African Caribbean People in Leicestershire

Afrikan Caribbean Support Group Research Project

Education Matters

African Caribbean People and Schools in Leicestershire

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Introduction

Since the 1944 Education Act, the philosophy behind schooling in the United Kingdom has been the idea of 'education for all'. This is a highly desirable goal but the extent to which it has been attained in practice has been questioned by African Caribbean people ever since their migration to this country in the 1950s and 1960s.

Examinations of the experiences of black children in education are not new. In 1981, the Interim Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups (Rampton, 1981) found that black children were underachieving in schools as a result of racism and discrimination inherent in the education system, and their conclusions were further bolstered by the Committee's Final Report (Swann, 1985).

The findings of the research project into African Caribbean people in Leicestershire come fifteen years after the Rampton Report and yet many of the indictments in that Report, and that of the Swann Committee, are repeated in the pages that follow.

Little appears to have changed. Black children still feature in disproportionate numbers in all of the negative statistics associated with education and schooling. Racism and discrimination continue to be problems in Leicestershire schools.

During the course of this project there has been much that has concerned the researchers, not least the stagnant position of African Caribbean people in the education system and the way that the pleas of this community are seemingly ignored whilst those of other groups in this politically sensitive area are given greater airing.

Policy-makers in this field should be warned that a perpetually bad position is producing increased levels of disenchantment within Leicestershire's African Caribbean community. The community is losing faith in the education system.

As such, this Report comes at a crucial time and it is hoped that both its analysis and recommendations will be given proper and urgent consideration.
Methodology

Literature review

Before embarking on this study of African Caribbean people and education in Leicestershire, literature related to the subject of black people and education was surveyed.

There have been a number of important reports on the subject, perhaps most notably those of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups (Rampton, 1981; Swann, 1985). Other texts that have provided an important academic background to this research are Benskin's work (1994) on the underachievement of black children in schools, Bourne et al's Outcast England (1994) and Cohen et al's Schools Out (1994), which looks at the use of exclusions in schools.

These works have helped put the findings of the research into context. They show that the position in Leicestershire is by no means unusual and, indeed, mirrors the experiences of black people elsewhere in Britain.

A review of relevant literature, and a grasp of the key issues in this area, also assisted in the framing of semi-structured questionnaires used during the course of this research and in directing and facilitating the group discussions, which formed an integral part of the study.

Qualitative data

A series of group interviews was conducted with African Caribbean parents. The views of parents are seen as central to this particular study and are also in keeping with the project's 'bottom-up' - as opposed to 'top-down' - approach.

A total of 53 parents took part in six group discussions, which covered a wide range of issues concerned with the education of black children in Leicestershire.
Semi-structured interviews were held with 20 African Caribbean schoolchildren in Leicestershire. A 'loose' questionnaire was used to get the schoolchildren to talk openly and in as much depth as possible about their experiences at school. Once again, this method was in keeping with the 'bottom-up' approach of the study and was employed with considerable success.

Face-to-face interviews were also conducted with educationalists and policy makers in the field, and these included three interviews with black teaching staff.

**Quantitative data**

This Report also draws on quantitative data where possible. General statistics on educational attainment have been used, as have available data on other quantifiable areas such as school exclusions. However, the study has found that ethnic monitoring is not nearly as widespread in education in Leicestershire as it should be, and so comprehensive and reliable data regarding many aspects of black people and schools are not available.

**Acknowledgements**

The researchers would like to thank Leicestershire County Council, the 1990 Trust, the Commission for Racial Equality, Moat Community College, the Centre for Multi-cultural Education in Leicester and Hampstead School, north London, for providing data and facilitating interviews.

Many different individuals contributed to the study and it is not possible to thank them all by name. In particular, the research team is most grateful to the members of the Afrikan Caribbean Support Group, for their unswerving support and encouragement, and to all those members of the African Caribbean community in Leicestershire, who have participated in interviews and discussions.

Thanks are also due to the schools and teachers who have assisted the project and to officers in the local authorities, who have participated in the study. Finally, the researchers wish to thank and pay tribute to previous members of the team who devoted themselves to the exacting, but very worthwhile, task of collecting data for the African Caribbean People in Leicestershire research project.
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Summary of Key Findings

Education is by far the greatest issue of concern to African Caribbean people in Leicestershire, with 53% of those surveyed choosing it as the highest priority. (Page 9)

The available evidence shows that black children continue to underachieve in Leicestershire schools. (Pages 10–11)

There is insufficient ethnic monitoring of educational attainment, exclusions, pupils with statements of special educational needs, teaching staff, and other dimensions of education in the county, and consequently the extent of black pupils' disadvantage and discrimination is hidden. (Pages 11–13)

Data which are available show that the rate of permanent exclusion of black pupils is at least five times greater than that for white pupils and the rate of fixed-term exclusions for black children is at least 3.6 times higher than that for white children. (Pages 11–13)

A significant proportion of African Caribbean parents is disillusioned with the educational system in Leicestershire and 39 per cent of those surveyed said they were in favour of separate schools for black children. (Pages 13–14)

