

Northamptonshire Racial Equality Council's response to the report by Professor Andrew Pilkington on educational achievement in Northamptonshire

Our response to this report is seeking solutions to extremely important problems rather than seeking to blame any party. However given that the focus of the report relates to the educational attainment of children and young people our response has to encompass actions from schools.

1. Northamptonshire Racial Equality Council welcomes the report on the educational achievement of Black and minority ethnic groups in schools by Professor Andrew Pilkington and has the following comments about the recommendations drafted out of the report.
2. The County Council has put in significant levels of investment to ensure that education in schools is delivered fairly. There are many actions that are undertaken by various officers in the County Council to raise levels of achievement, yet despite this, progress has been painfully slow and in some contexts the situation seems to be going backwards with gaps on outcomes increasing rather than reducing.
3. Given the County Councils improvement agenda for children and young people's services it is hardly believable that there is not a clear sense of which actions or initiatives are effective and which are not. Services designed to improve achievement across the County seem to have little clarity as to what they consider would be successful and equally little clarity as to the targets to be met on the journey there.
4. Professor Pilkington recommends a mapping activity of initiatives. NREC would like to see an analysis of the outcomes that the initiatives have delivered to the less well achieving racial groups in the County, and a clear judgement as to whether these actually reflect value for money.
5. One of the recommendations highlights the need for a strategic review building on the mapping and evaluation of initiatives by Northamptonshire County Council focussing on underachievement. Although a long term approach is no doubt necessary, NREC is concerned that any review is not allowed to drift. The NREC recommendation is that the review is undertaken within the next three months. In order that there is no drifting it is important that the review establishes clear short and medium term equality targets on under achievement.
6. The suggestion of a thematic inspection across the authority focussing on the achievement of Black Caribbean pupils is something that is welcomed by the

NREC and would potentially give a clarity of guidance to addressing this issue which would be unlikely to be found in any existing inspection activity.

In addition NREC would suggest that schools and the County Council should encourage Black and minority ethnic community groups to be routine consultees to OFSTED inspections.

7. In particular the recommendation on the targeting of primary schools was helpful given the majority of the current investment is focussed at secondary level where much under-achievement is already endemic. From the report it is clear that for many children and young people entering secondary education it is already too late. The strategic review of actions and initiatives should focus on addressing differential attainment at primary level.
8. NREC considers leadership to be a key issue providing the solution to Black and minority ethnic under achievement. NREC views school governors as having a key role in the solution to this issue. There needs to be professional development of the chairs and deputy chairs of school governing bodies. In addition, there should be ongoing Northamptonshire County Council officer support to governing bodies as a whole, to effectively analyse, interrogate and challenge Black and minority ethnic educational achievement data within the governors meetings. The County Council should enable leadership by providing a protocol for governors to ensure that data is supplied to governing bodies that is clear and can be used to compare performance with other schools in the County,
9. There are three separate recommendations that are focussed on monitoring activity. Clearly this is a priority and would need to have a level of transparency that does not currently exist. The essential aspects of this should be:
 - 9.1 Ensuring that schools are compliant with the law in having current racial equality statements with a clear action plan that identifies underachieving pupils and their ethnicity. The prioritisation of monitoring of this kind should be based of those schools receiving the highest levels of EMAG funding. This should be a key mechanism for the County Council to monitor improvement in schools as part of their general duty to promote racial equality under the Race Relations A(A) 2000. The monitoring and evaluation of strategies to improve Black and minority ethnic achievement should take place within schools and inform the development of their racial equality statements.
 - 9,2 Ensuring that ring-fenced funds like EMAG are focussed as a priority and spent by schools to raise Black African and Caribbean achievement.

- 9.3 Scrutiny of the County Councils Racial Equality Team in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. This should involve the publication of the equality impact assessment of the service in accordance with the requirements of the Equality Standard level 2 which the County Council has stated it has already achieved.
- 9.4 Community involvement in annual monitoring activity in order to have better performing services benefitting from the sharing of experiences and best practice and also to ensure that there is a growing sense of confidence in schools by Black and minority ethnic communities through their visible input into policy and strategy. NREC in partnership with Black and minority ethnic community organisations can offer the opportunity for co-ordinating effective and objective scrutiny which would have the advantage of maximising the opportunity for public scrutiny and thereby build public confidence in local schools and County Council Services.
- 9.5 Black and Minority ethnic communities in Northamptonshire have stated the importance of listening to Black and minority ethnic young people when evaluation services. The BME Sub Regional Partnership highlighted the need to re-establish BME young people's fora as a key strategy to do this.

It is vital that this work now started, carries on. The Andrew Pilkington Report highlights a picture where Northamptonshire is not simply reflecting national trends but an environment where institutional discrimination appears to be getting worse. What is required is courage and leadership to stop paying lip service to the issue, and take up the challenge of committing to end the discrimination. The Race Equality Team and the investment into it, is seen as the part of the solution to this critical issue

The first steps must be continuing the objective scrutiny of the kind started by the report. It is important that this kind of external analysis is continued not only next year but every year. The work of tracking attainment levels over time must be developed and improved upon.

The new structures of public services working together in the Local Area Agreement can give opportunities for us all to take ownership of this important issue. It is important that local LAA partners share this critical agenda and consider putting in local targets to address inequalities in attainment. This activity would be another part of the assessment of progress on the issue.

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