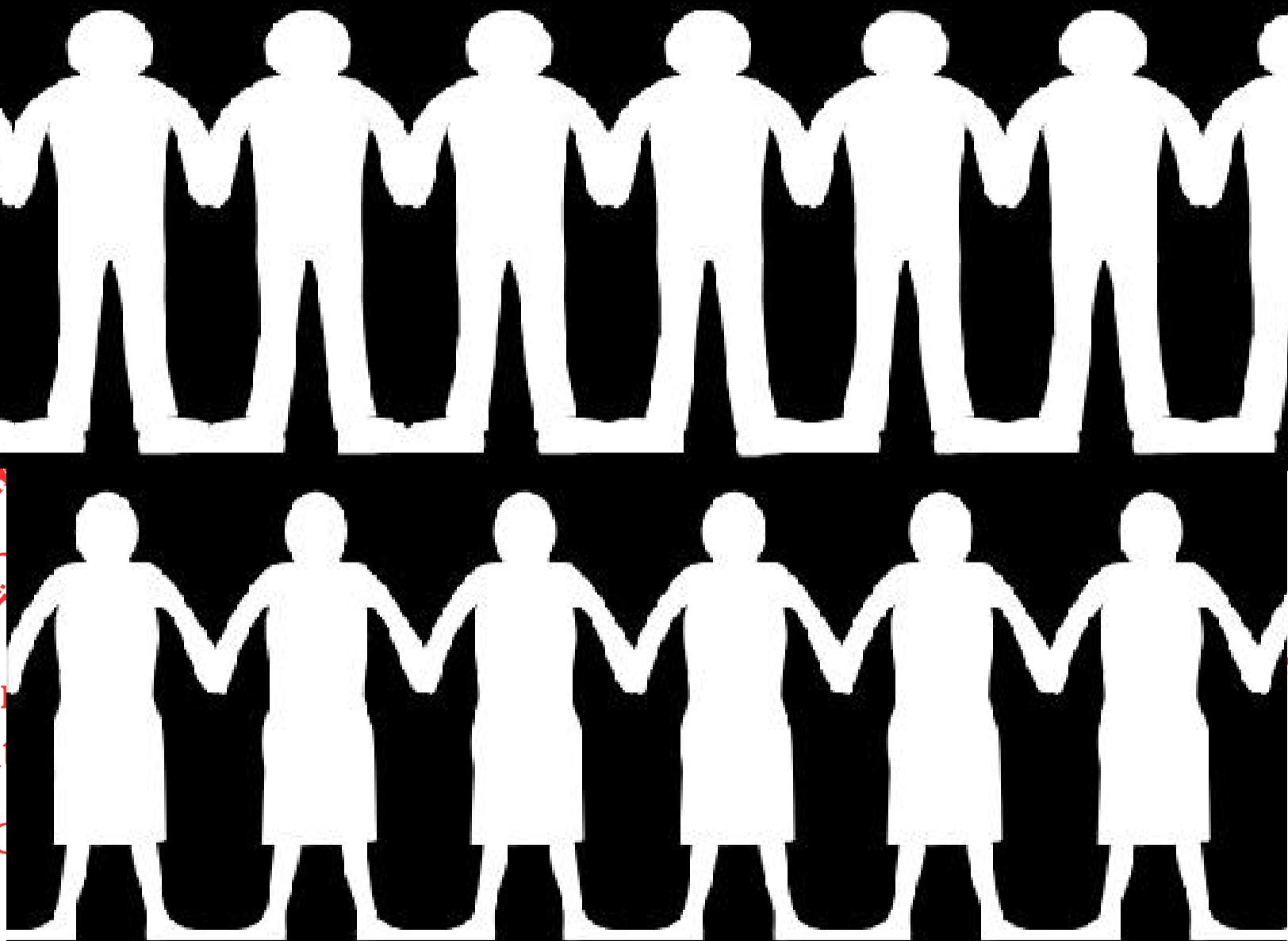# Black and Ethnic Minority Young People

and Educational Disadvantage

by The Runnymede Trust

Research review by
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11. Executive Summary

