

## **Executive summary: The Educational Achievement of Ethnic Groups in Northamptonshire**

1.1 **National picture:** The report contextualises the analysis of the educational achievement of ethnic groups in Northamptonshire by placing the discussion within a national framework.

1.2 A survey of the pertinent literature points to significant variations in the educational achievement of ethnic groups, with some BME groups are outperforming Whites, while others are underachieving.

1.3 Nationally, Black Caribbean males are doing poorly followed by Pakistanis and Bangladeshis.

1.4 While Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils are exhibiting some improvement, the underachievement of Black Caribbean male pupils has remained stubbornly persistent over a long period.

1.5 These ethnic differences tend to be less significant than social class differences but at the same time are more significant than gender differences.

2.1 **Northamptonshire picture:** Two distinct approaches have been undertaken in order to examine ethnic differences in educational achievement.

2.2 Firstly trends over the period 2003-2006 in educational achievement by ethnicity have been identified by comparing the results over these three years of distinct cohorts. A number of comparators are used to enable an assessment of whether there are any differences between the patterns at the level of the nation and at the level of the County, and within the County whether there are any differences between Northampton and Wellingborough.

2.3 A second approach has entailed tracking the educational achievement of the 2006 Key stage 4 cohort. We have identified how this cohort did at KS4 in 2006 and been able to identify how the same individuals did earlier at KS3 in 2004 and KS2 in 2001. On this basis it is possible to identify which groups have been making better progress relative to others.

2.4 In line with national data, ethnic differences at county level tend to be less significant than social class differences (as measured by entitlement to free school meals) but at the same time they are more significant than gender differences.

2.5 The ethnic categories employed below are the Census categories. Although they are the most reliable ones to use for our purposes, it should be noted that they are not unproblematic and do not fully capture how pupils define themselves which can and does change over time.

2.6 In Northamptonshire minority ethnic pupils (defined here as not White British) comprised 12.3% of pupils on roll in January 2007; in the main towns distinguished,

Northampton and Wellingborough, minority ethnic pupils comprised 24.1% and 23.9% respectively of the pupils on roll in January 2007.

3.1 **Ethnic differentials in Northamptonshire, 2003-6:** The salient features of the analysis of different cohorts in 3 distinct years are outlined below.

3.2 The analysis at **Key stage 1** compares the % gaining level 2+; 2004 data are based on tests and 2005 onwards on teacher assessment.

3.3 Taking the results for reading, writing and maths together, the groups that give the most cause for concern because they underachieve to a significant degree across the board are the Somalis, Bangladeshis, Black Other and Black Caribbean.

3.4 While English may not be the (main) language spoken at home for Somalis, a newly arrived group, Bangladeshis and for some members characterised as Black Other, the same cannot be said of Black Caribbeans. The low performance of this group at KS1 is therefore a particular cause for concern.

3.5 Examination of trends at KS1 over time confirm that Bangladeshis, Black Caribbeans and Black Other are a particular cause for concern since the gap between them and the White British is growing.

3.6 This data indicates that in the county particular attention needs to be given to the performance of Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Black Other pupils in maths.

3.7 The analysis at **Key stage 2** compares the % gaining level 4+ in English and Maths.

3.8 Taking the results for English and Maths together, the groups that give the most cause for concern because they underachieve to a significant degree across the board are the Somalis, Bangladeshis, Black Caribbean and Black Other.

3.9 It should be noted that these are the same groups we identified at KS1.

3.10 Examination of trends at KS2 over time confirm that Black Caribbeans and Black Other are a particular cause for concern since the gap between them and the White British is growing.

3.11 The analysis at **Key stage 3** compares the % gaining level 5+ in English and Maths.

3.12 Taking the results for English and Maths together, the groups that give the most cause for concern because they continue to underachieve to a significant degree across the board are the Somalis, Bangladeshis and Black Caribbeans.

3.13 It should be noted that these are the same groups we identified at KS1 and KS2; only the Black Other of the four earlier picked out are no longer identified as of particular concern.

3.14 The reduction in the gap between the performance of Black Caribbeans and the White British at KS3 compared to KS2 gives some grounds for hope.

3.15 Examination of trends at KS3 over time confirm that Bangladeshis are a particular cause for concern since the gap between them and the White British is growing.

3.16 The analysis at **Key stage 4** compares the % gaining 5+ A\*- C GCSE including English and Maths.

3.17 The data point to considerable underachievement at GCSE level for the following groups who this constitute a cause for concern in descending order: Black Africans, Black Caribbeans , Mixed White/Black Caribbeans, Bangladeshis and Black Other.

3.18 Analysis of trends indicates that Black Africans, Black Caribbeans and Mixed White/Black Caribbeans remain a particular cause of concern.

3.19 It should be noted that the one group consistently identified across the 4 stages as a serious cause for concern is that of Black Caribbeans.

