



Equality in Action: The Pimlico Way

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1 Introduction

Pimlico is a popular, multi-ethnic, multi-faith inner city 11-18 mixed comprehensive school. It has 1343 students on roll, 175 of these in the sixth form. Boys outnumber girls considerably with 792 boys to 551 girls. The main ethnic groups are of White, Black African, Black Caribbean, Asian and Bengali heritage. More than a third of students use English as an additional language, and 52 students are at the early stages of learning English. The school currently has 152 refugees/asylum seekers on roll. Students are from a wide range of backgrounds from the advantaged to disadvantaged.

Overall socio-economic circumstances are below average with a higher proportion of students eligible for free school meals than nationally. The attainment of students on entry to the school ranges from above average to well below average, and over the last five years, attainment on entry to the school has been below average overall. The proportion of students with special educational needs, including statements, is above average. Each year, the school provides 24 places on a specialist music course for gifted musicians.



Year on year, the school analyses its examination results across all key stages to investigate whether all students are achieving as much as they are able and to address issues of underachievement. The school has developed a very good database that allows it to monitor and track the performance of different groups of students and helps subject areas meet individual learning needs. The school is able to produce data on the performance of students from different ethnic groups and for students with special educational needs. Examination results indicate students for whom English is not their first language achieve as well or better than other students. Many gain good GCSE results in their first language such as Portuguese and Arabic.

The school's analysis of examination results indicates that white UK girls do less well than white UK boys and that boys from Black Caribbean, Black African, or Bangladeshi heritage have not been achieving in line with their peers for many years. The school's action plan to raise the achievement of students takes into account all the data on the progress of different groups of students as well as individuals. Where individuals or groups of students are not achieving as much as they are able, a support programme is put in place.

Many of the trends in underachievement at Pimlico School reflect national trends, particularly with regard to the attainment of boys from certain minority ethnic groups. OFSTED (1999) found that 'at secondary level, the data indicate that Black Caribbean pupils underachieve'. In some cases they are the lowest performing group at GCSE level. In 2000, OFSTED issued an alarming press release stating: 'African-Caribbean and



Pakistani pupils have drawn least benefit from the rising levels of attainment: the gap between them and their White peers is larger now than a decade ago.' More recently, the DFES (2003) found that 'proportionately more Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils are recorded as having special educational needs compared to White, Chinese and Indian pupils. Black Caribbean pupils are around three times more likely than White pupils to be permanently excluded from school. There are proportionately more Black Caribbean and Black Other pupils in pupil referral units compared with the proportion of these groups in mainstream schools.'

Gilborn and Mirza (2000) however, provide a strong argument for exercising caution in the blanket use of the term 'underachievement' and the potential negative stereotyping associated with the assumption that all students from particular minority ethnic groups underachieve. They argue that 'differences in average achievement between social groups raise cause for concern but do not, in themselves, prove anything about the potential of those groups. The reasons for such relative 'underachievement' are multiple and patterns of inequality are not fixed' (Gilborn and Mirza, 2000, p7). They quote evidence from OFSTED showing that any one group, for example African-Caribbean students whose achievement is ranked poorly in national measures, may actually be doing relatively well in some schools. They emphasise that 'difference in attainment between groups can be part of a necessary analysis of inequalities in educational outcomes' (Gilborn and Mirza, 2000, p7).

The starting point for tackling differences in attainment at Pimlico School was therefore embedded in a commitment to equality of opportunity and outcome for all students at our school. Following the enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence and the publication of the statutory Code of Practice on the duty to promote Race Equality by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), it is now widely acknowledged that schools have a duty to monitor their policies and practices, in particular, the impact of policies and practices on the attainment of individuals and groups of pupils.

The Code of Practice offers schools guidance in assessing the impact of their policies in the form of a set of questions:

- 1 Does the school help all its pupils to achieve as much as they can, and get the most from what is on offer, based on their individual needs?
- 2 Which groups of pupils are not achieving as much as they can? Why not?
- 3 Is the school making sure that its policies, including its race equality policy, are not having an adverse impact on pupils, parents and staff from racial groups?
- 4 How does the school explain any differences? Are such explanations justified? Can they be justified on non-racial groups, such as English language difficulties?
- 5 Does each relevant policy include aims to deal with differences in pupils' attainments (or possible differences) between racial groups? Do the policy's aims lead to action to deal with any differences that have been identified?

- 6 What is the school doing to raise standards, and promote equality of opportunity for pupils who seem to be underachieving and who may need extra support?
- 7 What is the school doing to: prepare pupils for living in a multi-ethnic society; promote race equality and harmony; and prevent or deal with racism?
- 8 Can any action taken be traced back to individual policy aims and related strategies?
- 9 Is the action appropriate and effective? Are there any unexpected results? If so, how are they being handled?
- 10 Does each relevant policy include aims to promote race equality and harmony; prevent or challenge racial discrimination; and deal with differences (or possible differences) between racial groups?
- 11 Do the policy's aims lead to effective action?
- 12 What changes does the school need to make to relevant policies, their aims, and any related targets and strategies? (CRE, 2001, p36-37).

