the AH pilot but carried out by independent researchers and, specifically, its key findings and recommendations. The final section considers some of the emerging issues in the wider context of the EPASI project.

Background to the need for the project

While documentary evidence confirms the presence of Black people (from Africa) in Britain as long ago as the 16th Century, and possibly prior to this period (File and Power 1981; Adi 1995) it is only following World War II that significant numbers of Black people came to settle in Britain. While the experiences of Black and minority ethnic groups within the English schooling system can be said to be reflective of particular sociopolitical and cultural climates, Black pupils have tended to experience various forms of exclusion (see Coard 1971) and poor academic performance over at least the last forty years. Recent evidence reveals that Blackⁱ pupils continue not to share in the yearly increases at each key stageⁱⁱ when compared with their white peers and the national average (Gillborn 1999; DfES 2006a; Gillborn and Rollock 2008 forthcoming). They are over-represented as having special educational needs and up to three times more likely to be excluded from school than their white counterparts and the national average (DfES 2006b). It is in the climate of such persistently low attainment, that the African Caribbean Achievement Pilot project was set up.

The Consultation process

In March 2003, the DfES issued a consultation document entitled “Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Minority Ethnic pupils” which set out a programme for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils and bilingual learners and sought various stakeholders views about this process. One of the key conclusions of this consultation was that inequalities are experienced differentially by different groups and if left to chance African Caribbean pupils will “continue to be failed by the system” (DfES, undated). During October of that same year, the then Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for Education Stephen Twigg announced a range of work under the overarching heading of “Aiming High” which included the African Caribbean Achievement Pilot Project.

The Pilot

The aim of the pilot was to “reverse the trend of academic decline for African Caribbean pupils and to close the gap in achievement between them and their peers.” (DfES undated). The DfES intended to meet this aim through the following set of objectives:

- 1 By supporting schools to develop the leadership capacity to lead a whole school approach to raising the achievement of African Caribbean pupils
- 2 By developing the knowledge and understanding of the specific issues facing African Caribbean pupils and equip teachers with the skills to respond to them
- 3 By producing models of good practice that can be shared with other schools and inform future policy

(Tikly *et al.* 2006)

This was initially planned to run from November 2003 to March 2005 but was eventually extended for a further four months until July 2005.

Thirty secondary schools were invited to become involved in the pilot. They were selected, initially, on the basis that they had they had 10 percent or more pupils of African Caribbean heritage on their school roll and, that these pupils were performing below average for all pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 (see Note 2 for description of Key Stages).

Each school was provided with funding for a lead professional (usually member of the school's leadership team) for one day per week to oversee and manage the project. They also received up to £16,000 to finance leadership strategies on the project, including support from an experienced consultant advisor and training support from the National College for School Leadership (NSCL)ⁱⁱⁱ. Finally, schools received a further £10,000 per year to implement "school specific strategies", that is schools were able to spend these monies on projects and initiatives that they felt best suited the needs of their pupils and school context (eg introducing and revising aspects of the curriculum to make it relevant to the experiences of Black pupils).

Developing strong leadership skills to implement and continue the pilot project was one of its key objectives. The DfES therefore asked the NCSL to establish and provide a specialist leadership programme for the schools involved in the pilot. This programme sought, specifically; to provide lead school professional with the opportunity for individual and collaborative learning in order to help them develop the capacity to meet the needs (ie to raise African Caribbean achievement) of the AH project.

The NCSL Leadership Support Programme was comprised of a series of four residential events, which took place between March 2004 and February 2005. Its specific objectives were to:

- 1 Develop the individual leadership capacity of lead professionals according to identified self-need
- 2 Ensure that lead professionals can develop their knowledge, awareness and skills to lead a whole-school approach to raising African Caribbean achievement in their schools
- 3 Provide further project-specific leadership opportunities
- 4 Oversee a professional network and provide collaborative learning opportunities and support for lead professionals
- 5 Facilitate exchange of good practice amongst participating schools

(DfES undated)

Fig. 1 Timeline of the Aiming High: African Achievement pilot project

Time period	
2003	
March 2003	DfES produce consultation document called "Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Minority Ethnic pupils"
November 2003	DfES announces first national strategy to raise achievement of minority ethnic pupils. AH is part of this strategy
2004	
March 2004	Evaluation begins
2005	
March 2005	Initial end date of pilot and evaluation
July 2005	Actual end date of pilot
2006	
June 2006	Actual end date of evaluation. Extended to this date to enable analysis of performance and inclusion data plus of new value added data ¹

The Evaluation

Background and aims:

The independent evaluation of the AH project was commissioned as part of the pilot and was lead by researchers from the University of Bristol, the Institute of Education and Birmingham local authority. It was originally scheduled to cover the same time period as the pilot but was later extended to June 2006 so that the researchers could include analysis of a third set of performance and inclusion data and of the newly introduced contextual value added data. The evaluation had four key aims and objectives:

