

# Collaboration and Change: working together to raise achievement of African-Caribbean children and young people

Report of the Ealing Parents  
and the Black Child Meeting  
Priory Community Centre  
27 February 2004



**Education Services**



## **Acknowledgments**

We would like to thank everyone who came to the Ealing Parents and the Black Child meeting at Priory Community Centre on 27 February 2004.

This report contains their words and thoughts, and every one of them played a part in writing it.

The report was prepared by members of the steering group. We would like to thank Donovan Crossfield, Marie Desai, Greg George, Diarra Green, Mollie Hunte, Monique McCurdy, Akubah Quansah and Iscelyn Richards for contributing their perspectives.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Diane Abbott MP, who offered to come to Ealing and whose contribution has been so inspiring.



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## Messages of support

*"I was very impressed by the big turnout for this event. It demonstrated once again how committed Black parents are to helping their children achieve at school. I am sure this event will be the beginning of a new deal for Black and ethnic minority children in Ealing schools. And I will be glad to do anything that I can to help."*

**Diane Abbott MP**

*Education is above all about the creation of life opportunities for children and young people. In Ealing we are utterly committed to raising achievement for Black children - we realise that this is not just about exam results, but also about aspirations and hope. I'm delighted with the success of the first part of "Ealing Parents and the Black child" and the Local Education Authority and its partners in Ealing look forward to learning more from Part II of the event.*

*We will take the recommendations and comments made in this report very seriously and we welcome the opportunity for dialogue and collaboration.*

**Cllr Leonora Thomson**  
**Deputy Leader, Ealing Council**  
**Cabinet portfolio for developing young people**

*Dear Friend,*

*You are part of an historic event for the children, parents, and education of Ealing.*

*With expertise from all walks of life including business, politics, and education, Part I of 'Ealing Parents and the Black Child' was an overwhelming success and the biggest event of its kind in Ealing. It again demonstrated how powerful an experience the gathering of knowledge is, when this expertise comes together behind a common concern.*

*Welcome to Part II of this very special, important and exciting 'Collaboration and Change'. I look forward to working with you to raise the achievements of the Black child in Ealing.*

**Cllr Karen Hunte**  
**Lead Member for youth involvement**

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# Executive Summary

On 27 February 2004, the Ealing Parents and the Black Child meeting was held. Over 300 adult participants and more than 80 children and young people who attended addressed the questions:

- \* What can parents do to improve achievement of African-Caribbean children and young people?
- \* What can schools do to improve achievement of African-Caribbean children and young people?
- \* What can young people do to improve achievement of African-Caribbean children and young people?
- \* Where do we go from here?

## **What was special about this meeting?**

- \* It was the first meeting of its kind to be organised jointly by Ealing Education Department and African-Caribbean community organisations in Ealing.
- \* Over 300 adult participants and more than 80 children and young people attended. Young and old, male and female, new parents and community elders worked together.
- \* There was a strong feeling of agreement and consensus throughout the meeting and in making recommendations.
- \* The meeting called for a new collaborative approach between the community, schools and the education services.

## **Why is it so important to take the messages from this meeting very seriously?**

- \* because the messages come from African-Caribbean parents, children and young people and are born from their own experiences of education
- \* because statistics show that African-Caribbean children and young people continue to be failed by the education system.

## **What has the meeting affirmed?**

The attendance, ethos and recommendations of the meeting dispelled myths and stereotypes about the African-Caribbean community. It was quite clear that:

- \* African-Caribbean parents ARE interested in their children's education
- \* African-Caribbean young people DO understand the value of education and DO want to learn and succeed
- \* Within the African-Caribbean community there are many high achievers, who have been successful in varied fields, as professionals, academics, politicians, business people, writers, and more
- \* The African-Caribbean community DOES want to work with schools and the education authorities to turn around the situation for their children and young people.

### What were the main messages from the meeting?

There were messages from the meeting for parents, schools and children and young people to learn. It was recognised that everyone had a role to play and responsibilities. The main messages from the meeting were:

- \* It is fundamental for all parents to support their children in all that they do. African-Caribbean parents feel a particular necessity for this in the light of current concerns about the education of their children and young people.
- \* It is vital for parents to make their presence felt in school in a positive way, including attending meetings, becoming school governors, making relationships with their children's teachers, informing themselves about education and offering support to the school.
- \* An Ealing African-Caribbean Parents' organisation should be formed, which can work in collaboration with schools and the education department to raise African-Caribbean achievement, can act as a support group for parents, can network with other African-Caribbean organisations and can represent the education concerns of the African-Caribbean community to education authorities, including to the government.
- \* Schools and the education department are asked to take steps to improve educational outcomes for African-Caribbean pupils, and to work in partnership with parents to achieve this improvement.
- \* African-Caribbean children and young people understand the importance of educational success, want to aim high in their own education, and are asking parents and schools to support them in their ambition.

"There is a generation of children to save. We need to work at grass roots level to help our children achieve their dreams."

Diane Abbott, MP

# Recommendations

## Formal recommendations from the meeting to parents, schools, education services and young people

### What parents could do to improve the achievement of African-Caribbean children and young people

#### As parents, we must:

- \* keep remembering how fundamental it is to support our children
- \* continue to positively motivate our children
- \* ensure that we regularly check the progress of our children from the beginning of school right to the end of their education careers
- \* look at our own roles as parents and support other parents and children in all that they do
- \* be proactive: visit the school, develop a relationship with the teachers, ask for regular reports, be more proactive in helping the school to better meet our children's cultural needs
- \* make sure we attend parents' evenings, and go prepared with a list of appropriate questions
- \* be assertive in voicing our concerns as well as acknowledging when things are going well
- \* empower ourselves by finding out about our rights as parents and our children's legal rights.

### What schools could do to improve the achievement of African-Caribbean children and young people

#### We would like schools and teachers to:

- \* raise their expectations of Black children
- \* stop excluding our children
- \* give our children the same respect they give to other children

- \* have more Black teachers – conduct a recruitment drive for teachers representative of communities of Black African-Caribbean heritage
- \* have effective monitoring practice in relation to attainment
- \* have effective monitoring practice in relation to incorporating African and African-Caribbean culture into the mainstream curriculum
- \* become more aware of the cultural needs of our children
- \* set up a rolling programme for Black professionals and mentors to go into schools continuously to promote achievement.

### What young people could do to improve the achievement of African-Caribbean children and young people (from the young peoples' workshop)

#### As young people, we must:

- \* prove statistics wrong by making our GCSE results the highest they have been and eventually make a difference in society
- \* be committed to working hard and taking life seriously because too many Black people are underachieving and dying
- \* prove statistics wrong by making our GCSE results the highest they have been and eventually make a difference in society
- \* take responsibility for our mistakes
- \* achieve.

## Where do we go from here?

### As a community we would like to take action to:

- \* set up a new organisation that can work collaboratively with the Education Department and schools to raise achievement of African-Caribbean children. The organisation can also act as a parent's network, working with the existing organisations dealing with education of African-Caribbean children
- \* lobby the Education Department about African-Caribbean achievement
- \* make our presence felt in school in a positive way
- \* support existing Black community educational organisations
- \* inform ourselves about what is needed to educate the Black child: a parent education forum so we are clear what we have to do as well as what the school has to do
- \* press for more teachers from the African-Caribbean community.



## PERSPECTIVE

### I have potential to fulfil my goals

As a young person in the young people's workshop, I found it very beneficial and constructive. It gave me a different look at life and made me feel certain I could achieve and aim higher.

We introduced ourselves with our name, age and which school we came from. This allowed us to get to know each other.