A high proportion of black children do not enjoy or like school, for reasons such as lack of material about black culture and history, unfair treatment, and the failure of teachers to understand or appreciate the experiences of African Caribbean children. (Pages 15–17)
From the available evidence, black people are greatly under-represented amongst teaching staff in Leicestershire schools. *(Page 17–18)*

There is inadequate training for teachers at all levels in the needs, experience and culture of black pupils. *(Page 18)*

There is a shortage in the county’s schools of teaching materials which reflect African Caribbean history, culture and experiences and offer positive portrayals of black people. *(Pages 18–19)*

The National Curriculum and the growth in the numbers of locally managed schools appear to be undermining multi-cultural education in the county. *(Pages 19–20)*

Many black parents support supplementary schooling as a way to overcome disadvantages experienced by their children, but the schools are at present inadequately funded. *(Pages 21–22)*

The problem of exclusions of black pupils is of growing concern and there is currently inadequate training of teachers, advice to parents and independent review of such exclusions. *(Pages 23–25)*

Racism and discrimination continue to be seen as a major problem in the education system. *(Pages 25–26)*

Black parents need to become more involved in their children’s schooling but often do not find schools welcoming or prepared to offer necessary advice and support. *(Page 27)*
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Summary of Recommendations

1. Ethnic monitoring of attainment in Leicestershire schools should be undertaken by the LEA to ascertain the extent of underachievement by black children and the reasons for this, so that positive action to remedy matters can be taken. (Page 11)

2. The monitoring of permanent and fixed-term exclusions of black pupils should be improved so that accurate and reliable figures are available. (Page 13)

3. Ethnic monitoring of pupils with statements of special educational needs should be introduced. (Page 13)

4. More effective ethnic monitoring of teachers should be undertaken by the Local Education Authority so that it knows how many black teachers are working in Leicestershire schools. (Page 17)

5. The Local Education Authority should place a high priority on increasing the number of black teachers in Leicestershire schools and should take positive action to achieve this goal. (Page 17)

6. The LEA should take the lead in developing effective in-service training for schools and teachers in the needs of black pupils and in developing a deeper awareness and understanding of African Caribbean issues, history and culture. (Page 18)

7. The Local Education Authority should seek to ensure that teaching materials reflecting black history, culture and experience are available in all schools and should offer necessary advice on these matters to headteachers and other staff, involving local African Caribbean expertise where possible. (Page 19)
The ACE Saturday School requires further funding to meet the demands of a growing number of pupils and to realise its potential. At the minimum, there appears to be a strong case for LEA funding for a paid co-ordinator. (Page 22)

Careful monitoring of the exclusion of black pupils should be undertaken by the LEA so that any schools with high proportions of such exclusions can be identified and action taken. (Page 24)

The LEA should organise training sessions, supplemented by written advice and materials, on the disproportionately high levels of exclusions of black pupils and the reasons why this is occurring. (Page 24)

The LEA should produce an information pack for parents explaining the reasons for exclusions and the rights of parents to oppose them. The reasons for the disproportionate levels of exclusions of black children should be investigated and discussions should be held with African Caribbean parents. All permanent exclusions should be reviewed by an independent tribunal, including members of the black community. (Page 25)

Schools should be strongly and visibility proactive in their stand against discrimination. All schools should display notices which serve as a constant reminder that racism and discrimination is abhorred and is one of the key evils that can undermine both the school and society. (Page 26)

The LEA and schools themselves should actively encourage the involvement of African Caribbean parents. The establishment of a Black Parents' Forum would aid effective campaigning and help to promote the education of African Caribbean children. (Page 27)

The LEA (after April 1997 the 3 LEAs) should establish an African Caribbean Education Steering Group (ACESG), which should include senior councillors and officers as well as representatives of the black community. The Steering Group should be given high profile and status, and responsibility for monitoring the experiences and attainments of black pupils and instituting improvements in policies and funding, where necessary. (Page 30)
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Issues in African Caribbean Education

(i) Low attainment and conflict: an unchanging picture

Education has been among the most emotive and powerful of the issues covered in the study of Leicestershire's African Caribbean community. It is certainly an issue that is viewed with a great deal of importance, with over half of the respondents to the Leicestershire African Caribbean Survey listing education as the issue of greatest concern to them, as shown in Figure 1.

It is likely that those people who chose education did so in the realisation that any failures in this area affect many of the other problems faced by the community, from unemployment through to lack of equal opportunities and political influence.

![Pie chart showing issues of greatest concern]


Figure 1: Issues of greatest concern to the African Caribbean community
Sadly, this Report details many such failures in the educational system. The broad picture is one of underachievement and conflict within schools and these findings reflect those of other studies of black people and education.

(ii) Educational attainment

Whilst there is clearly much more to education than the results gained by pupils at the end of their period at school, gaining qualifications nonetheless remains the traditional way of gauging success or failure for both pupils and the schools themselves, and are of critical importance in determining the opportunities open to individuals in higher education and employment.

Analysis of the quantitative data available regarding African Caribbean people in Leicestershire reveals a gloomy picture. As shown in Figure 2, the data indicate that African Caribbean people generally underachieve by comparison with their white or Asian counterparts, except at GCSE grade A–C (or equivalent).

![Qualification Chart]

Notes: (a) African Caribbeans in Leicestershire aged 16 and over; (b) UK population aged 16–59.
Sources: Dept for Education; Social Trends 1994; Leicestershire African Caribbean Survey 1994.