The aim of this report is to collate existing knowledge and information in order to identify gaps in understanding and make recommendations for areas which would benefit from further research. The research focusses on the years of compulsory schooling in the primary and secondary education system. The three main elements of this study include:

- Mapping of current and projected experience of young black and ethnic minority people
- Assessment of national initiatives and significant localised action research projects which seek to address various aspects of educational disadvantage and inequality
- A meta-evaluation of prevailing views about the impact on young people of such initiatives. This will be set in the context of general forms of provision for the specific needs of ethnic minority groups

Educational Disadvantage: Current Features

From 'under-achievement'to educational disadvantage
The issue of 'under-achievement'dominated debates relating to the education of ethnic minority pupils until the beginning of the 1990s. Nevertheless, the concept is widely misunderstood and may now play a part in reproducing familiar stereotypes. It can lead to lowered expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies of failure. It may also shift responsibility away from the education system and onto students and their families. We would assert that the failure is in the under-achievement of the system in providing for black students. Bearing this in mind, the focus within the report is on the *relative* achievements of pupils of different ethnic groups. And upon the disadvantages, or inequalities, of achievement and opportunity.

Many comparisons of the academic achievements of ethnic and non-ethnic children fail to take into account key influences such as social background. Ethnic minorities are more likely to belong to socio-economic groups which will increase their academic disadvantage.

The argument is also put forward that the measures used to assess educational attainment can themselves influence achievement levels. The most frequently used measures concentrate upon high attaining pupils. These methods often create sharp differentiations within student groups.

Achievement
There has been a general improvement in GCSE achievement in the 1990s. This improvement has been reflected in the achievements of minority groups. Ethnic minority students are now achieving more highly on average than ever before. Not all groups have improved at the same rate. In many areas the gap has widened between the most successful and least successful groups. This has had a harsh impact upon African Caribbean young men in particular. Despite doing better than their predecessors, they often find themselves falling further behind their white and Asian counterparts. In Birmingham in 1995, for example, the percentage of students achieving five or more higher grade passes is shown below.

5 or more higher grade passes *(Gillborn and Gipps 1996)*	
African Caribbean	18%
Indian	39%
White	36%
Bangladeshi	29%
Pakistani	21%

Although African Caribbean young women tend to achieve higher average results than their male counterparts it would be a mistake to assume that they do not face significant inequalities of opportunity. When the performance of young black women is compared with that of white women of the same socio-economic group, the picture is still less encouraging.

Where statistics allow distinctions to be made, pupils of Black African background often achieve relatively higher results than their peers of Black Caribbean origin. It seems that both social background and gender play a part in this.

In the 1980s it was found that, on average, Asian groups were performing better than white groups. In some areas, like Brent, this remains the case. But in Birmingham, for example, the reverse is true. However, these figures can be misleading: the usefulness of a simple, broad 'Asian' category is increasingly being challenged. It ignores important differences in the economic, social and religious profile of different communities with roots in the Indian sub-continent.

There are many other ethnic minority groups whose experience and achievement in education are not recorded. For Children of Gypsies and other Traveller communities — where relevant data are gathered — there is evidence of considerable and consistent inequalities of opportunities. In many cases, however, schools and local authorities do not accept any particular responsibility for such communities.

Educational Progress and School Effectiveness
Educational *progress* and *achievement* are not the same. It is possible for a group to make great progress and yet still attain lower average achievements. The influence of the school is significant but social background is of much greater importance. There is, however, some evidence for 'differential school effectiveness' for ethnic minorities. That is to say that some schools are particularly effective for ethnic minority pupils.

Teacher - Pupil Interactions
An increasing amount of research has focused on classrooms and pupil-teacher interactions. The findings often raise fundamental questions about the way in which students are experiencing schooling. Such research highlights hidden processes that can deny equal opportunities, whilst claiming to operate in a 'colour-blind' fashion.

African Caribbean students frequently experience relationships with white teachers which are characterised by relatively high levels of control and criticism. Teachers often hold negative and patronising stereotypes about South Asian students, especially concerning the nature of their home communities and linguistic abilities.