There were three questions which we discussed at length and all the answers were noted down on paper. The answers helped me to see that we could help stop the underachieving of Black children.

All of this was done in one whole group discussion and it was very reassuring to be with people who could share the same difficulties.

The whole meeting was a challenge to me because prior to the meeting, I did not know anyone in the group but after being in the forum, I came away feeling positive knowing that I could strive for achievement in every area of my life. It also made me see that I have potential to fulfil my goals.

**Donovan Crossfield - age 12**

" I came away feeling positive knowing that **I could strive for achievement in every area of my life.** It also made me see that I have potential to fulfil my goals."

Donovan Crossfield - Age 12



# Background and context

## History and background

In April 2003 Diane Abbott MP held the second hugely successful 'London Schools and the Black Child' conference in Westminster. Following this conference Diane Abbott generously offered to host local meetings for Black parents in the London boroughs, and Ealing Education Department immediately contacted her to ask if she would come to Ealing. The request was strongly supported by Dr Caroline Whalley, the Executive Director of Education and by elected members. They had already identified the achievement of African-Caribbean pupils in schools as a priority for development in Ealing, recognising the national, London-wide and Ealing concerns about inequality of achievement in the education system. They were keen to take advantage of the opportunity to hear parents' views and concerns, and hoped that as a result of the meeting a constructive collaborative approach between African-Caribbean parents and the Education Services would be fostered.

Diane Abbott invited officers from the Education Department to meet her at Westminster to brief her about the Ealing context and to discuss a possible parents' meeting.

Ealing has a long-established African-Caribbean community, with a history of supporting the education of their children. The first African-Caribbean supplementary schools (West Indian Saturday Schools) were set up by the community in the early 1970s and two in particular have been running for 30 years. The community organisations supporting children, young people and families in education embrace teaching, counselling, advocacy, career guidance and information services. Many of these organisations offer advice and inservice training to teachers, as well as curriculum development work with pupils (particularly to reflect African and Caribbean culture and history.) It is a

measure of the community's strong commitment to education that although the organisations are largely unfunded or struggle to run on a shoestring budget, they continue their activities through the dedication of volunteers from varied professional backgrounds.

As soon as Diane Abbott agreed to host the meeting in Ealing, the Education Department wrote to African-Caribbean community organisations to inform them about the event and ask for their collaboration in organising it. A steering group was convened from representatives of the local authority and the community, and this group planned and organised the meeting.

It was the total commitment of this group that ensured the success of the meeting.

## Objectives, potential outcome and principles of the meeting

### Objectives

The objectives of the meeting were to provide a forum for African-Caribbean parents, children, young people and members of the community:

- \* to discuss the education of African-Caribbean children and young people with Diane Abbott MP and with each other
- \* to make recommendations to the Education Department and schools, and for parents to be

- > informed
- > empowered
- > motivated
- > heard.

"We are watching a silent catastrophe"

Diane Abbott, MP

## Potential outcome

The potential outcome was: a new parents' group which would provide a voice for the African-Caribbean community on education matters and would be a partner for the local education authority and schools.

## Principles

In planning the meeting the steering group adopted the following principles:

- \* the purpose of the meeting was to have a positive outcome and to open a constructive dialogue and avenue for collaboration between schools and the Education Department
- \* the meeting would concentrate on and celebrate African-Caribbean achievement in education, and look at ways of promoting it
- \* the meeting would discuss issues of low achievement of some African-Caribbean pupils and the over representation of African-Caribbean pupils, especially boys, in exclusions from school, but in the context of moving the agenda forward and working with the Education services to improve the situation
- \* the meeting would be professionally organised and conducted to the high standard the topic merits.

## Young achiever's story

I was born in West London but moved to Trinidad, where my father was born, when I was just four years old. There I had the benefit of the country's exemplary educational system. Upon completing secondary school, I received a scholarship to study in a university called Barry, in Miami. I went there with the aim of pursuing a career in medicine. After completing my degree, I decided to return to London where the rest of my family now was. I applied for and secured a place at St George's Hospital Medical School. So far the course has been both challenging and interesting with one and a half more years to go.

Unfortunately I am the only Black male in my year of 35 and one of only two Black males among 210 total students in the programme.

I think that I was lucky in that I was brought up in a system where there was no thought that I could not do or become something because of my ethnicity. This, as well as immense support from my parents, enabled me to get to this stage. Hopefully at Descendents we will be able to provide some of that support and inspiration to the young people that we work with.

**Diarra Greene, age 26**

P E R S P E C T I V E

## How the meeting was planned: two perspectives

The meeting was planned by the steering group consisting of education and other council officers, a councillor, Black parents and members of Black community organisations.

### Experience of planning the meeting: two steering group perspectives

Community member	Education officer
<p>As a member of the community, I found it most rewarding being a part of the steering group for the Diane Abbott conference.</p> <p>The commitment shown by all members of the group was not only encouraging but also “contagious” as one could not help but feel the need to be at the meetings on time or send apologies if unable to attend. If one was unable to attend however, there would never be the sense of exclusion as progress reports were always sent out for our information and this showed commitment from the initiators of the project.</p> <p>Throughout the planning process, there was a great atmosphere of professional and community cohesion as our collaborative ideas integrated to make a successful evening.</p> <p>It was evident that each member of the steering group had a sense of ownership for the project and was proud to be a part of it. This was apparent as members took up different areas of responsibility and carried them out to the highest professional level possible.</p> <p>It is a privilege for me to serve on this committee and it is promising to see council officers and members of the community working together to equip our black parents and children with information, knowledge and the hope of achieving their goals and dreams through education.</p> <p><b>Success is possible!</b></p> <p>Rev. Lloyd Crossfield</p>	<p>‘Astounding, tremendous, committed, totally involved,’ these were some of the words I thought of to describe the valuable contribution given by the community.</p> <p>At our first meeting, which was a steering group meeting, fifteen people: officers, parents and community members attended. People were very enthusiastic and offered their help and support. We were very pleased at the number of people who phoned and offered to help with the number of jobs that needed to be done. Our steering group grew.</p> <p>We were equally overwhelmed by the support members of the community provided before and during the conference. One outstanding contribution was a community business, which provided and delivered all the bags for handouts. Others delivered leaflets, and many came to help assemble the packs for participants. Another outstanding contribution was provided by a member of the group who organised the venue, and decorated it to a very high standard.</p> <p>Community members chaired the conference, organised the crèche, young people’s workshop, distributed flyers to organisations and individuals, facilitated workshops, provided refreshments, worked on the reception, and many other jobs. The conference would not have been a success without the support, dedication, commitment and involvement of the community members. I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to all those who contributed and attended the conference, I really appreciated the support.</p> <p>Ivy Scott, Consultant, Ethnic Minority Achievement</p>

## Perhaps knowing how the youth feel on the topic will help broaden understanding and find an answer to this problem

Many issues were raised at the conference concerning this serious issue that needs to be addressed and the way in which it was structured and the way the problem was talked about encouraged great audience participation.

I was a part of the young people's group and we were asked what we needed to help us reach our full potential. Instead of being told how to deal with these problems we were asked how we would deal with these problems.

We were allowed to go away and discuss certain points in groups and then feedback to the audience.

We suggested that all we needed was support, teachers that care about our learning and positive role models.

I enjoyed the chance to express myself in an open and friendly forum, not very often do youth get the opportunity to talk about our feelings and things such as education and the representation of us the Black youth and how different things affect us. These things tend to be assumed by elders.

When there is no one around to listen to you, naturally you begin to feel a little bit segregated from your community or your 'village'.