Figure 2: Highest qualification obtained by African Caribbean people in Leicestershire compared with the population of the United Kingdom
Recommendation: Ethnic monitoring of educational attainment in Leicestershire schools should be undertaken by the LEA to ascertain the extent of underachievement by black children and the reasons for this, so that positive action to remedy matters can be taken.

(iii) Conflict and exclusions

The available evidence shows that African Caribbean children are more likely to be subjected to schools' disciplinary procedures than other pupils. Headteachers have the power to exclude children for a fixed period or to exclude them permanently for serious and persistent misbehaviour. These powers seem to be used more frequently against black pupils.

As shown in Table 1, of those children whose ethnic group was recorded, 7.1 per cent of permanently excluded pupils were African Caribbean which was over five times higher than their proportion (1.4%) of the school-aged population. Black children were also over-represented (by nearly four-fold) amongst those pupils who were excluded for a fixed period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>School population(a) (%)</th>
<th>Permanent exclusions (%)</th>
<th>Fixed-period exclusions (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>85.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed(b)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: (a) Children aged 5–17 years in 1991 Census; (b) children of 'mixed parentage' are not revealed in 1991 Census data, although many of those so defined by schools are likely to be in the 'black – other' Census category; (c) figures exclude children whose ethnic group was defined as 'not known' by schools and the LEA.

Sources: Report by Director of Education presented to Leicestershire Education Resources Sub-Committee on 23 October 1995; 1991 Census.

**Table 1: Proportions of excluded pupils and school population, by ethnic group, for 1994–95**
The disproportionate numbers of black children who are excluded from school are clearly shown in Table 2. This gives the number of excluded children per 10,000 school-aged children from each ethnic group. Black children are five times more likely to be permanently excluded than white children and over 43 times more likely to be permanently excluded than Asian children. For fixed-period exclusions, the figures show that the rate for black children is 3.6 times higher than for white children and over eight times higher than for Asian children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Permanent exclusions per 10,000 children</th>
<th>Fixed-period exclusions per 10,000 children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>177.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>77.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>642.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>142.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black + ‘mixed’(b)</td>
<td>108.8</td>
<td>885.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All children(c)</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>186.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: (a) Figures are calculated by dividing LEA figures on exclusions by numbers of children aged 5–17 in Census data for each ethnic group; (b) figures are for those children described by LEA as black or of ‘mixed parentage’ per 10,000 black children in the Census; (c) figures are derived by dividing total numbers of excluded children (including those whose ethnic group was ‘not known’) by total number of school-age population in the Census data.

Sources: Report by Director of Education presented to Leicestershire Education Resources Sub-Committee on 23 October 1995; 1991 Census.

Table 2: Number of excluded children per 10,000 children of school age, by ethnic group, for 1994–95

It is not possible to discern a trend in the exclusions of African Caribbean children as figures for different ethnic groups were not available before 1994–95. Indeed, in his Report on Exclusions for the meeting of the Education Resources Sub-Committee on 23rd October 1995, the Director of Education stated ‘the ethnicity of excluded pupils is not always known to the person registering the exclusion and is therefore not necessarily precise’. The figures in this Report show that the ethnic group was ‘not known’ for 20 per cent of permanently excluded children and 6.8 per cent of pupils excluded for a fixed period.

There are good reasons for believing the figures in Tables 1 and 2 under-estimate the numbers of black pupils who are excluded. The Director of Education’s Report included a category of ‘mixed parentage’. It seems likely that many of these pupils are black and accord with the Census category of ‘black–other’. Indeed, in the 1991 Census the largest number of school-
aged black children (47.1%) were put in the category of 'black-other' by their parents, followed by 'black-Caribbean' (40.9%) and 'black-African' (12.0%). As shown in Table 2, if the LEA's figures for 'black' and 'mixed parentage' are taken together, the rate of permanent exclusions per 10,000 children rises to 108.8, nearly eight times the rate for white pupils, and the rate of fixed-period exclusions is 885.3 per 10,000 pupils, which is five times the rate for white children.

Since 1990 there has been a dramatic rise in permanent exclusions in Leicestershire, which show an increase of 115 per cent from 114 to 245 per year. The growth of fixed-term exclusions has been even greater, with a rise of 278 per cent from 714 to 2,702 per year. Data are not available to show how the numbers of African Caribbean exclusions have risen over this period as figures are only available for 1994–95. It is also worth stressing again the LEA warning that the statistics may not be accurate.

**Recommendation: The monitoring of permanent and fixed-term exclusions of black pupils should be improved so that accurate and reliable figures are available.**

A related issue is the number of African Caribbean pupils who have been given statements of special educational needs. In a letter dated 6th October 1995, the Service Manager of Leicestershire County Council's Special Educational Needs Assessment Service stated:

At present, we do not record the numbers of pupils with statements of special educational needs in Leicestershire by ethnicity. We cannot, therefore, give information on the number of children with statements of special educational need who have been excluded from school broken down by ethnicity.