Black students are always over-represented when exclusion statistics are broken down by ethnicity. Whereas exclusions are commonly associated with very serious offences such as violence or threatening behaviour, there is some evidence to suggest that less obvious conflict with teachers may lead to disproportionate expulsions of black pupils.

Racial Violence
Asian students suffer a high level of racial harassment in schools. Teachers are often unaware of the extent and especially damaging nature of racial harassment in their schools. Racial harassment plays a large part in students' confidence and ability to perform well at school.

Local and National Initiatives

National Initiatives
There are very few national initiatives which focus on the educational disadvantage of ethnic minority people. Apart from 'The Childrens Society' and 'The Basic Skills Agency', it is difficult to find examples of mainstream bodies targeting issues relating to ethnic minorities. Key areas of concern for ethnic minorities such as bullying and racial harassment do not appear to be addressed by the national organisations.

Many of the national initiatives, such as the work on exclusions, are merely interested in proving, by way of research, that educational disadvantage exists rather than taking any practical measures to minimize it.

There are, however, exceptions. The DFEE has recently initiated a project on gathering good practice. Moreover, projects such as 'Cities in Schools' aim to engender a multi-disciplinary approach, in partnership with companies, to help improve opportunities.

Local Initiatives
Mentoring has emerged recently as one of the most significant areas of activity at both national and local level. The Windsor Foundation, for instance, is in the process of launching a junior mentoring programme. Many of the more successful local initiatives such as KWESI in the West Midlands and the Lambeth 'Raising Achievement Project' use mentoring as a means of counteracting and reducing disaffection among African Caribbean young men.

Most other local initiatives are local authority funded and based around the supplementary schools model providing additional tuition and intensive support.

Research Review

The picture that emerges is one of extreme disadvantage on the one hand, and a patchy and incomplete support structure on the other. The greatest area of concern is for African Caribbean youth who have attainment levels reaching only half that of their white peers.

Much of the research has traditionally focused on describing and analysing the disadvantage. Only recently has attention started to be given to methods of good practice and innovation in counteracting the systemic discrimination. The research commissioned by the DFEE and undertaken by the Open University, for example, specifically aims to collate good practice from effective schools. This should establish a useful bench mark for emphasising practical action and information exchange.

Small scale research is prone to become marginalised. Despite the abundance of information on differential exclusion levels for black youth, there is no clear policy line. The amount of research on the education of ethnic minority groups, commissioned by government or its agencies, is still relatively limited. The most significant recent reports include OFSTED's reports on Recent Research on the Achievements of Ethnic Minority Pupils, and The Educational Needs of Traveller Children, and CRE's report on the Cost of Exclusion. Other major agencies such as the NUT and The Runnymede Trust have also commissioned work on exclusions. Further independent research may help to influence the necessary change in policy.

There appears to be a dearth of research on the impact of changes at the local level, such as in funding mechanisms and shifts in the social services. The youth services in particular have been decimated, resulting in a consequent lack of role models, and a rise in disaffection. At the same time, the voluntary sector has taken on more of the responsibilities for making up the educational deficit. Yet many of these local bodies work in isolation and are struggling for financial survival. Often, they have only insecure or insubstantial funding to rely upon.

Similarly, the success of certain multi-ethnic schools has gone largely unnoticed. What is lacking is not just examples of good practice, but also an analysis of qualitative factors. For example, it would be helpful to have a better understanding of the value of religious and moral instruction in schools.

The influence of supplementary schools has been underestimated. Ironically, it is often parents themselves who have played down, or even tried to hide their children's attendance of supplementary schools, for fear of stigma. A positive analysis could help to make better use of local education funding, and ensure that pupils and their parents gain full value from their schools. Indeed, there may be considerable benefits in further analysis of the potential advantages of multi-disciplinary working at the local level.

Another significant gap in research concerns the emergence of new identities and youth cultures. Teacher training should increasingly take such factors into account to examine pastoral care, discipline and relationships in the classroom, and the handling of conflict among young people. There are also indications that the number of black teachers is decreasing, but no firm proposals have been offered on how to counteract this development.

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