Before attending this conference I was aware of the problem concerning Black youth and education but was not fully aware of how much people are working together to help improve our potential.

In some ways the fact that Diane Abbott MP was there, showed that there are people around that genuinely care and want to help make a difference.

Perhaps knowing how the youth feel on the topic will help broaden understanding and find an answer to this problem.

**Iscllyn Richards age 17**

P E R S P E C T I V E

# The meeting

## The Meeting Programme

### Ealing Parents and the Black Child Education Meeting for African-Caribbean Parents

#### Programme

#### 6.30pm **Doors open and refreshments**

- \* Welcome - Cllr. Karen Hunte
- \* Pupils' stories – Diarra Green, Monique McCurdy, Marie Desai
- \* Diane Abbott MP
- \* Discussion with Diane Abbott
- \* Group discussions

#### 8.45pm **Break and Refreshments**

- \* Plenary – Claire Villaruel
- \* feedback from young people – Diarra Greene
- \* the way forward
- \* Closing remarks – Cllr Karen Hunte

#### 10.00pm **Depart**

#### **Young People's Activities**

Descendants organisation will be opening their doors for young people to share their views on Education. The young people will feed back the outcome from this discussion to the meeting, in the plenary session

“There is no question of our children’s ability to achieve, but our children enter the system full of hope and then fail to achieve.”

Diane Abbott, MP

## Proceedings

The meeting took place at Priory Community Centre, and we are grateful to Joe Anastacio, the manager, and the centre staff for their work, foresight and support for the event.

- \* Meeting packs: information packs were prepared for parents to take away at the end of the meeting. They included a reference and information booklet produced for the event on education issues, what parents could do and how parents could get further information on any of the topics.

The packs were distributed to participants on registration. They were presented in special bags provided by Tyme Euro-Caribbean Restaurant in West Ealing, and this sponsorship and partnership by a local business was much appreciated.

- \* A crèche was organised by Priory Community Centre to encourage parents of young children to attend. This was well attended and very successful.
- \* The meeting opened in the big hall at Priory Community Centre with a welcome by Cllr Karen Hunte.
- \* The first speakers were three young achievers: Diarra Greene, Monique Mc Curdy and Marie Desai. This set the context of high achievement for the meeting.
- \* Diane Abbott spoke and took questions from the participants and facilitated discussion. She received tremendous applause, and at one point a standing ovation. A summary of this session is given below.
- \* The meeting broke into groups to make recommendations on the following three questions :
  - One thing parents could do to improve the achievement of African-Caribbean children and young people

- One thing schools could do to improve the achievement of African-Caribbean children and young people
- Where do we go from here?

- \* Workshops for children and young people were facilitated by the Descendants organisation staff and young people, and were so oversubscribed that additional volunteers had to be brought in to help. They discussed the same three questions, and also made recommendations on a fourth:

- One thing young people could do to improve the achievement of African-Caribbean children and young people

- \* The workshops each had a facilitator from the community and one from Ealing Council. Participants found the discussion so valuable that all workshops asked for additional time, preferring to shorten the planned break.
- \* Diane Abbott visited all the workshops and contributed to discussion. This was very much appreciated by participants.
- \* During the break refreshments were provided by Wadada Caribbean caterers from West Ealing. Not only did Wadada provide the food, but as members of the Ealing community they joined in the meeting as participants: another aspect of the partnerships which underpinned the meeting
- \* The final session was chaired by Cllr Karen Hunte and Claire Villaruel, from African-Caribbean Initiative and Parents' Education Network. The recommendations from the workshops were shared and discussed. Before departing, Claire Villaruel led the meeting in honouring the elders of the local community. They included Eric and Jessica Huntley, Mollie Hunte, Willis Wilkie, Keith Waithe and many others.

### **Diane Abbott at the meeting**

When Diane Abbott MP arrived she was keen to be updated about Ealing community organisations and any local issues about the education of African-Caribbean students. She was briefed by Cllr Karen Hunte, Berenice Miles, education officer and education consultant Sandra Richards.

Her address to the meeting referred to relevant policy, legislation and research statistics. She made a number of significant comments about the issues affecting African-Caribbean students nationally, including the extent to which African-Caribbean students are affected by exclusions and GCSE grades. In addition, Ms. Abbott visited every workshop, listening and making appropriate contributions. Parents, educators, facilitators and students were very encouraged by her presence. She contributed to several discussions developing in the workshops, drawing on her experience as a parent and as an active Member of Parliament.

During the break for refreshments she maintained a very high level of interest, mingling with attendees, asking and answering questions.

At the end of her contribution on the platform, Ms. Abbott pledged her ongoing support. She agreed that the event was a huge success and expressed an interest in being kept informed of outcomes and any future developments.

Two young members of Descendants, Ousman Samega-Jannah(11) and Rebecca Cofi (9) made a presentation to Ms Abbott on behalf of the steering group, and in gratitude for inspiring the meeting. Ms Abbott was presented with two pots designed and made by Ealing artists at Heritage Ceramics, Southall. The potter was Odion Ogogo, from Nigeria, and the pots had been decorated by Kojo Darko, from Ghana. The shape of the pots was inspired by the shape of the calabash, and the decoration was in simple geometric patterns representing the stars.

Ms. Abbot's participation throughout the meeting demonstrated genuine concern about educational achievement and exclusions of African-Caribbean pupils, which she described as "a silent catastrophe".

### **Diane Abbott's message**

In her address to the meeting, Ms Abbott said:

I am here this evening to support you as parents in supporting your Black children.

The struggle to improve the education situation is not a new struggle. Since the 1960s the education system has failed Black students. We are in the third generation of African-Caribbean children this system has failed.

The Swan report in the 80's had a specific focus on Black children, and since then a series of Ofsted reports have made the figures clear. I started to look at this in the 90's, and what has focused me is that I have come to the point where I have to say 'enough is enough.'

At age five when they enter school, Black children are doing well. There is then a significant drop-off in subsequent Key Stages, particularly for Black boys. Currently, in Hackney, my own constituency, the figures of boys achieving 5 A – Cs in GCSE are White boys: 42%, and African-Caribbean boys: 9%. The research shows a similar situation in London and across the country. Furthermore the Black Caribbean group is the only ethnic group that does not catch up with the average attainment; even pupils who enter school not speaking any English are narrowing the attainment gap and in some cases doing better than other groups.

Not that educationalists analysing the situation have not looked at solutions. Not that Black people have not looked at their own solutions. From the early days African-Caribbean parents looked to deal with the situation themselves. They set up supplementary schools, which empowered parents.

The Government, schools and Black parents all have a role to play in making progress.

## **A workshop facilitator's feedback**

### **Length of time**

Considering the topic under discussion, the group did well to keep to time! Participants were prepared to forego their comfort break in favour of winding up the discussion. On the whole, the group remained focused on the questions posed, however, the five minutes allocated for group work was not adequate (the time limitation was understandable given the tight schedule).

### **Responses from group**

The group came to the workshops with a very positive attitude. This could have been because such meetings often attract parents and carers who are already actively engaged in the education of their children. It would be good if part of the focus of any group that comes out of this initiative is to identify and work with young parents and single parents who are struggling to do the best for their children.

### **Organisation**

The organisation of the event was impressive: thanks to excellent forward planning, the whole evening ran to time. There were issues of time, for example during the workshops that, by the very nature of the subject matter, required more time than could be allocated. However, organisers came round to inform us that the break would be curtailed so that more time could be spent in discussion.