**Recommendation: Ethnic monitoring of pupils with statements of special educational needs should be introduced.**

**(iv) Growing militancy among parents**

The worrying statistics on black children and education are having an adverse effect on the confidence that African Caribbean parents have in the educational system. They are finding it increasingly hard to accept such low levels of educational attainment, especially as education and schooling are given such a high priority within the community.
Figure 3: Do you think the education system is failing African Caribbean children?

Source: Leicestershire African Caribbean Survey 1994

Figure 4: Would you support a separate school for the education of African Caribbean children?

For black parents it would seem the education system itself is at fault and it is little surprise that they feel that it is failing their children, as shown in Figure 3. Many parents believe it is only by educating their children separately that they will be able to achieve a decent standard of education. The level of support this view is attracting among parents in Leicestershire is such that it cannot be ignored. As shown in Figure 4, 39 per cent of parents questioned as part of the Leicestershire African Caribbean survey said that they supported separate schools for the education of black children.
Analysis and Recommendations

Just what lies behind the continued poor performance of African Caribbean children in Leicestershire's schools? This is not an easy question to answer but findings from the study provide evidence in support of some answers.

Central to understanding why African Caribbean children continue to underperform is an analysis of how they are taught within schools. Many of the problems stem from the fact that African Caribbean children become disillusioned with school. A host of studies on education generally have stated that if children are not properly motivated or interested in school subsequent disillusionment will lead to misbehaviour and, inevitably, underachievement (see, for example, O'Keefe and Stoll, 1995).

This appears to be affecting African Caribbean children in schools up and down the country. The situation is especially acute in Leicestershire, however, because African Caribbean people constitute such a small minority group and black children feel particularly isolated.

(i) Fostering cultural pride

In his book *Children and Race* (1983), psychologist David Milner makes the point that if children see no reflection of their selves in their school curriculum it can seriously retard their learning, while in his work on the education of black children Wilson (1987) notes that it is when children begin school at the age of four or five years that negative feelings about themselves start if there are no positive references to their culture in lessons.

Examining the content of lessons, the manner in which they are taught and who is doing the teaching, may help to explain the continuing poor performance of African Caribbean children.
The importance of fostering cultural pride among African Caribbean children in schools cannot be over-stressed. As a black schoolteacher told researchers:

...The portrayal of positive role models for black children is essential in my view. I see white children inspired in my classes when I teach about Nelson and Churchill, and I look at the black children and think how they might be inspired if I taught them about Marcus Garvey or other great black people in history.

The views of the children themselves provide evidence that a lack of awareness of African Caribbean culture in Leicestershire’s schools is having a detrimental effect on the educational experience and attainment of this ethnic group.

Only one of the 20 children interviewed remarked that they enjoyed school. She told researchers that she enjoyed both the lessons and the atmosphere.

On the whole, however, school was disliked and the most often quoted reason was a belief that teachers do not understand the cultural needs of black children and that there is little or nothing in the curriculum related to black culture. This is leading to black children becoming disillusioned at school. Even at a young age, they felt marginalised and said they were being treated unfairly compared to children from other ethnic groups.

These are typical responses from African Caribbean secondary school students in Leicestershire:

- ‘There’s nothing about black people in any of the lessons. I think that is wrong especially as we have to learn things about everyone else.’

- ‘I don’t get anything much out of school. The lessons are so boring. It’s the teachers fault, they don’t pay me any attention. I think it’s because I am black. All of the black kids are treated like me.’

- ‘Although I don’t mind school, there are problems with exclusions, mainly African Caribbean kids. Not much help is provided. They only misbehave because they are so bored.’

- ‘There is not enough education for black children. The teachers tell us nothing. There should be more in school about us.’

- ‘It [school] is all set up for Asian kids. They get all the special treatment. We have to learn all about them all the time. They get treated better than black kids.’
• 'The school tends to deal with Asians much more than African Caribbeans. I just didn't feel like they wanted to teach me properly.'

• 'I would like to see more African Caribbean teachers in education to help black kids. The teachers at my school are only interested in helping the white and Asian kids. We get pushed to one side and left.'

These views, and the issues examined in Section 5, highlight a number of different steps which should be taken in Leicestershire to address the problems black people are experiencing with schools and the education service.

Black teachers serve as positive role models for African Caribbean pupils and they are much more likely to understand the views and experiences of black children. Researchers on this project have endeavoured to discover how many black teachers work in Leicestershire schools. Leicestershire County Council does not appear to know. In a letter, dated 16th October 1995, the Manager of the Education Personnel Unit stated:

The Authority's scheme for monitoring ethnic origin is voluntary and I regret therefore that I cannot provide any reliable statistics in relation to either teaching or Education Department staff.

**Recommendation:** More effective ethnic monitoring of teachers should be undertaken by the Local Education Authority so that it knows how many black teachers are working in Leicestershire schools.

Given that 1.4 per cent of the school-age population in the county is black, a proportionate number of teachers would give 95 full-time and 28 part-time staff. The researchers on this project have managed to identify only nine African Caribbean teachers in Leicestershire schools. Even if this is a considerable under-estimate, it seems clear that there is a serious shortage of black teachers in the county's schools.