It was in the context of our commitment to understanding differences in attainment as an equal opportunities or equality issue, that the Senior Leadership Team and Governing Body tasked the school's Race Equality Working Group to tackle some of these questions.

The Race Equality Working Group was constituted as a result of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, which gives a statutory obligation to schools to produce and implement a Race Equality Policy. The aim is to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination, promote equal opportunities and promote good relations between people of different racial groups. The school successfully produced a policy, which involved all members of the school community (parents/carers, governors, teachers, students, LEA staff, consultants). As part of the school's self-review process, the policy is constantly being monitored.

Once the policy was produced, the Senior Leadership Team and Governing Body decided that the group had been so successful and its work so important, that it should continue to meet two to three times per term to look at issues highlighted in the policy. Strategies to raise the attainment of Black Caribbean, Black African and Bangladeshi boys were the focus.

Members of the Race Equality Working Party felt it was important to start by finding an example of good practice. Winchmore School had been identified by OFSTED (2002) in Achievement of Black Caribbean Pupils: Good Practice in Secondary Schools. We therefore invited Lesley Mansbridge, Headteacher of Winchmore School (London Borough of Enfield), to talk about the strategies the school employed to raise the attainment of Black Caribbean boys. In 1999 boys at Winchmore School were achieving 20% less than girls at GCSE. Black African-Caribbean boys were not achieving their full potential at Winchmore: results from the partner primary schools clearly indicated a

potentially high achieving group of boys. The rate of exclusions at Winchmore was very high and disproportionately involved Black students. As a new headteacher, a key priority was to tackle underachievement and to reduce exclusions. The school commissioned a piece of research by a multi-agency team of advisors including teachers, an educational psychologist and staff from the Child and Family Consultation Service to review what was taking place in the school. The team recommended a number of ways to tackle underachievement in boys and made particular suggestions about how Black students could be better supported to reach their potential. Teaching and learning were at the heart of the whole approach. There had been little emphasis on rewarding achievement and good behaviour and celebrating the positives about the school. Changing this was central to tackling underachievement and challenging behaviour. The school also looked hard at the curriculum and worked at making it more relevant. Low attainment and challenging behaviour were seen as symptoms rather than as something inherent in particular cohorts of students. Consultation with students was key to the strategy. A clear message from Black students was that they felt that when they arrived at secondary school, they were seen either as 'blank sheets' or as potential problems, whereas in their primary schools, they had been well-known and their achievements recognised. The headteacher realised that race issues of this kind needed to be urgently addressed and discussed openly with staff and students and their families.



Our Race Equality Working Group considered many of Lesley Mansbridge's strategies. We knew that some departments in Pimlico School were already implementing strategies to address issues of differences in attainment. However, we felt it was important to address this as a whole school issue, to investigate possible reasons for these differences and to take effective action. We could have looked at the national picture and picked out good practice and strategies to implement, but to do so would create "bolt-ons" with no real substance and relationships to the school and its community. We felt strongly that the community must take ownership of the issues if we are to successfully implement change. We wanted to see a change in attitude and culture and to move the school into the 21st century, where diversity in language, culture and attitudes are embraced and celebrated and all students achieve as much as they are able. We wanted to begin by putting the community at the heart of creating this change. Thus, we invited parents to join the Race Equality Working Group. Our most recent OFSTED report (March 2003) recognised how effective this has been: 'The parents who took up this opportunity [to join the Race Equality Working Party] have become actively involved in the work of the school. One or two have since joined the governing body on which parents are well represented. The working party is proving an effective body.'

2 Research Design

The Race Equality Working Group was tasked with investigating differences in attainment and the relative 'underachievement' of Black African, Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi boys. Taking into account what we learned from Lesley Mansbridge about the centrality of student participation and our own commitment to putting the community, including students, at the core of change, we decided that a qualitative research process involving students would provide a rich picture of some of the reasons for the relative differences in attainment. Being committed to a research process that is participatory, we started with the idea of enlisting the students studying for their A-level sociology course to help the Race Equality Working Group put together a questionnaire. These Year 13 students were also researching the sociological issues to do with questionnaires versus discussion groups.

A draft questionnaire was considered at a meeting of the Race Equality Working Group with an external educational consultant. The questions were classified under the following categories:

- 1 Self-awareness (in terms of achievement)
- 2 Engagement in school
- 3 Aspirations/Ambitions/Expectations
- 4 Barriers to learning
- 5 Support
- 6 Racial harassment.