The evening ended more or less on time and I appreciated the fact that the organisers respected the delegates' time sufficiently to stick to the 10 o'clock end. I have attended too many functions where organisers felt that it was ok to run over by an hour or three. It leaves a bad taste in my mouth and causes me to be reluctant to attend such functions in future.

### **Thoughts on the event**

The evening was necessary and valuable, although one comment that I heard was that we didn't hear anything we didn't already know. Maybe the point was not to raise any

new issues. However, after reflecting on the issues raised, I couldn't help feeling that it is crucial is that we give equal focus to our role as parents – our children's first teachers. It is my view that by trusting our children's teachers to do all they need to do to equip our children for the world outside we are making a major mistake. If we are not laying solid educational foundations pre-school then we cannot, in all honesty, point the finger at the teachers. We know that our children may experience racism at school therefore what we should be doing is equipping them ourselves so that when things start to go wrong, we can safely say it's nothing to do with our children's reading, writing or numeracy skills, because we've sorted that. And we can also say it's not our children's behaviour and conduct in school, because we have already sorted that, too.

The best way to recognise discrimination is to eliminate those common smoke screens that teachers hide behind and use as legitimate reasons to exclude our babies. And this requires us to do some serious soul searching. Are we teaching our children how to conduct themselves in public places? Are we doing work with our children at home? Are we sending them to private tutors or supplementary schools? Are we conducting ourselves in a way that inspires our children, or do we think we deserve to sit in front of the tv every night? Do we think that just because we've got a nice car and a nice house and a 'safe' job, we've made it in British society?

Maybe we need to adopt an attitude to our children's future that is less like the middle-class mediocre one we see around us and more like the upper-class 'take no prisoners' attitude that does not care to sit on its laurels? We have a lot of thinking to do about the role that we play in our children's underachievement and I would encourage any group that comes out of this initiative to pay as much attention to working with parents and children as it does to working in the education system.

PERSPECTIVE



### **The government role**

The government wants to make progress on this issue. There is gradual improvement in the way it is working, for example the government is now collecting statistics. There is a need for more direct financial support to schools and community organisations and teachers should be paid more. The government should insist on eliminating the achievement gap. This should be a positive government goal – in the same way as the literacy and numeracy strategies direct schools to raise attainment in those areas. All this talk about raising levels of achievement is worthless unless they begin to talk about raising levels of achievement for Black children.

### **The schools' and local education authorities' roles**

Ms Abbott went on to describe the schools' and local education authorities' roles. She said that schools and local education authorities should:

- \* recruit a teaching workforce and cohort of headteachers that looks like London
- \* recruit teachers from the Caribbean
- \* support the professional development of teaching assistants
- \* set more rigorous targets for schools, especially in respect of exclusions. Black boys are set on a path of social exclusion
- \* appoint Black people to senior positions in the local education authorities
- \* appoint Black teachers to key positions, including as headteachers
- \* support Black teachers and headteachers.
- \* work more closely with community education providers, such as supplementary schools
- \* make it clear that teachers of all ethnic backgrounds need to own the issue.

## The parents' role

Ms Abbott said:

As Black people – parents, grandparents, aunts, cousins, friends - we need to focus on our children early on. We need to learn, and participate in parent, teacher and friends associations or become school governors for example. We need to take key supportive roles in school. We need to engage from day one. Don't leave it too late! We need to support community activities by building our community institutions. We need to give children a sense of their culture so that they have a strong sense of themselves – ethnic groups that are strongly anchored in their history and culture tend to achieve. Make an investment of time early on – I cannot stress this enough.

Ms Abbott went on to express concern at the high levels of exclusions of African-Caribbean boys from school, and said that they were being set up for a life of social exclusion. She also talked about the curriculum and said Black parents were not interested in their children signing up for steel bands or learning how to make samosas: they wanted their children to access the mainstream curriculum.

Ms Abbott said:

"I come from a people, a community that believes that when it comes to your children you have to do everything in your power to get the best for your child, whatever price you have to pay. That's how I was brought up. That's how my parents brought me up."

She went on:

"We are here this evening, not to reinvent the wheel. We are here to support our people and to move the issue forward.

There is nothing, nothing more precious than the future of our children.

Our children enter the system with all intelligences, all aspirations, all the hope. We can all point to the children who are succeeding, but there are many more – with limitless intelligence - who are not. We are here not just for our individual children, but for a whole generation of Black children.

There is a generation of children to save. We need to work at grass roots level to help our children achieve their dreams."

After Ms Abbott's speech she led a question, answer and discussion session.

## PERSPECTIVE

### Whose job is it really anyway?

It was reassuring to meet people who can relate and empathise with recurring problems at school. What was displayed at the meeting was parents wanting to support their children to find them a good school and support them through it. However, gaps within the system made it difficult for them. Therefore, having a team that can make changes within the system will be supportive. It seems that the responsibility is always linked to parents, but whose job is it really anyway?

**Greg George, parent, carer in special needs and community campaigner**

## Question, answer and discussion session

**Q** We need to challenge the low expectations of white teachers for our children.

**A** Yes, we do. Don't take teachers' words at face value. Discuss your child's progress and your own expectations with the teachers.

**Q** Be careful when schools claim that they have an Equal Opportunities Policy. Sometimes it is only on paper and means nothing.

In my case I only found out at the last minute that my child was being entered for a lower grade GCSE exam paper, and he would not have been able to achieve an 'A' grade. I had to fight the school for the upgraded paper to be given. However the child was set up to fail because he had not had the appropriate teaching for the higher paper.

**A** It is a common experience of Black parents to be told that the child is doing well but then the child is later denied opportunity. Do question the teacher carefully, and be firm, but on the other hand don't get too confrontational with school, because this does not help.

**Q** I have read that Ealing local education authority was one of the most improved boroughs. If so, how did African-Caribbean children do?

**A** I can't answer that specific question, however schools need to be challenged on data. They do have it, but they are reluctant to give it out. There is information in your parents' pack for this meeting.

**Q** (from Professor Gus John, former Director Hackney local education authority, Director Communities Empowerment Network, Professor University of Strathclyde) Congratulations to Diane Abbott for the annual conferences on The London Schools and the Black Child. There is a challenge: there are African children who excel over others - what makes the difference? I am interviewing undergraduates from state schools and they experience pressure from peers to deviate from academic achievement. Our children are calling our children 'geeks', 'coconut' because they are focused on their learning. This is a serious problem.

**A** Our culture needs to be reflected in the Gifted and Talented programmes. Black boys give up on education because education has given up on them. There is no question of our children's ability to achieve, but our children enter the system full of hope and then fail to achieve.

Closing the question and answer session, Diane Abbott said that she hoped practical ways of helping would come out of the smaller group work.

### **Challenging negative teacher expectations of our children's abilities by any formal means necessary.**

The education meeting with Diane Abbott and other colleagues was informative, engaging and proactive. Apart from providing a platform for minister Abbott to share with us her educational concerns regarding our Black children in the British schooling system, the event enabled various African-Caribbean parents and families the chance to address key educational issues through a workshop approach. This approach facilitated intimate discussions in smaller groups, and our contributions were summarised and feedback to the whole gathering for future (re)address and action.

During the first plenary session, I was fortunate enough to be permitted to share briefly with the audience some specific concerns around one of my son's recent experience of negative teacher expectation at his former secondary school in Ealing. My son had coursework downgraded for being 'too brilliant for his ability (given that he has dyslexia and dyspraxia), and was entered for a lower tier GCSE seen examination paper in Media Studies, despite achieving 74% in the Mocks. Following my intervention, and with the support of the Special Needs department at the school and an outside agency, he was eventually permitted to revise for the higher paper two days before the exam, bearing in mind his peers had three weeks preparation time. He still gained a 'C' grade and, subsequently, an apology from the Headteacher.