**Recommendation:** The Local Education Authority should place a high priority on increasing the number of black teachers in Leicestershire schools and should take positive action to achieve this goal.
Alongside the recruitment of more African Caribbean teachers, there is a need for improved training for teachers at all levels. All teachers should have an awareness of black issues, and African Caribbean culture and history. As well as young student teachers, experienced staff should participate in training sessions on multi-cultural issues and the experiences and needs of African Caribbean children, so that a deeper, improved understanding is developed throughout the profession.

David Gillborn of the Institute of Education reported in The Voice (15 November 1994) that there is evidence to show that many teachers consciously or unconsciously view African Caribbean boys as a particular threat to their authority and as undisciplined. A black teacher interviewed for this research project stated:

\begin{quote}
People are frightened of things they do not understand. Many teachers do not understand where a black kid from the inner city is coming from so they are scared of him. I'm at an advantage because I'm black, but even I could have benefited from some kind of specific training in dealing with these sort of kids. They have very special needs which I don't think are fully appreciated.
\end{quote}

Fifteen years ago, in his Report into the Brixton disorders, Lord Scarman found 'a lack of understanding by teachers of the cultural background of black pupils' (Scarman, 1981, para 6.16). Despite much discussion since then, it is clear that many teachers continue to be ignorant of the history, culture and traditions of African Caribbean people and have stereotyped views of black pupils.

Improved levels of training, alongside more black teachers, would help counter negative stereotypes, and enable teachers to understand black pupils' needs and to communicate with them more effectively. It would also help staff and schools develop their curricula and syllabuses to include topics of interest and relevance to African Caribbean children and to foster cultural pride.

\begin{center}
Recommendation: The LEA should take the lead in developing effective in-service training for schools and teachers in the needs of black pupils and in developing a deeper awareness and understanding of African Caribbean issues, history and culture.
\end{center}

A further issue highlighted by the research is the need for more teaching materials reflecting African Caribbean culture and experiences. Advice on such matters is available from various organisations such as the Association for the Teaching of Caribbean, African and Associated Literature (ATCAL), who argues strongly that LEAs should provide more training and materials for teachers.
As long ago as 1982, a Schools Council publication (Craft. 1992) stated:

All school lessons need to employ curricula, curriculum materials and examinations which include examples drawn from a wide range of cultures and which avoid presenting solely anglo-centric views of the world.

Unfortunately, the investigations undertaken by the researchers have revealed little evidence of such an approach in many Leicestershire schools, at least so far as black experiences and culture are concerned.

There is a wealth of material which could and should be made available in Leicestershire schools, including poetry, drama, literature, film, music and history. Many examples are given in various works, such as that by Dabydeen (1985).

At a minimum, books that offer a positive portrayal of black people should be available in school libraries. Many materials are available from the Raddle Bookstore, which could act in an advisory role for schools.

The availability of such teaching materials and resources would be of benefit to all children within the school, helping them to develop a greater knowledge, understanding and respect for each other’s cultures. In the case of African Caribbean pupils, such materials would help to develop greater respect for themselves, increased cultural pride, and a heightened interest in education in schools.

**Recommendation:** The Local Education Authority should seek to ensure that teaching materials reflecting black history, culture and experience are available in all schools and should offer necessary advice on these matters to headteachers and other staff, involving local African Caribbean expertise where possible.

**(ii) Curriculum Matters**

Within Leicestershire’s schools it has been found that African Caribbean pupils are taught in the same way as the white pupils, with little or no regard to special factors such as their different use of English. The role of patois and other African Caribbean languages has not been sufficiently recognised in schools.
Curriculum Statement

Leicestershire’s Curriculum Statement outlines the aims and principles which govern education in the area for children at all stages in the system. It is used alongside the National Curriculum which lists ten subjects as the minimum to be taught in all schools. This includes the core subjects English, Mathematics and Science, and also History, Art, Music and Religious Education.

Leicestershire’s Curriculum Statement adds more breadth to the National Curriculum stating that literacy, numeracy, information technology, citizenship and equal opportunities should be prevalent in a child’s education.

However, the Curriculum Statement does not include multi-cultural or multi-racialism as separate topics. Multi-culturalism in this instance relates to teaching all children a variety of cultures and experiences of other ethnic groups. It is presumed that these areas will be covered elsewhere under topics such as citizenship and equal opportunities. This results in variations in different schools’ approaches to multi-culturalism. The position has been worsened by a number of Leicestershire schools opting out of Local Authority control and therefore moving from underneath the LEA’s umbrella Curriculum Statement.

As discussed in the previous section, it is still possible for schools to increase considerably the amount of material of relevance to black children available for classroom teaching and the recommendation that this should be done is consequently reiterated.

CME Research

The Centre for Multicultural Education (CME) in Leicester was established in the early 1980s after some members of the African Caribbean community approached the county council concerned about the lack of multi-cultural education in Leicestershire schools.

An early product of the CME was research into the views of African Caribbean pupils in the area. The subsequent report, entitled The Future Surveyed, revealed that the majority of African Caribbean children would like to see subjects such as West Indian and African history available at school. Sadly, this is still not the case within the county’s schools.

One problem is that the freedom of manoeuvre of the LEA and individual schools is greatly limited by the National Curriculum. It is compulsory under the National Curriculum that 80 per cent of history taught in school should be British history. It is unlikely that this will lead to greater understanding of different cultures.