- 1 To assess the impact of the project on:
 - i) African Caribbean achievement
 - ii) School systems and structures
 - iii) Staff knowledge and understanding of related issues
 - iv) The ability of staff to respond to pupil needs
 - v) The effectiveness of school leaders
 - vi) The role of parental involvement/perceptions
- 2 To establish what conditions have contributed to the success or lack of success of the project, or what conditions are necessary for successful change
- 3 To examine the process of implementation of strategies aimed at raising African Caribbean achievement
- 4 To examine the effectiveness of the support offered to lead professionals and schools to raise African Caribbean achievement, including:
 - i) Support from the DfES
 - ii) Support from the Aiming High consultant
 - iii) Effectiveness of the Aiming High guidance
 - iv) Effectiveness of the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) "bespoke" programme

(Tikly *et al.* 2006)

¹ Way of assessing pupil achievement that focuses on the overall progress they make rather than the attainment of specific grades.

Methodology:

The evaluation team employed both quantitative and qualitative assessment processes. They analysed various pupil characteristics (eg ethnic group, gender, free school meal eligibility) against pupil attainment for all thirty schools involved in the pilot project. Ten of the schools were selected as case studies. In addition, at the DfES' request, a further two schools were included as comparison schools. Case studies involved a two-day visit, which incorporated semi-structured interviews with key personnel (eg governors, headteachers, lead professionals, Aiming High consultants, teachers, parents and pupils). A total of 382 interviews were carried out for the evaluation.

Key findings:

In presenting the findings, consideration was paid to improvement in attainment of African Caribbean pupils and the effectiveness of schools to implementing the project. A summary of some of the key findings is listed below:

- 1 AH was effective in raising the awareness of African Caribbean issues in schools
- 2 There was some evidence to show that results improved for African Caribbean pupils attending the Aiming High schools although there are a number of important points to note when this data is compared with levels nationally and with general achievement in the Aiming High schools (see page 5 for details).
- 3 That a “whole-school approach” is required to meet the aims of the AH
- 4 Some schools had yet to meet their legal duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000² and to ensure a lead on race equality issues
- 5 There were particular factors that hindered the effective implementation of the AH, for example:
 - i) A “colour-blind” approach (that is ignoring the particular needs of this ethnic group),
 - ii) Incapacity of leadership team to manage change,
 - iii) Lack of accountability at different levels

Key recommendations:

The authors of the evaluation make a number of recommendations, which are summarised below:

- 1 Schools should conduct an audit to determine their capacity for implementing whole school change to raise African Caribbean achievement.
- 2 Local authorities should support schools by making specific curriculum resources available in key subject areas and provide examples of specific practice as well as develop more cohesive partnerships between clusters of schools to share good practice.
- 3 The DfES should require schools to submit a plan to qualify for funding based on evidence from the self-evaluation. Such plans would include clear milestones and funding would be staggered to ensure that these milestones are met.
- 4 The Training and Development Agency (responsible for teacher training and development) and the NCSL should provide as a “central component of their activities” training and guidance for leaders, teachers and the whole school workforce to support African Caribbean achievement.

² For further information see www.epasi.eu/CountryReportUK.pdf

Conclusions

The evaluation of Aiming High project reported some improvement in the results of African Caribbean pupils attending Aiming High schools. However, when examined in detail this improvement revealed a number of important concerns. For example, despite their improvement Black Caribbean boys remained the lowest achieving group in the Aiming High schools at Key Stages 3 and 4, with their value added scores between Key Stage 2 and 3 remaining almost unchanged between 2003 and 2005. The overall attainment and value added scores varied considerably across the schools involved in the project reflecting the varying levels of success of the different schools.

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ⁱ **Terminology:** Following the 2001 Census, “Black” in policy terms usually refers to communities of African and/or Caribbean heritage and “Other Black backgrounds”. Discussions within education focusing on the low attainment of Black pupils are *usually* referring to pupils categorised as Black Caribbean or African Caribbean whether or not they are born in Britain.

Census 2001 categories relating to Black:

Black or Black British

- Black African
- Black Caribbean
- Any Other Black background

(see Office for National Statistics, 2001)

ⁱⁱ **Key stage:** fixed periods of national examinations taken by pupils between 5 and 16 years. Between these ages, pupils sit a series of tests as part of a process to determine whether or not they have reached specific levels of the National Curriculum (NC). These tests, called Standard Assessment Tests, and frequently referred to as SATS, take place at the end of each Key Stage (see Fig. 7.3 below). Within this period of compulsory education, the NC is divided into four key stages that represent different age spans and levels. There are eight levels of increasing difficulty and pupils are expected to reach an expected level (shown here in brackets) according to their age.

Year Group	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Age of pupils at end of year	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Key Stage (KS)	KS 1			KS 2				KS 3			KS 4	
Level	1-3 (2)			2-5 (4)				3-7 (5/6)			Via National Qualifications	

Fig. 2 Attainment targets and level descriptions for the National Curriculum

ⁱⁱⁱ **National College for School Leadership:** helps support the training and development of those wishing to take on leadership responsibilities in schools. See www.ncsl.org.uk/index.cfm for details.