The group reflected on whether it was the best way to motivate students to express their opinions. Concern was expressed about the potential participation of students whose attainment is lower than their peers and who often finding it difficult to engage with written tasks. There were also concerns about 'leading' questions. Based on these arguments against the use of a questionnaire, we decided to opt for the use of discussion groups for the following reasons:

- We are eliminating written text as a potential barrier to engagement and expressing oneself;
- Students often feel more confident and motivated to explore issues in a group with their peers;
- A group activity is more engaging, collaborative and offers more learning opportunities.

However, we wanted to give due consideration to the time and energy that had been put into developing the questionnaire, thus we agreed that the six categories or focus points used to group the questions would remain the focus of group discussions.

Representation in terms of the facilitation of the discussion groups was a key issue. We were aware that ethnicity, socio-economic position, profession, role and interest are



all potential sources of bias (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Extended discussions took place on the influence that these factors could have on the group dynamics. Considering the facilitators for the discussion groups, it was felt that the membership of the Race Equality Party was both diverse and representative. It was decided that facilitation of the discussion groups would remain with eight members of the group from different backgrounds and with different roles and interests. We also thought it was important to consider whether students may be influenced by the 'everyday' role of the facilitators, hence introducing another form of bias. Will they be inclined

to say what they think we want to hear? For this reason, none of the teaching staff facilitated groups. We are not claiming that all facilitator and respondent bias can be eliminated in this way, but rather that we engaged with these issues and undertook strategies to limit this bias.

Every facilitator was given written guidance on the suggested format for discussion. This guidance is reproduced in the appendix. The guidance outlined the key issues around which the discussion should be scaffolded, as well as notes highlighting key findings from research that could be used to initiate or extend the discussion. We acknowledge that there is an inherent bias in identifying and selecting key research findings. However, one advantage of using research to initiate and extend discussion is that it attempts to counter facilitators introducing their own thoughts and ideas into the discussion. Additionally, the facilitators could not assume that students are familiar with the wider picture of patterns in attainment. Sharing these research findings in a sensitive way with students was felt to be awareness-raising and empowering.

All Bangladeshi, Black African and Black Caribbean students in Years 10, 11, 12 and 13 were invited to participate in a discussion group. Seven facilitators were involved in the discussion groups. Seventeen groups with six to eight students per group met for one hour over a two week period. In order to facilitate discussion around common cultural knowledge and experience, groups were composed around ethnic origins, i.e. there were Black Caribbean groups, Black African groups and Bangladeshi groups. In all, 102 students were interviewed as part of a discussion group.

All teachers were kept informed of the project and processes and of any scheduled absence of students who were participating in groups during the day. Group discussions took place during school time to ensure all students could have the opportunity to

participate. A 'peer debriefing' strategy via staff briefings and leadership team meetings was used systematically to ensure credibility and enable all staff to have ownership of this work.

As part of our research design we solved the technical issue of recording discussions by deciding to have an assistant facilitator in each group who would be responsible for writing notes that would be used as the record of discussions. However, due to organisational complexity, this did not happen. Facilitators were left to make their own notes and we recognise that some data have probably and unavoidably been lost for this reason.

The British Educational Research Association Guidelines for research identifies a number of general and particular considerations for our work. We made sure that we fulfilled our ethical obligations to inform students of the aim of the research and its use, obtain their consent to interview them as part of a group, record the group discussions, and guarantee their anonymity.

Beyond these ethical considerations and in terms of our commitment to a participatory process, we wanted to ensure that our research was not just 'research on' our students, but also 'research with' and 'for' them (Graddol, Maybin and Stierer, 1994). We were certainly looking to gain insights from the students (which qualifies as research on), but our primary intention is to use the outcomes in order to facilitate better understanding of and support for the student groups. By sharing identified issues that initiated this research and its findings, we are raising awareness amongst students; by including them in the dissemination process we are giving them an active role in transformative practice.



3 Findings

The project and its findings reflect the picture that is documented nationally in many ways, but at the same time project the features that are unique to Pimlico School. Due to a large number of students involved in this project, very rich data were collected. The following are the themes that emerged in the process of the data analysis. The two groups differ on many issues to do with their background, social conditioning and cultural expectations. However, when it comes to reflecting issues that are particular to being a student in Pimlico, their views are the same. This implicates that, for example, issues to do with the building, environment, uniform and food are of similar concern to all students.