The British Social Attitudes Survey 1994 asked respondents if they felt schools with numbers of pupils with parents from other countries and cultures should teach them about their
parents' country of origin and its culture. The survey found strong views on the subject with only 2.9 per cent stating that didn’t know. Around 40 per cent of respondents to the survey said that this multi-cultural approach should be adopted by schools.

It is clear that training for teachers is again of key importance. Teachers should be trained to incorporate some black perspectives or angles into their lessons if African Caribbean children are not to feel marginalised and isolated. This underlines the recommendation in the previous section, that the LEA should take the lead in developing effective in-service training for schools and teachers. One black schoolteacher told researchers:

There is no reason, if you’ve got black kids in your class, for not giving examples in the lesson that they can relate too. You immediately see them perk up if you mention the name of a famous black person. They respect you for it. It’s just common sense really.

Supplementary Schooling and the Role of ACE

Given the restraints imposed on educating African Caribbean children by the National Curriculum, supplementary schooling has taken on a special importance.

Many black people regard supplementary schooling as a key way to overcome disadvantage to improve the performance of African Caribbean children. The first supplementary school in Leicestershire, known as the Saturday School, was formed over 20 years ago. It is held each Saturday during term and is run by trained teachers, assisted by parents and other members of the community.

Since its inception many dedicated individuals have given their time without any financial reward. All have worked towards one goal – the improvement of the children's education, in order to foster pride and respect for themselves, their community and their culture.

The Saturday School is run by the Afro-Caribbean Education Working Group (ACE) which has the following aims and objectives:

• To improve liaison between home and school;

• To foster a positive self-image amongst all people of African Caribbean descent and to counter the undervaluing of their culture and heritage;

• To provide appropriate contexts for the examination of the social, economic and historical circumstances that have led to the evolution of racism in this society and to show ways in which this is manifest;
To broaden and develop positive attitudes towards black people in Britain, the Caribbean, Africa and other parts of the world, and also towards ethnic minority groups in Britain, in order to balance stereotypical and obscure views perpetuated within the society as a whole;

To build upon the cultural richness and diversity within our society as a whole and in doing so make children and young people aware that individual and group differences must be understood, appreciated and respected rather than be feared, ridiculed or ignored;

To encourage in all children a world perspective to counter the predominance, within the school curriculum and society as a whole, of the white European standpoint;

To develop in all young people, positive images of other people so that each young person can have his or her own self-image positively reinforced by the recognition of others within the peer group;

To make recommendations to relevant bodies/authorities concerning the academic performance and social welfare of African Caribbean children.

In keeping with the aims and principles of ACE, children are taught not only academic subjects such as Maths and English but also African and West Indian history and current affairs. These are taught in interesting and innovative ways which allow the participation by the children.

ACE also conducts workshops and conferences, particularly for parents, in order to discuss and explain legislation relating to education and the rights of the parent. Parents are given the opportunity to voice their fears and aspirations for their children.

In addition, ACE holds celebration evenings where students within the African Caribbean community are honoured for their achievements.

However, ACE is without question an under-funded organisation and with more money it would be possible for supplementary schooling to be provided for more children.

Recommendation: The ACE Saturday School requires further funding to meet the demands of a growing number of pupils and to realise its potential. At the minimum, there seems to be a strong case for LEA funding for a paid co-ordinator.
(iii) Exclusions

As discussed in Section 5, an educational issue that is causing particular concern amongst Leicestershire's African Caribbean parents is the number of black children being excluded from school. It has already been seen that African Caribbean children in Leicestershire are over-represented among those children who are excluded from school. Nationally, Department of Education figures show that African Caribbean pupils account for 8.1% of all exclusions whilst making up only 2% of the national schools’ population and that black children represented one quarter of all children excluded from secondary school (CRE, 1995).

Since the onset of the publication of school performance tables there have been fears that some schools might use exclusions to remove low achieving pupils from their rolls. There has also been concern that certain socio-economic and ethnic groups would be more susceptible to exclusions than others. This argument is best articulated in a study of exclusions by Bourne, Bridges and Searle in Outcast England: How Schools Exclude Black Children (1994). They state:

Exclusion is seldom the measure of a child's capacity to learn; it is an indication, instead, of the teacher’s refusal to be challenged. And when you have an educational system which puts premium not on the educability of the child but on the price of its education, the challenge to the teacher is the financial cost of keeping it in school, not the human cost of keeping it out. When, in addition, educability itself is prejudged in terms of societal stereotype which associates 'black' with 'problem' the exclusion of the black child becomes much more automatic.

In line with national figures, exclusions in Leicestershire schools have risen dramatically since 1989-90. In that year, 100 pupils were permanently excluded, but by 1994-95 the figure had risen by 145 per cent to 245. During this period, fixed-term exclusions rose by 343 per cent from 610 to 2,702 per year.

Figures for black pupils are only available for 1994-95, and according to the LEA are 'not necessarily precise'. As reported in Section 5, the rate of permanent exclusions of black pupils in 1994-95 was five times greater than that for white children and the rate of fixed-term exclusions of black pupils was over three-and-a-half times more than that for white pupils.

If pupils defined by schools as of 'mixed parentage' were included, the rate of permanent exclusions of black pupils in 1994-95 was eight times higher than that of white pupils and the rate of fixed-term exclusions of black children was five times that for white pupils.