My general message was that, as parents and guardians, we should formally challenge any negative expectations of the school to ensure that our children have their coursework fairly and accurately assessed; and that they are entered into examinations truly appropriate to their ability.

**By Akuba (Grace) Quansah, parent, educationalist and children's campaigner.**

P E R S P E C T I V E

## **Themed overview of the workshop discussions**

Although the formal recommendations from the workshops are given in this report, the discussion in the groups was wide ranging. Much of it has been captured in the paragraphs below.

## **Discussion affecting parents**

### **Giving time and support to children**

Participants saw this as the most important area to address. For this reason we have included a very full list of suggestions made in the workshops:

### **Parents' messages to parents are that:**

- \* we talk WITH our children rather than talk TO them, and ensure that we encourage them
- \* we offer our children appropriate stimuli and spend time with them – and know what topics our children are doing in school
- \* we believe it is fundamental to support our children in their Instill high self-esteem
- \* each day we could
  - give at least ten minutes quality time
  - to our children
  - make sure their homework is done
  - ask 'how was your day?'
- \* we give children something to do: reading, maths etc. AND MAKE IT FUN!!!!
- \* we monitor more carefully what our children watch and listen to
- \* we empower their children – give them respect for themselves and others
- \* we give our children a clear understanding of our history of ourselves
- \* we encourage children to study – including through a Black parents' group coming together.

### **Understanding the education system**

There was much discussion about parents' need to inform themselves. Participants gave the following advice to parents:

- \* acquaint yourself with the education system. Seek Information on the internet, if you have access to it
- \* be assertive at school. Don't be intimidated by jargon. Clarify terms by asking the teachers or by doing your own research

- \* find out about the curriculum: what are the levels, Key Stages etc.? Use the internet, use libraries
- \* seek information – how are Black children doing in the borough?
- \* know who to contact in the local education authority
- \* find out about the school's assessment policy
- \* find out about the study centres – how do they affect our children?

### **Active participation in school**

One of the main themes of the meeting was that parents should become actively involved in their children's school. Participants gave the following advice to parents:

- \* go to parents' evening prepared. Make a list of questions you want to ask
- \* visit the school when you need to. Don't wait for the school to ask you to come
- \* be more actively involved in your children's school. Have more of a presence
- \* don't always leave it to one parent. Both parents involve yourselves with the school.

### **Becoming a school governor**

There was a general feeling that school governing bodies were not representative, and that it was important for Black parents to put themselves forward as school governors. The general advice to participants was: put yourself forward for governor. It is important for your children, but also it can be very rewarding for you.

Worryingly, several Black participants who were or had been school governors shared their experience of feeling isolated and excluded as governors. Some had given up, but others had persevered, had been able to make a positive contribution and felt that it was a worthwhile experience. Below is a synthesis of some of these comments, and the box gives the positive experience and messages of two school governors.

It is useful to have these two aspects of the experience of being a Black school governor, so that school governing bodies can be sensitive to how some members might be feeling.

### **Synthesis of concerns from some Black School Governors**

- \* "I am the only Black governor and I still have a feeling of isolation. At first nobody talked to me. They all knew each other and there were cliques."
- \* "As a new governor I was sometimes not sure of what was being discussed in meetings and other governors were not willing to explain."
- \* "I could not get the ear of the meeting and ended up having to discuss issues privately with Head teacher, who was very supportive and helpful."
- \* "After two years I still feel excluded."
- \* "It is difficult to raise issues about Black pupils and get the ethnic monitoring information."

### **Being a school governor can be a rewarding experience**

Experience and messages from two Black School Governors

"Black School governors can and do play a very vital and active role in school. If you have a particular interest or skill, offer to share this with the school. Our children benefit from having black governors, so do volunteer."

Our children must have our support within the school on a continuous basis. Being a school governor can be a rewarding experience.

Do not feel intimidated. Ask about becoming a school governor"

"I can only stress the importance of more Black parents taking up the school governor role. I really do enjoy working with Acton High School and my experience so far has been a positive and invaluable one."

### **Joining support groups**

Participants were pleased to have information on the many support groups in Ealing for Black children and young people and their parents. They valued the notion of parents giving support to other parents, and felt it was important to identify support groups and join them.

### **Setting up a new education organisation**

The intention to set up a new organisation in Ealing has been covered in the formal recommendations. However an additional theme coming from the workshops was that the new organisation should be part of a future national network for parents of Black children.

### **The value of talking in a forum with other Black people**

Time and again throughout the day phrases such as 'our children', 'our people', 'our culture', 'people with the same experiences', 'like-minded people' were used. In the evaluations there were many comments about how positive people felt the experience of talking together with other Black people had been. People felt supported and shared a desire to support other parents. There were many requests for more opportunities for Black parents to talk together about education issues.

### **Examples of comments on the value of talking in a forum with other Black people**

- \* The opportunity to participate in meeting with like-minded people
- \* The opportunity to discuss issues and come to a common consensus
- \* The fact that we can express our views easily
- \* I have never had such an overwhelming positive experience of being with so many professional successful black people all in one place. This in itself is an extremely powerful feeling. If I felt like this as an adult I can only imagine that this must be so inspiring for the black children who were present today.
- \* I am not alone

### **Need for directory of local Black organisations**

Participants recognised the importance of information about Black organisations. This included parents' and children's support organisations (described above,) but also Black businesses which might work in partnership and provide mentors and role models, resources such as Black bookshops, artists and so on.

The ideal would be local directories of Black organisations, reviewed annually and distributed at local vantage points, easily accessible – but participants acknowledged that they needed to be more proactive.

### **Need to listen to children and young people**

#### **Value of parents and their children attending the event and discussing issues together**

There was considerable appreciation of the input from the children and young people. People recommended parents to listen to their children more, and asked for more input from children and young people at future events.

The fact that parents and children attended the same meeting was felt to be important and positive.

### **Inspiring each other to take on the challenges: perspective of the young people's workshops facilitator**

More than 80 children and young people attended the crèche and young people's workshops. About 10 children attended the crèche for under 7's run by Priory playgroup, over 30 took part in a workshop for children aged 8 – 11 and over 40 took part in a workshop for young people aged 12 and over. The workshops were led by Descendants staff, and run by men and women who were volunteers of Descendants, and other volunteers who came to help. Four young people from Descendants also helped to lead the sessions. They followed the themes of the adult workshops.

The discussion was lively and the young people threw up some very interesting questions. They had their own ideas; they identified their own strengths and weaknesses. One young person began her contribution by stating " I realise that it is "Our" responsibility to do the work, but our parents must make sure that they encourage us to do our homework". Other points were about teachers, "not understanding them" or being unable to communicate the curriculum effectively because English was not their first language, or being indifferent to their culture and stereotyping them based on preconceived ideas. Another problem was that a constant stream of supply teachers disrupted their learning.

As coordinator of the young people's section of the conference, I felt it was extremely important for the young people to have their say, and speak about their education from their point of view. They also used the opportunity to offer support to other young people who were experiencing crisis in their education. In my opinion they were inspiring each other to take on the challenges of their own education and putting forward solutions for the way forward.

I felt privileged to have worked with so many young people on such an important issue, in an environment where they felt able to talk freely and openly about their experiences, share their ideas, and look for answers for their future needs in the education system.