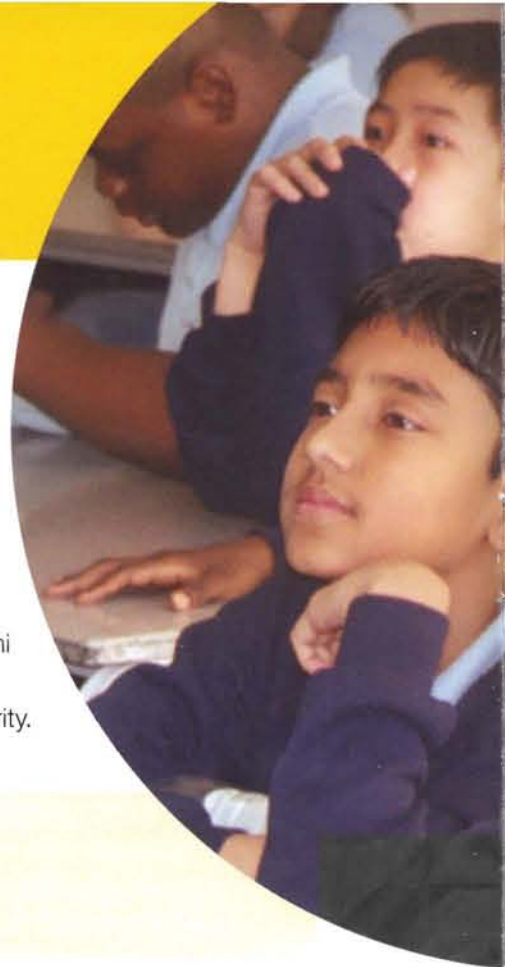
The data were analysed according to Hycner's guidelines for qualitative data analysis, listed in Cohen and Manion (1997, p293-4). The interpreted data are going to be presented first of all as themes on which the groups differ and then the themes that are common for both groups. Every section of the interpreted data is going to be followed by a recommendation of the research team, which is there as a suggestion for the consideration of the leadership team.

Last point to be made before the data interpretation is presented is that this study is based on the principles of the qualitative research, which claims that:

There is no single interpretive truth. There are multiple interpretive communities; each having its own criteria for evaluating an interpretation. The interpretive practice of making sense of one's findings is both artful and political. (Denzin, Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry, 1998, p30)



3 Findings: Bangladeshi Boys



Attitudes

Bangladeshi boys overall had a more positive attitude towards the school. Students felt that if they are positive towards teachers that it is reciprocated. They were open and confident during the discussions, eager to express their views. Bangladeshi boys feel that the socio-economic issues at home prevent their learning at school; the concern of the family is an important priority.

Recommendation:

As the recommendation for the next section.

Significant others

**“You’ll end up
in a restaurant
if you don’t
work hard!”**

Pimlico Student

Bangladeshi boys repeatedly highlighted the importance and influence that their families have on their schooling. Having support and encouragement to do well in school from their parents and elder brothers was identified as the key factor by this group. They observed themselves that Indian children do extremely well and the belief is that Indians are particularly successful, because their parents always encourage them. Even though these students were not shown any statistics on Indians they correctly judged that they were amongst the top achievers in Britain. This parallel has even bigger relevance since the two groups are ethnically very closely related.

Recommendation:

These students are pointing out that parents are the most influential people in their environment. Therefore there needs to be a higher level of school – home interaction. First of all, parents need information and understanding of school systems and factors of achievement. The fact that most of the students who participated in this project did not know what their predicted grades were shows the obvious need to improve communication. Second, the school needs to address issues that are important to families, such as first language maintenance, which will be discussed under a separate heading.



If knowledge is worth having, it is worth sharing

The way that Bangladeshi boys responded to having been given an insight into the national statistics on the achievement of different groups confirmed the experience of the researchers in Winchmore School.

First of all, students did not have a bigger picture about their achievement compared to other groups and the achievement gap between the White and Bangladeshi achievement, that every practitioner in education is aware of, was a discovery for Bangladeshi students. Their responses indicated that they felt it was their right to know these facts. They were asking questions such as:

“Why aren’t we told such things? Why aren’t our parents told?”

Pimlico Student

Recommendation:

This is a very complex issue, because we do not want to influence students and parents in a negative way by presenting the statistics that can come across as hopeless for this particular group. On the other hand, being ignorant about the issues that are of direct relevance to oneself cannot serve to anybody’s advantage.

In resolving the way to negotiate the balance between: sharing the knowledge with students and families that is not very pleasant, but it is shared with the aim to motivate and improve rather than negatively influence this group of students, it is helpful to refer to what the students have said about their need to be told clearly and truthfully about failure.

“Statistics should be told. We should be told what happens if you fail. We should be told you’ll sleep in the streets.

Don’t give us too many options and fallbacks. We need to change our attitudes to work. People think it’s OK if you don’t pass GCSEs, they’ll become hairdressers or something else.”

Pimlico Student

“There should be failure education instead of sex education. Keep telling us what it means to fail.”

“Parents would be so disappointed if we flopped in Bengali.”