4.1 So far we have been looking at different cohorts. To gauge progress we need to track the same pupils over time. This has been done for one cohort completing KS4 in 2006. The analysis has been done for Northampton and Wellingborough but not the county.

4.2 The numbers for each of the ethnic groups identified in the cohort analysis are very low and so we need to be circumspect. Of the minority ethnic groups distinguished only two contain more than 40 pupils: Bangladeshis and Mixed White/Black Caribbeans. The experience of the first does seem to point to relative progress being made as pupils go through the school system, while the experience of the second suggests that some groups may face particular difficulties in the last years of compulsory schooling.

4.3 The cohort analysis does confirm our earlier analysis of the performance of Black Caribbeans. In both Northampton and Wellingborough, they arrive at secondary school already behind their white peers. They make limited progress at KS3 but fall behind seriously again at KS4.

5.1 **Explaining underachievement:** When we explore divergent explanations for ethnic differentials in educational attainment, we enter a politically highly charged terrain. The reason for this is that different explanations tend to apportion blame to different groups, most notably parents or schools.

5.2 Steering a path through these tortuous rapids, we need to recognise that the underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils cannot be simply explained away in terms of social class since differences remain even when controls are made for social class. Something else is going on and additional explanations are needed.

5.3 We can conclude that IQ is not a major factor but that there is evidence to suggest that a range of social factors are significant: economic deprivation, which itself stems at least in part from racial discrimination; cultural factors, which need to be carefully contextualised to avoid ‘blaming the victim’; the increased marketisation of education; ineffective schools, which themselves are often located in disadvantaged areas; and (the often unintentional) racial discrimination in schools.

5.4 Ethnic differences in educational achievement are not inevitable and ‘we’ need to ask ourselves how we contribute to the failure of black pupils and what we can do to prevent us failing them.

**6.1 The recommendations:** These focus on the responsibilities of the local authority and schools.

6.2 Local authority monitoring 1: The local authority should produce an annual monitoring report on ethnic differences in educational achievement and should disseminate this widely to schools, the racial equality council and community groups. To facilitate dissemination it is suggested that the local authority convenes an annual conference with schools and community groups to examine trends, identify good practice and develop action plans.

6.3 Local authority monitoring 2: The local authority should consider further ways of monitoring how schools are fulfilling their legal requirements in maintaining race equality action plans, in preparing all pupils for life in a multi-ethnic society and in reporting racist incidents (DfES, 2004). The same goes for the schools which receive EMAG. This needs careful monitoring. Such monitoring might be prioritised with the race equality action plans of those schools in receipt of EMAG being the first to be subject to systematic scrutiny. There is anecdotal evidence that schools are in some cases failing to fulfil these legal obligations.

6.4 The duty to promote community cohesion: The local authority is encouraged to use the new statutory duty on schools to promote community cohesion (which came into force in September 2007) as a lever in order both to promote continuing professional development in meeting the educational needs of minority ethnic pupils and develop effective race equality action plans.

6.5 Continuing professional development (CPD): Schools are reminded of their legal obligations to undertake CPD in meeting the educational needs of minority ethnic pupils. There are some helpful texts that can be recommended for use in CPD such as Dadzie (2000), CRE (2000), Runnymede Trust (2003) and DfES (2004).

6.6 Local authority strategic review: The local authority is urged to undertake a long term strategic review that focuses on the underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils. This review should be undertaken in partnership with the Racial Equality Council, the Black Consortium and other key stakeholders.

6.7 Inspection: The local authority and racial equality council should jointly consider inviting OFSTED to undertake a thematic inspection that focuses on how schools are addressing the underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils.

6.8 Targeting primary schools: It is clear that underachievement begins early with group differences evident already at KS1. We know that poor reading and writing is associated with low achievement later. Given this, early childhood education and effective teaching in primary schools remain a priority and consideration might be given when designing initiatives to focus more on the younger age groups.

6.9 Research: This research only goes so far. The local authority should consider commissioning a further cohort analysis (with higher numbers) at the level of the county rather than just the towns. It would also be helpful to undertake both a value added and a contextual value added analysis at the level of the county. The local authority should also consider producing data in future for a longer period than the current 3 years, which uses 2004 as the baseline; they should also explore the possibility of comparing ethnic groups after controlling for FSM (and if possible other indicators of social class) and gender. To enable there to be sufficient numbers in each category it may be necessary of course to merge some of the ethnic categories. Schools should consider using focus groups to explore the experiences of minority ethnic pupils.

6.10 Mapping initiatives: There are clearly a plethora of activities in the county which are designed to promote Black and Bangladeshi achievement. It is not altogether clear currently, however, how they fit together and whether they are being effectively evaluated. It would be helpful if the local authority developed the mapping exercise which it has started both to map out how the various initiatives fit together and to ensure they are effectively monitored.

Professor Andrew Pilkington,  
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