**Margaret Noel**  
**Coordinator Descendants youth group**

# “It takes a village to raise a child”

African saying, quoted by participant, in feedback

## Discussion affecting schools

### What could schools do?

Participants were very concerned about achievement and exclusions of African-Caribbean pupils. On the whole they did not feel that they had effective communication with the school, and did not feel included. On the other hand, they had a strong desire to collaborate and work with schools, and hoped that this would improve as a result of the meeting.

### Relationships

Relationships between the school and the child was a recurring theme. Parents asked:

- \* “Are teachers afraid of educating our children?”

There was a feeling that success or failure for a child was affected by:

- \* the teacher ‘connecting’ with the child

Participants were aware that this impacted on the high rate of exclusions of African-Caribbean children and young people.

### Listening and talking to parents

Relationships between the school and parents was also a recurring theme. Many parents did not feel listened to or respected. Parents talked about not feeling welcome in school – feeling excluded. Parents hoped that this situation would improve. Their messages were:

- \* schools need to listen to parents. (There was a perception that schools don’t listen to parents)
- \* it would be useful for schools to have an identified person to link with the Black community.

Parents were keen to support their children and the school. They pointed out that they would like to be kept informed of their children’s progress, and not just called in if there was a problem (i.e. too late,) or to attend parent’s meetings. Parents said:

- \* schools should keep in contact with parents on an ongoing basis
- \* we would like schools to share children’s termly targets with parents, also provide information on the ongoing monitoring of children’s progress
- \* there needs to be greater transparency of information, for example of individual files and school policies
- \* this greater sharing of information would encourage collaborative approaches to pupil achievement, and raised expectations.

### Monitoring

Many parents had not been aware of the full ethnic monitoring that takes place currently in school. They commended it, and wished that the results were always communicated to parents. They also saw the value of it to monitor and inform school practice. They thought:

- \* schools should monitor classroom practice in relation to African-Caribbean pupils
- \* there should be ethnic monitoring of practice in relation to attainment
- \* monitoring of children’s achievement in school should be publicly available and ethnic monitoring looked at by an independent body.

## **Raising expectations and aspirations**

The theme of the meeting was Black achievement, and participants stressed the need to raise teacher expectations of African-Caribbean pupils and to raise the pupils' aspirations. The messages from parents were:

### **Schools could improve the achievement of African-Caribbean pupils by**

- \* teachers raising their expectations of African-Caribbean children
- \* teachers becoming more aware of the cultural needs of African-Caribbean children
- \* recognising and responding to the need to improve examination rates for African-Caribbean pupils
- \* setting up an ongoing programme of Black business people being invited into schools to share their experiences and expertise at key points in students' school careers, to act as mentors and to sell achievement
- \* ensuring Black pupils have a role model – someone who has made it in society. This could be achieved by schools organising Black mentors. It would include addressing the need for Black men in the primary classroom. Schools could also contact and make use of the '100 Black Men of London' organisation.

## **Equality of treatment**

There was a perception that Black children were not respected by teachers, nor treated fairly. Again, this perception was echoed by young people in their workshops. Parents said schools could improve equality by ensuring:

- \* that respect is mutual that there is a high level of expectations
- \* that staff are more positive in their attitudes to Black children
- \* that the workforce is more representative, with Black teachers at all levels
- \* that professionals challenge inappropriate behaviour from other workers
- \* that teachers praise African-Caribbean children
- \* that teachers treat people fairly (with equality.)

## **Exclusions of African-Caribbean pupils**

There was concern and anger about the numbers of African-Caribbean pupils, especially boys, being excluded from school. Parents of excluded children felt that the school had not listened to them or to their children, and there were strong feelings of frustration and injustice. Participants acknowledged that there were some schools with higher levels of Black exclusions than others. Some parents felt they had not been fully informed about the alternative provision made for pupils at the study centres (pupil referral units) and expressed their concern.

### **GCSE setting and tiering**

Parents were concerned that their children had been denied opportunities without the school informing parents of the implication of the teaching groups in which their children were placed. For example, the practice called 'tiering' applies in GCSE mathematics. There are two exams with partially different syllabuses. In one of the exams the highest grade a student can reach is 'B', so students taking it are denied the opportunity of an 'A' or an A\* grade. A student taught to this syllabus would not be able to succeed in the higher tier exam, even if she or he is very able, because the syllabus content and the examination papers themselves are different.

Of course most people are better at some curriculum areas than others, and the intention of providing different teaching content was to give pupils the best opportunity of success in their weaker subjects. The problem arises when able pupils are placed in the lower groups, and parents are not fully informed.

### **Appropriate curriculum content**

Participants felt that the curriculum did not reflect the culture of Black pupils in school, and that this was a key factor in motivating and including African-Caribbean children, and raising achievement. They made the following comments:

- \* in general, the culture within schools is that African-Caribbean history is omitted. It needs to be incorporated
- \* the curriculum should be relevant to the child, and therefore needs to incorporate the cultures, history, contributions and achievements of the wider society
- \* there needs to be monitoring of practice in relation to incorporating African and African-Caribbean culture and history into the mainstream
- \* this needs to be genuine – not a tokenistic Black History Month
- \* family values, roles and responsibilities need to be taught in PSHE
- \* after school clubs are valuable, and should be available and promoted.

### **Funding for ethnic minority education initiatives**

Participants recognised that the government was putting funding into schools to raise ethnic minority achievement, and that some of this money was earmarked for African-Caribbean pupils. There was concern that this money was not always spent to improve education for the community for whom it was targeted, and that money allocated for African-Caribbean pupils was being spent on other communities. There was also concern that in spite of additional government funding to improve African-Caribbean achievement in school, African-Caribbean pupils still had lower achievement than other communities.

### **Black teachers**

Participants deplored the fact that there were very few African-Caribbean teachers in schools. They felt that having teachers who understood and shared their background would help achievement of African-Caribbean pupils. This point was echoed by the young people in their workshops. Parents said that they would like to see:

- \* an increase in Black teachers, representative of Black African-Caribbean descent pupils
- \* targeted recruitment and retention of Black teachers
- \* Black teachers taking a more active part in schools
- \* ethnic monitoring of teachers

### **General comments**

#### **Three generations of African-Caribbean children**

Diane Abbott said “We are in the third generation of children this system has failed.” Participants expressed concern that the parents and even the grandparents of the children and young people in schools now had themselves been failed by the system, and had not had the educational opportunities they deserved.

There was discussion about ways to redress the balance, especially for the many young black men who had missed opportunities. Examples of initiatives, such as a grant in the US to enable Black men to continue in education were described.

#### **Parents as taxpayers and citizens**

Participants affirmed their rights as taxpayers and council tax payers to have an appropriate education service for their community. They felt that the agenda should be taken forward at a political level, including lobbying Black politicians.

## The views of young people

One of the aspects most valued by participants was the fresh and insightful feedback from the young people's workshops. We have put it all together below so that readers can appreciate its powerful impact.

### What can parents do to improve achievement of African-Caribbean children and young people

#### We would like parents to:

- \* help us revise
- \* try to work harder to get children back in school
- \* ensure we do homework and tasks set, even though we're responsible
- \* give us some space to do our work.

### What can schools do to improve achievement of African-Caribbean children and young people?

#### We would like schools to:

- \* make sure that we are treated fairly in school, instead of constantly underestimating us
- \* let us be taught by qualified teachers
- \* make sure we have consistent teaching
- \* have more teachers from our own community, who know us and understand us
- \* help us with booster lessons
- \* have a more 'hands-on' approach to lessons
- \* help us to be more focused
- \* have extra curriculum lessons
- \* draw a clear line between break and lessons
- \* give students role models to look up to
- \* give more praise.