Pimlico Student

“I thought Bengali was irrelevant, but I did it because my parents wanted me to.”

Pimlico Student

“It is important for parents to maintain the heritage.”

Pimlico Student

“The parents feel that children are changed by the system if they loose the language.”

Pimlico Student

First language maintenance

There were mixed attitudes expressed under the question of the importance of their first language. Some students felt that they underachieved because – *we have two languages*. Some students were aware of the cognitive advantages of bilingualism – *I don't think having two languages is a problem. I read in the scientific journal that it develops your brain*. All the students were clear on the following:

- it was of great importance to their parents that children speak Bengali and that they maintain the culture,
- sometimes it is not their choice to study Bengali,
- they have internalised the devalued status of their language in the society.





Recommendation:

The students themselves had many suggestions under this section:

There should be a class from Year 7. GCSE is not enough. There should be a class in primary school too.

If there were Bengali lessons in schools from Year 7, parents would feel happier about their children going to school and they would not take them for such long holidays.

A significant number of studies done on different continents and with different language groups have identified that children who are supported in developing as balanced bilinguals (being able to read, write and learn in both languages) benefit from increased cognitive abilities and higher overall academic achievement. (J.Cummins, 2000, Language, Power and Pedagogy). One student from Pimlico read about it in a scientific journal, but teachers, parents and students would benefit from raising their awareness on the advantages of maintaining and developing bilingualism. Schools, parents and communities need to work together on securing the appropriate provision for studying Bengali as an academic subject and a language that has a valued status not only amongst Bengali speakers. Apart from that, first languages play a big role in terms of negotiating one's identity within the family and community.

"I don't see the value of Bengali. Employers want French or other European languages. It's a waste of time."

Pimlico Student

"Bengali is valued only amongst the people who speak it."

Pimlico Student

"We don't feel it's appreciated that we speak two languages – it's very common."

Pimlico Student

3 Findings: Black Students



Attitudes

The Black African Caribbean Boys were confident to discuss issues with all the facilitators. These students felt that there was a lack of understanding by staff about Black cultures, especially the Caribbean culture, about the ways in which particularly Black boys speak and behave towards adults. Their behaviour is often construed as threatening and aggressive. The boys themselves insisted that their attitude to staff was not a sign of disrespect, but was often taken as such, which was followed by a conflict situation. They all believed that a clearer understanding by staff of the cultures and attitudes would create a better relationship and working environment. Also, these students highlighted that the presence of Black staff in school was not significant enough and this was an issue that they were following very closely:

“There is only one Black teacher in Pimlico.”

Pimlico Student

“No, there are three and the headteacher is half-Indian.”

Pimlico Student

“Our maths teacher understands; he is from South Africa.”

Pimlico Student

Recommendation:

Even though there are certain standards of acceptable behaviour when in school, it would be of benefit if the staff were offered INSET opportunities that would raise their cultural awareness. Being prepared to encounter less familiar types and less acceptable types of behaviour means being better equipped to deal professionally in a relevant situation. On the other hand, efforts need to be invested in working with students with the aim of making them more aware that different behaviour is required and appropriate in different settings. A mentoring scheme delivered by the organisation 100 Black Men has had a great success in mentoring Black boys and raising their awareness on the effects that certain behaviour may have. As a result, their relationship with teachers was significantly improved.



Significant others

Black students seem to be more vulnerable to the peer pressure than Bangladeshi students who are more influenced by their parents and families. In this case, the peer pressure is working against their achievement. Black students talk about studying not being cool, missing after school clubs because they would be laughed at or called names. Peer pressure hindered their day-to-day achievement, they have to be seen as one of the 'boys' doing and saying what was expected of them.

"You try so hard to be like the others. Sometimes if you are good at something, you have to go down to be at their level. You have to muck about."

Pimlico Student

Recommendation:

The students indicated that they have responded well to outside speakers who were invited to talk to the students at the peak of the conflict between these two ethnic groups. This route can be explored again to deal with peer pressure and changing attitudes towards learning.

"We are good at sports, we need help to use that."

Pimlico Student

Achievement

One characteristic was very specific to this group: they are aware of their abilities and potential when it comes to sports, art and music. They take pride in it and they judge that it is one thing in which Black students achieve better than White. We have not had access to such statistics, which would be useful in this case. However, promoting the image of Black students as achievers in sports can be seen as another way of stereotyping them and not helping them concentrate on their academic achievement.

On the contrary these students are saying:

"Support us to achieve in sports. That is what we are good at. We need better sports facilities – there is no grass for rugby."



“We are good at everything practical and creative.”

Pimlico Student

Recommendation:

Achievement in sports will reflect on achievement in other subjects. Skills, abilities and achievement in school and outside of school need to be recognised, celebrated and supported – that will make a positive impact on self esteem, motivation and overall achievement and attitudes.