Such was the level of concern amongst African Caribbean parents in Leicestershire that a special seminar on exclusions was held for black parents in May 1995. The aim of the seminar was to raise awareness of exclusions of black children and to advise parents how they can deal legally with schools that they feel have excluded their children unjustifiably.
The seminar also sought to address reasons why African Caribbean children were so susceptible to exclusions in Leicestershire's schools. The main reason cited for the unacceptably high number of exclusions among black pupils was racism and discrimination.

Participants at the seminar, which included educational experts and parents, felt that very often cultural differences meant that teachers did not know (or felt they did not know) how to deal with black children and that exclusion was the simplest option. There was also the general opinion that a 'culture of exclusion' had developed around teachers' dealings with African Caribbean children and that these children were being picked upon. During the course of this study parents have told researchers stories of their children being excluded when they clearly felt that the reason for this was the colour of their child's skin. One parent told the research team:

They excluded my son for fighting, but the white boy he fought with for making racist remarks at him is still in school. They single out the black children for these exclusions. It's a disgrace.

Of course, every individual case is different, but the greatly disproportionate levels of both permanent and fixed-term exclusion of black pupils show that the educational system is working against the interests of African Caribbean children.

It is essential that the Local Education Authority should take prompt and effective measures to investigate this problem. Is there a particularly high level of exclusions of black pupils in a small number of schools? Is such information available?

**Recommendation:** Careful monitoring of the exclusion of black pupils should be undertaken by the LEA so that any schools with high proportions of such exclusions can be identified and action taken.

The training of teachers is again important if black children are not to continue to be disproportionately excluded. As a first-step, schools and teachers should be made aware that this is occurring and seminars, workshops and training materials should be organised to discuss the extent of, and the reasons for, the problem.

**Recommendation:** The LEA should organise training sessions, supplemented by written advice and materials, on the disproportionately high levels of exclusions of black pupils and the reasons why this is occurring.
There is also much that black parents can do to discover the reasons for proposed exclusions and where appropriate to oppose them. Schools are obliged to follow statutory procedures before an exclusion is confirmed. Too often, black parents do not appreciate their legal rights and so lack of parental resistance means the exclusion goes ahead. Parents need to be made more aware of sources of information and advice, such as When All Else Falls – Law and Guidance on Exclusions, produced by Highfield and Belgrave Community Law Centre.

A good proposal is for the establishment of a Black Parents’ Forum. Parents should be encouraged to attend exclusion hearings, not just for their own children but for others as well. Campaigning and mutual support offers important ways of persuading schools to reduce the number of exclusions of black children.

The LEA should pursue a policy of exclusions as a last resort so that the disproportionate numbers of African Caribbean pupils excluded can be brought under control. There is a strong argument for the automatic review of all permanent exclusions by an independent tribunal, including members of the African Caribbean population. A Community Education Panel set up in Croydon to examine exclusions appears to have had considerable success.

**Recommendation:** The LEA should produce an information pack for parents explaining the reasons for exclusions and the rights of parents to oppose them. The reasons for the disproportionate levels of exclusions of black children should be investigated and discussions should be held with African Caribbean parents. All permanent exclusions should be reviewed by an independent tribunal, including members of the black community.

(iv) **Racism and discrimination**

The extent to which racism and discrimination exists within schools is impossible to quantify. That it exists, however, is not in doubt amongst African Caribbean people. Of those people who told the Leicestershire African Caribbean survey that the education system was failing their children, nearly 70 per cent said the reason for this was racism and discrimination.

The discrimination that parents are most concerned about comes not from other pupils within the school, although within the group discussions parents called for schools to treat racist name calling from all children with a higher degree of seriousness, but from the teachers themselves. Parents expressed their concerns over both overt and covert discrimination from teachers within some of the county’s schools.
The overt forms, of which anecdotal examples were given to researchers, may include teachers making openly disparaging remarks about black children and treating them differently. A number of children also complained about this.

Covert discrimination occurs in a number of ways. For example, streaming may result from racial discrimination whereby a black child may be placed in a low ability group. One black parent told researchers that his daughter complained three times of being held back while white children of similar or lower ability were moved into higher groups. It was not until he witnessed this for himself that he believed it was happening.

All schools in the county should be particularly vigilant in identifying racism and discrimination, and all schools should have a clearly defined policy on anti-racism and anti-sexism, which should be widely distributed and publicised.

Unfortunately many of those schools that do have such a statement told researchers that it was ‘good enough.’ It has been found that the reality is that such policies are often vague and few people are aware of their existence.

**Recommendation:** Schools should be strongly and visibly proactive in their stand against discrimination. All schools should display notices which serve as a constant reminder that racism and discrimination is abhorred and is one of the key evils that can undermine both the school and society.

The LEA should frame a co-ordinated policy for all of its schools and should try to persuade local management schools to adopt similar practices. All schools should display posters that clearly state anti-racist policies.

Many schools carry out their own internal inspections on a regular basis. A recommendation of this Report is that as part of these internal inspections any signs of covert discrimination should be investigated.

Teachers should be able to give good account of why any child is in a low attainment group. There should be at least one teacher trained in multi-cultural issues involved in the internal inspection process. Schools might consider bringing in experts from outside to ensure that this process is carried out effectively.