### What can young people do to improve achievement of African-Caribbean children and young people?

#### We can:

- \* work harder and aim higher
- \* take life seriously
- \* make sure we achieve the best results, over achievement, we go to school to learn, we give no reason to exclude
- \* we need to recognise the negative images
- \* take the situation of bad results, underachievement and exclusions and turn them around into positives.

#### Where do we go from here?

#### We would like:

- \* an increase in Black teachers
- \* to improve examination rates
- \* pupils to make efforts to attend lessons
- \* all of us to work harder as a community
- \* all of us to aim higher.



## The feedback session

The last session of the meeting was a plenary and feedback from the workshops. People shared the recommendations from each of the workshops, and there was the opportunity to comment and ask questions.

The conference recognised that young people have a valuable contribution to make in their own education achievement.

The recommendations from the plenary are included in the formal recommendations above. However it is worth giving the last word to the children's and young people's workshop.

Feedback from the children's and young people's workshop, reported by Diarra Greene, was:

- \* to move on in life, for whatever you want to be, you need education
- \* even though some children like school and have favourite subjects, and other children dislike school, the concept of needing education to prepare for life was clear in the children's focus group.

## Some of the issues raised have implications for government and for initial teacher training

- \* The government should set aside specific funding for initiatives to empower parents to become more active in their children's school life.
- \* Initial teacher training and continuous professional development should specifically address strategies to enable them to meet the needs of African-Caribbean young people.
- \* The government should introduce compulsory inservice training for all people who work in schools, to specifically address strategies to enable them to meet the needs of African-Caribbean young people.
- \* The government should implement initiatives for the training, recruitment and retention of teachers of African-Caribbean heritage at all levels.
- \* The government should implement a rigorous monitoring system to ensure that schools spend their funding for the purpose intended. Schools should be accountable for their use of funding from government initiatives to address inequalities in the education of African-Caribbean pupils. These include the Ethnic Minorities Achievement Grant, Excellence in Cities, Excellence Challenge and other funding initiatives. Action should be taken if the outcomes for African-Caribbean pupils do not improve, or where the funding has been used by the schools for other purposes.
- \* Ethnically monitored information from schools should be publicly available, in line with the requirements and spirit of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The government already requires schools to monitor attainment and exclusions by ethnicity and gender, so this information is available.
- \* National curriculum guidance and materials should be very explicit in respect of a culturally inclusive approach, including incorporating African and African-Caribbean perspectives throughout all curriculum subjects and the resources to support them. Ofsted inspectors should monitor the extent to which schools implement the culturally inclusive curriculum.

## Closing remarks from Cllr Karen Hunte

Karen Hunte told the meeting:

You don't need qualifications to be a councillor, a school governor, prison governor.

Get involved! Protect your ambition!

People will try to discourage you, but do not let them. There is no reason why you cannot achieve your ambitions. Refuse to be discouraged. Protect your ambition. Do not let anyone take it from you or tell you why you cannot have it. Do not listen to reasons why you should not be ambitious, or let people or things distract you from your ambitions. Be ambitious!

"I enjoyed the chance to express myself in an open and friendly forum, not very often do youth get the opportunity to talk about our feelings and things such as education and the representation of us the Black youth and how different things affect us. These things tend to be assumed by elders."

Isceelyn Richards, Age 17



“Instead of being told how to deal with these problems we were asked how we would deal with these problems..... Perhaps knowing how the youth feel on the topic will help **broaden understanding and find an answer to this problem.**”

Isceelyn Richards, Age 17



# Participants' evaluation of the meeting

## Who attended?

### Information from the monitoring sheet filled in by participants

	<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Percentage of those who responded</b>
Black or Black British	Caribbean	66
	African	16
Mixed Background	White/Black Caribbean	3
	White/Black African	3
	Any other mixed background	3
White	British	3
	Any other white background	8
	<b>Gender</b>	
	Female	62
	Male	38
	<b>Age of adults attending</b>	
Age profile	25-34	16
	35-44	30
	45-54	41
	55+	11
	<b>Role</b>	
	<b>(people could identify themselves in more than one relevant category)</b>	
Role	Parent/grandparent/carer	66
	Grandparent	4
	Student	15
	Education worker	19
	Community organisation	38
	Specific interest in the issue other	43 11

## What did they say about the meeting?

### Information from the evaluation sheets filled in by participants

(nb. not everybody filled in all the questions)

Question	Response			
	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
Overall I found the meeting	21	19	2	0
I felt the opportunity to contribute my views was	17	19	4	1
I felt the feedback from the workshops captured our views accurately	18	13	5	1
The speakers were	22	17	2	0
The workshop I attended was	11	22	2	0
The parents' information pack was	17	22	2	0
The organisation was	21	15	2	0

### As a result of this meeting I go away feeling.....



## What I liked best was .....

- \* that it even occurred in the first place
- \* the idea
- \* the opportunity to contribute and look at forward thinking plans
- \* the amount of information in that short period
- \* the opportunity to participate in meeting with like-minded people
- \* the opportunity to discuss issues and come to a common consensus
- \* that we want more Black teachers into schools and Black parents to work together
- \* the fact that we can express our views easily
- \* the fact that parents came and participated
- \* Diane Abbott's speech and Gus John's delivery
- \* the sharing of views and I hope that we can follow up with a Black parents' coalition
- \* everything
- \* feedback from the children themselves the workshops
- \* I felt that the whole thing was of a very high standard. The only negative aspect was the time was too short for the topics discussed. The views were not given enough time
- \* the interaction between parents, teachers etc. in workshops. Listening to the ideas, brainstorming and seeing how to improve
- \* the opportunity to discuss issues with like-minded people. Ideas for action that it was well organised and interesting
- \* that the speakers were informative and energised. A productive meeting
- \* the good attendance
- \* Ms Diane Abbott's speech and the whole set up
- \* that we are trying to improve our children's education and can come together to express our views
- \* people sharing experiences and giving ideas as a way forward
- \* the workshops were very good and having peoples' views. The green booklet gave some information I was looking for
- \* the speakers who gave me inspiration to keep chipping away at inequality
- \* successful people pressuring
- \* I am very satisfied
- \* seeing parents and children attending this meeting
- \* was the fact that there was not an ounce of hostility in a hall full of both African and Caribbean black people.
- \* I have never had such an overwhelming positive experience of being with so many professional successful black people all in one place. This in itself is an extremely powerful feeling. If I felt like this as an adult I can only imagine that this must be so inspiring for the Black children who were present today.
- \* another thing I feel compelled to comment about is the wonderful art exhibit that embraced me as I walked in the entrance of the hall. Fantastic! This is an apt word to also describe the general organisation and time management, which Black events that I have attended in the past seem to lack.

### Proud phone call to Jamaica

"As a member of the steering group for the Diane Abbott meeting held on 27th February 2004, due to prior commitments, I was away in Jamaica and unable to attend the meeting.

In my absence my wife and children attended the meeting and when they returned home, I received a surprise phone call from my son, Donovan, to say that not only was the meeting a real challenge to him but that he was extremely proud to know that his father was a part of the steering group."

**Rev. Lloyd Crossfield**

## Next time we could .....

- \* follow up on last one's progress. How far did we get?
- \* look at other issues arising from previous meeting
- \* make it a more regular occurrence
- \* spend more time in groups sharing ideas etc. and perhaps the way groups feed back to meeting could be improved on
- \* achieve more on how to reach one another agree on constituents of a Black parents' coalition
- \* have more time for speakers
- \* have more time for questions from the floor, especially after workshops
- \* continue to have regular workshops regularly throughout the year
- \* have opportunities to network – immediate connections
- \* be more focused about practical solutions
- \* we could hear of some improvement
- \* have role model speakers
- \* deal more in depth with the issues affecting our children. Let our children speak
- \* hear how did they (successful people who pressured) do it
- \* have more time for discussions
- \* have more speakers from Education section
- \* consider organising similar events on a Saturday, as it is extremely difficult to stay for the full duration of the meeting if you do not drive and have a young child/children. It is because of this reason that I will be unable to attend on 12/5/04. I am extremely disappointed.