First language maintenance

Black students attached very little value to their first languages. Contrary to the Bangladeshi boys, they did not mention at any point the attitudes that their parents have to first language maintenance. One boy said:

I want to take exams in Portuguese. I didn't know you could take GCSE in Portuguese.

Recommendation:

A very simple way of supporting students in first language maintenance is communicating affirmative messages to do with being proficient in other languages, encouraging them to take GCSEs in their first languages and providing them with information on how to enrol and where to find support in preparation for exams.

“Languages that we speak are not needed anywhere.”

Pimlico Student

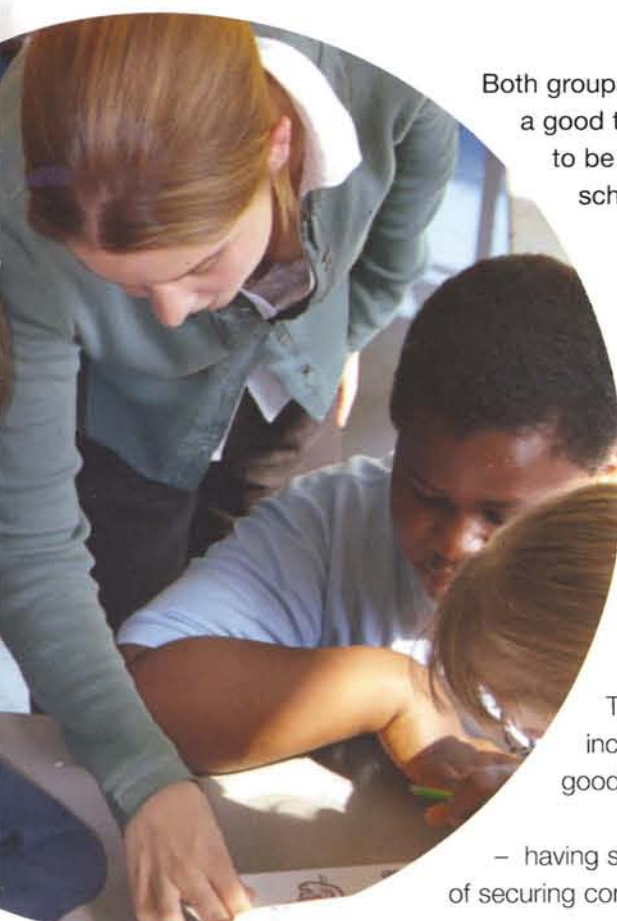
“I want to take exams in Portuguese. I didn't know you could take GCSE in Portuguese.”

Pimlico Student



3 Findings:

What issues are common to both groups?



Both groups of students produced a very similar list of characteristics of a good teacher and both groups would like significant improvements to be made in terms of their environment, the building itself, school uniform and also food.

What makes a good teacher?

Teachers that show they respect students by:

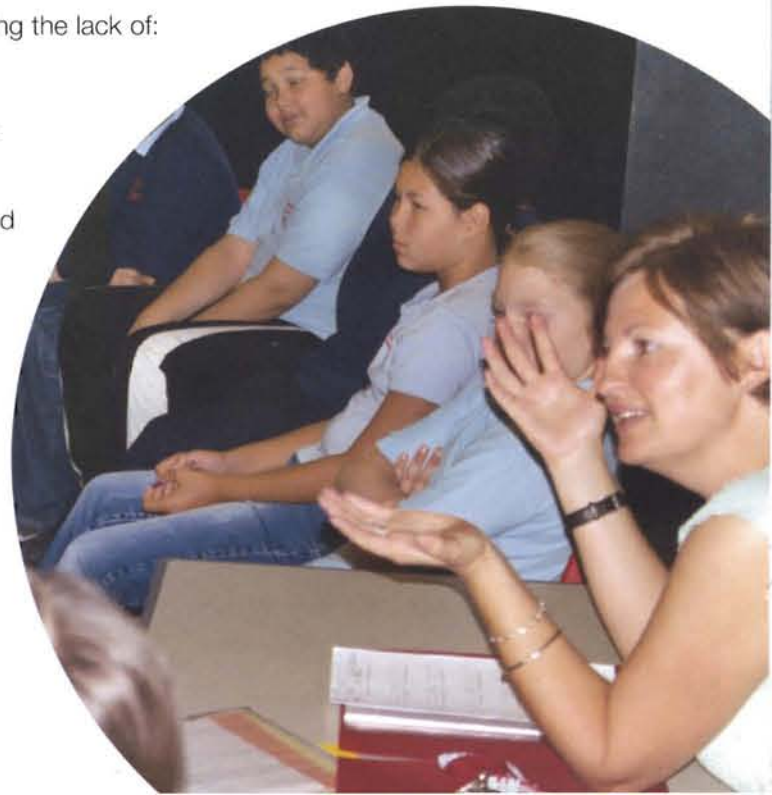
- looking smart when in lessons,
- interacting with students like adults,
- differentiating work and finding ways to include everybody.