Parents should always question why a black child is in a low attainment group.
(v) Parental involvement

The general view of people interviewed as part of this study of Leicestershire’s African Caribbean community and education is that black parents need to become more involved in the education of their children.

Parents should take seriously any complaint from their child that they are being unfairly treated and if necessary should be prepared to take the matter up with the school. Parents also need to be wary of passing on to their children their own bad experiences, and negative perceptions, of school. Researchers have recognised that parent power can be very effective but that to have success it needs to be co-ordinated. Whilst there is much conviction among African Caribbean parents there is little co-ordination.

Under half of all respondents (48 per cent) to the Leicestershire African Caribbean survey said they did not have enough say in the education of their children and a further quarter did not know. Concerns were expressed by black parents over the approachability of schools and teachers. It was pointed out, however, that parents who are actively involved in their children’s schooling are taken more seriously and treated with more respect by teachers.

One clear message from the research is that African Caribbean parents should avoid only going to the school when problems occur. However, schools need to take the initiative in encouraging such parental involvement. The research has shown that many black parents would like more opportunities to discuss the education of their children and greater support and advice on schooling questions.

This Report strongly supports the formation of a Black Parents’ Association or Forum. Such a Forum would be able to act as a co-ordinating pressure group for parents in the county. It would also be a visible watchdog for schools in the area and may go some way towards preventing unnecessarily high levels of exclusions.

It would be desirable for schools to meet regularly and formally with the Forum to discuss complaints and issues regarding the education of black children in school. Likewise, the LEA would meet regularly with this Forum to deal with the specific problems associated with the education of black children.

**Recommendation:** The LEA and schools themselves should actively encourage the involvement of African Caribbean parents. The establishment of a Black Parents’ Forum would aid effective campaigning and help to promote the education of African Caribbean children.
7

Education Matters

The recurring theme in this study of education and African Caribbean people in Leicestershire has been frustration. Black people place a very high priority on education but parents are frustrated that the system does not sufficiently assist their children in fulfilling their potential.

African Caribbean people are fully aware that the education a child receives at school is likely to have a major impact on her or his life, in terms of employment, income, housing and the ability to deal with other people and institutions and organisations.

Education is a key factor in empowering individuals and communities. However, at present the evidence shows that black pupils as a group underachieve at school and do not attain the success and qualifications of which they are capable. This is a great cause of frustration.

This study has found a need for more black teachers in Leicestershire schools, better training for existing staff in the needs, experiences and culture of African Caribbean pupils, improved availability of teaching materials reflecting black history and achievements, and a greater determination by schools to combat racism and discrimination. These are needed to help to overcome the frustration felt by black pupils in largely white, or white and Asian, schools where they are very much the minority.

The research has highlighted the problem of the disproportionate levels of exclusions of black pupils and the failure of the LEA or the schools to examine the causes and tackle them. The inadequacy of ethnic monitoring of different dimensions of education in the county means that the extent of the difficulties experienced by black children is hidden from view and consequently the problems continue to frustrate African Caribbean pupils and their parents with little apparent action by the authorities.

Parents want to be more involved in their children's education and would like more information from the schools. Yet here, too, the wishes of African Caribbean people are frustrated.
In 1981, Lord Scarman drew attention to ‘the sense of disappointment and frustration’ which black parents and children felt in the education system. That was fifteen years’ ago, and yet the problems persist. Since then, many studies and investigations have highlighted the disadvantages in the educational system experienced by black pupils, but it is clear that much remains to be done to overcome them – in Leicestershire as elsewhere in Britain.

The unsatisfactory state of affairs could, however, be improved with sufficient commitment and determination. At present, there is just one Local Education Authority with responsibility in this field but from April 1997 there will be three. This presents a new opportunity for a concerted campaign to overcome the disadvantage and discrimination experienced by African Caribbean pupils and the chance for a real partnership involving parents, children, teachers and the local authorities.

This report includes 13 recommendations for action, based on the findings and their analysis. The researchers believe the implementation of these suggestions will bring about a marked improvement in the experiences and achievements of black pupils. It is, however, essential for the local authorities to take the lead.

In order to do this, and to sustain the momentum, a final recommendation is offered:

**Recommendation:** Each LEA should establish an African Caribbean Education Steering Group, which should include senior councillors and officers as well as representatives of the black community. The Steering Group should be given a high profile and status, and responsibility for monitoring the experiences and attainments of black pupils and instituting improvements in policies and funding, where necessary.

The problems highlighted in this Report can be overcome and the obstacles and frustrations can be removed. This is in the interests of African Caribbean people, so that black children can fulfil their potential. It is also in the interests of the people of Leicestershire, so that black people are enabled to make their rightful contribution to the wider community. Education matters – to us all.
References


“The direction in which education starts a person, will determine their future life.”

Plato

“It is knowledge that influences and equalises the social condition of humans.”

Benjamin Disraeli

“One by one the solid scholars Get the degrees, the jobs, the dollars.”

W.D. Snodgrass

“Only the educated are free.”

Epictetus

“Knowledge is power.”

Francis Bacon

“The schools of a country are its future in miniature.”

Tehri Hsieh