The list that was collected in this research is very lengthy and includes many references that are well established principles of good practice such as:

- having staff on permanent or long term contracts is a priority in terms of securing consistency in teaching, learning and discipline,
- having staff that reflect the school's intake and provide good role models for students,
- more support teachers in lessons,
- clear boundaries and rules.

These students are currently experiencing the lack of:

- attention from teachers,
- feeling that their teachers care about their achievement,
- time for students to be listened to and the proof that their views have been heard and considered.



Recommendation:

A very complex issue of staffing seems to be underpinning every aspect of insuring not only high, but even satisfactory quality of teaching and learning. The difficulties of recruiting permanent staff and ethnic minority staff are well known to every headteacher and LEA. The low morale amongst teachers is clearly identified by students and it is having a very negative impact on their motivation. One school cannot resolve very complex social, economic and professional issues that have created this crisis within the teaching profession, but it can communicate to its staff via staff meetings and handbooks that statements such as:

I will still get paid even if you don't get GCSEs —

have a negative pedagogical value. It is best to avoid them.

Negative attitude by staff towards the students and negative communication between school and home (letters and phone calls) build up animosity, which then reflects in subsequent lessons. At the same time, positive attitude and behaviour of staff, and positive communication has a positive and long term effect on how the students behave and work in lessons. **Rewards, praise and positive attitude enhance attainment.** The school therefore needs to look at its Behaviour Plan, ensure there is regular monitoring and consistent delivery of the Behaviour Plan by staff.

“The best lessons were during the OfSTED inspection!”

Pimlico Student

Lessons

Generally, students felt lessons were not structured and dynamic enough, therefore not stimulating. Supply teaching was often an excuse to behave poorly because lessons were not structured. Good lessons were those where students knew boundaries, when the behaviour plan was delivered consistently, when Rules, Rewards and Sanctions were observed strictly, but fairly. More time was necessary in lessons to support students and reflect. The best lessons were those that enabled student interactions; these lessons asked open questions and all students had the opportunity to answer.

Recommendation:

In this case students have clearly pointed out the kind of teaching and learning that they appreciate: **best lessons are well prepared, differentiated, structured and inclusive.**


Seating plans are instrumental in preventing conflict.

"Two weeks on Black History month and six weeks on Hitler."

Pimlico Student

Curriculum

The selection of knowledge and skills that we choose to establish as the curriculum is one of the most complex and sensitive issues on all levels, from the national level down to the individual. What we learn will not only influence our current situation, but also our future attitudes and perceptions about ourselves and others. Curriculum was the first issue raised by students at the first meeting of the Racial Equality Working Party in May 2003 and throughout this research students were raising the concern that the curriculum largely does not reflect the cultural diversity of the school community.



"It was done (Black History Month), but we need more."

Pimlico Student

"It is always about slavery, about White people treating Black people badly."

Pimlico Student

"Music exams are never about music that we are interested in, that we know very well."

Pimlico Student

"What about Asian and other cultures? There should be a multi-cultural month."

Pimlico Student

Recommendation:

Reviewing the curriculum for each subject area and developing a curriculum that reflects the school's diversity is a process that needs time and effort. However, there are already examples of good practice in this school, for example the History department have achieved this with a module on the Indian history. Other departments mentioned in the OfSTED report are: Art, Drama, English and Modern Foreign Languages. The departments need to be supported in terms of being given time allocation, INSET and advisory support in order to engage with this process.

“I want to be a human resources officer.”

Pimlico Student

“I want to play rugby for England.”

Pimlico Student

Aspirations

Nearly all students interviewed had high aspirations to continue their education and become professionals and in some cases a very specific vision of what they wanted to be. The only difference between the two groups was that the Black African Caribbean boys often mention high flying careers in sports as their goal which was not the case with the Bengali boys, who were more thinking in terms of traditional professions. Students were aware of their areas of achievement and the areas they needed to improve upon.



Recommendation:

Students have demonstrated that they have high expectations of themselves. Teachers can support students in working towards their high expectation if they use opportunities to communicate that they have high expectations too.

Building

Again an issue that is not easy to change, having a another building is not an option. However, these students have indicated issues that can be addressed and that will improve conditions:

- Temperature

Adjusting heating for the winter and organising blinds for the summer could reduce the level of frustration with this very basic, but very influential element in any environment and leave more energy for students to concentrate on their learning.

- Decoration

“It is either too hot or too cold. How can we learn if it’s too cold?”

Pimlico Student

“Can the rooms be freshly decorated and windows cleaned?”

Pimlico Student



Feeling safe

Many students commented on the fence that was recently put in place. It makes them feel much safer and less vulnerable to the intruders. Another positive impact is that some people have stopped truanting, because it takes much more of an effort. Having a policeman on site seems to be positive as well and it has also altered the negative perceptions that Black Caribbean boys admitted having about policemen.

School uniform

Students like having a school uniform, but they do not like their current uniform. The opinion is that it is not smart enough and they are not enjoying or feeling proud wearing it.

Recommendation

Since this seems to be a very important issue for students, it would be worth consulting students on it. Perhaps consider organising a competition and getting students to vote for the most preferred style and colour out of what is available.

Food

The students find the food unattractive.

Again it would be good to consult students on the available options and use the opportunity to look into the ways of raising awareness on healthy eating habits.



“The school is multi-cultural and you don’t feel like a minority.”

Pimlico Student

Concluding remarks

This report should not be finished without recognising the achievements that Pimlico already has on its record. According to OfSTED Report, 2003 students of this school are:

.. articulate and well able to live in and work in a diverse cultural society.

... parents expressed particular satisfaction with ...how the school effectively helps students to become mature and responsible members of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society in which they live.

And even though the multi-cultural ethos is already a recognised strength of this school, throughout this research the students have highlighted their wish for Pimlico to celebrate and utilise its diversity in every aspect of its work: curriculum, communication, staffing, recognition of and support for first languages and even food.

Post Data Interpretation Comments

“You need to add that we all learn differently. I cannot sit and read for a long time. When we studied about planets in Science, we did a role play and I still remember what we studied then. When revising for an exam I choose a song to listen to and everything I study I sing to that song. That way I can remember everything I read.”

High achieving Black Boy,
doing A levels

This report was presented to students, for their approval before its dissemination. These are some comments made by students in the feedback sessions:

“Bangladeshi boys need a Bangladeshi mentor, like Black boys have their mentor.”

Bangladeshi students, Year 11



4 Next Steps

We believe the work reported in this study is very important. The project was conducted primarily to find out more about how we could work together to raise the achievement of Bangladeshi and African Caribbean boys at Pimlico. However, we believe that the issues identified in Pimlico have wider relevance and will be of interest both to other schools in Westminster and to schools nationally.



Building on the project at school is the first priority. Wide dissemination of the findings within school is integral to the project itself and feedback received at each stage of the internal dissemination will inform the next step in the development of a strategy. Students who were the 'subjects' of the study will play an important role in the internal dissemination. Roles will be reversed for an afternoon and students will present their perceptions and suggestions to teachers and other staff. We hope that by offering students the opportunity to be experts and teachers we will encourage them to experience enthusiastic ownership of the study. We anticipate that teachers will appreciate the students' commitment and pay close attention to their views.

LEA officers have recognised that this study grapples with issues of relevance to all schools in the LEA and, indeed, beyond Westminster. The model of research used has involved all members of the school community including students, staff, parents, governors, LEA officers, community representatives and external consultants and this has made this a particularly exciting project. A conference will disseminate the work widely to schools in Westminster and, space permitting, to delegates from schools outside the authority. The conference will give staff and students the opportunity to share the innovation, enthusiasm and insight that have characterised this project. We are confident that other schools will be able to learn from the insights of Pimlico students.

5 Appendix:

Notes to facilitators

Suggested format for discussion:

- You want to empower students to achieve
- What directs their achievement?
- What helps them to achieve?
- The discussion should not agonise over the past but focus on:

Where do we want to go?

...and How do we get there ?

- Which areas of life do individuals achieve in and why?
(Could be football, music, driving a scooter, helping at home or what ever individuals feel they have learnt and can apply successfully)
- Why have they learnt and are successful in these areas?
(Could be because they control it, or someone organises it in a particular way, or some motivation, e.g. payment)
- How well are you doing and can you do?
- Let's set up an environment at school for you to achieve in

Statements to initiate or extend the discussion

- Probe their aspirations, what results are they going to get, where will you go after Pimlico School, what might you be doing in 10 years time.
- In one large urban authority African Caribbean pupils enter compulsory schooling as the highest achieving group but leave as the least likely to attain five high-grade GCSEs
- Bangladeshi attainment still lags behind white averages nationally
- In 34 authorities (42%) none of the black categories matched the attainment of white pupils
- Fluency in English affects some minority pupils' attainment
- Sometimes teachers or parents expect too little from young people
- School achievement will determine success in later life – it will affect whether or not students will go to university, get a job and the contribution they make to society
- Length settlement and period of schooling in the UK can affect performance
- Schools and teachers want to see all their students succeed

Learning from this their own experience, what aims and methods can they suggest for their achievement workshops?

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