## A post impression of the meeting

Ealing parents and the Black Child – I liked the title of the meeting, because it acknowledged that some parents of Black children are white.

The evening was well organised and efficiently delivered – well thought-out, well planned. It was encouraging to see so many young Black men and women there, including youngsters participating and actively involved. This augurs well for the future.

The fact that such a prominent part was played by officers of the local education service, a local councillor as well as an MP was laudable and indicates that the serious nature of the Black issues is at long last being heard. This suggests the possibility of some major outcomes for the educational and social provision and performance of Black children in Ealing – a matter highlighted and tackled over 40 years both in Ealing as well as in other areas where Black communities have settled in England.

It remains now for some serious planning to be done at the highest levels, including the government, local authority, educational authorities and the community for effective structures and the provision to meet the educational social and cultural needs of the Black child, so long overdue. This means proper, ringfenced funding needs to be in place.

**Mollie Hunte, consultant,  
psychologist and educationalist**

P E R S P E C T I V E

## **As a result of today's meeting I will**

.....

- \* put into practice some of the suggestions made, knowing I can't and won't give up endeavour to pass on information to those of the same background / schools / church etc.
- \* take more responsibilities about our kids
- \* I will be teaching my children and having more talks with them about their education
- \* continue to educate my children culturally, spiritually and emotionally. Support and challenge the school wherever I feel the need. Support always!!
- \* talk to more parents about how they could best help their children, by offering support
- \* talk to my parents more about school
- \* be more proactive in outreach to schools to get students into university
- \* network with people I've met here tonight
- \* attend the follow-up
- \* come back again and try to become more active
- \* be more proactive
- \* analyse myself as a parent
- \* speak about the event and inform people about ways they can encourage, support, get involved in education for Black children
- \* get involved more in parents' groups. Take an active part in the lobby group re the way forward
- \* I think the young generation will listen
- \* be trying to push my child to improve in education
- \* be more motivated to work with parents to empower them to help their children achieve their ambition through reducing the children's constraints they face in schools
- \* be able to contact organisations and groups as necessary
- \* now I have some more information I can go on and do what I need to
- \* proactively move forward to my goal to break down the barriers
- \* feedback into my next full governing meeting and the EMAG officer at school
- \* get more involved
- \* like to attend such meetings in future
- \* be more involved in my child's education
- \* feel compelled to inform others about events such as this so that they too - like myself, can solidify their own perception of black children's current experience of the educational system on reflection of their own experiences as well as developing an understanding of encouraging black children to perceived knowledge and education as a positive attainment.

## **And finally.....the one thing I would like to feed back about tonight is.....**

- \* to say how marvellous it is to see our Diane Abbott took time out from her busy schedule to visit with us. Thank you dear Diane
- \* it was very encouraging to meet with people of the same minds and being enlightened about organisations available to support in educational needs
- \* the meeting raised fundamental questions relevant to the achievement of our children's education but has done very little to effectively provide solutions. There is need to understand the whole environmental factors both at school, home and children themselves that enable children to achieve their education
- \* THERE IS HOPE AND A STRONG possibility of Black children achieving and it can be done through "getting involved"
- \* we need to get the message out to Black people in the community so that ALL our children achieve. It takes a village to raise a child
- \* great that there is a lot of like-minded people who actually want to do something about their Black children's education
- \* attendance was excellent. it was a brilliant opportunity for networking and meeting old friends
- \* I appreciate the good time-keeping
- \* the contribution in discussion groups was good
- \* to ensure parents individually take responsibility to ensure that children get the best out of their education
- \* it was good – thank you to Berenice Miles who support Black education and others, Marcia Gordon, Michelle Samuel and Ivy Scott and Claire Villaruel
- \* it was a very good session. More parents next time but lots came this time, which is good
- \* there was good involvement in improving our children's education and to involve more Black teachers
- \* that I believe we should have more forums/meetings like this in order that we can continue in our fight to equality for our Black African-Caribbean children. The need to bring Black people together is important!
- \* we must start believing in ourselves... we must believe that we can as a people do it ourselves. Black people must trust each other more and be more confident in OUR own abilities. Then we will be able to solve any problems social or otherwise
- \* I am not alone: I will get myself and others involved in positive groups and organisations and see to it my son achieves his full potential
- \* I feel that there was a lot of emphasis during the talks and particularly in 'The parents' information pack' to Black Caribbean children. As I work in the school environment I have seen African children subjected to racism just as much as Caribbean. There are consistent comments in 'The parents' information pack' about Black Caribbean males not achieving and the government measures being taken to improve this. What about the African boys? Are they achieving?

## Ealing Parents and the Black Child Meeting Steering Group

Jenefer Adams	Parent, School Governor
Joe Anastacio	Manager, Priory Community Centre
Kevin Beckles	Learning Mentor, Greenford High School
Lina Bhatt	Ealing Racial Equality Council
Carmel Cameron	Teacher, Acton High School
Wendy Cameron	Coordinator, Ealing Council Race Equality Scheme
Lloyd Crossfield	Pastor, The Church of the Pentecost, Southall,
Bongi Dube	Coordinator Behaviour Improvement Project, Ealing Education Dept
Karen Hunte	Councillor, London Borough of Ealing
Samira John	Consultant, Early Years, Ealing Education Dept
Patricia Joseph	Parents' Education Network; African-Caribbean Initiative
Christine McKay	Unison; School Governor
Berenice Miles	Policy Officer, Equalities, Ealing Education Dept
Margaret Noel	Coordinator, Descendants youth group
Laurie O'Garro	Equalities Consultant
Jan Parnell	Post 16 Advisor, Ealing Education Dept
Sandra Richards	Education Consultant, Reaching Out Development Services
Ivy Scott	Consultant, Ethnic Minority Achievement, Ealing Education Dept
Ian Steill	How High the Moon
Lesley Tucker	Education Department, Bollo Youth Centre
Claire Villaruel	Parents' Education Network; African-Caribbean Initiative
Susan Wright	Ealing Connecting Communities Project

### PERSPECTIVE

We all have to take responsibility for our own success

"We are currently at Brentside High School studying AS Photography and AVCE Art and Design and want to continue our learning at University. We would like to see more teaching staff from different cultural backgrounds to reflect the ethnicity of students in schools as we think this would really help students to feel more comfortable with their teachers and would provide more positive black role models for future generations.

We were really shocked and excited about the number of people, (parents and teachers) who attended the conference to offer their support and show their interest in the education of Black people. There were so many interesting points raised -in particular, we learned that we can't just blame the system for the failure of black students- that we all have to take responsibility for our own success. We, as students, need to aim high, think ahead and work hard to ensure we meet those challenges. Although we were very nervous to talk publicly in front of so many people, we were really pleased to have the opportunity to be heard and really proud to have the opportunity to participate in such an exciting event."

**Monique McCurdy and Marie Desai**  
6th form students, Brentside High School

## **We are grateful to the following people for their help and support with the Ealing Parents and the Black Child meeting**

Trevor and Lynne at Tyme Restaurant, 113 Uxbridge Road W13 9AU tel 020 8840 7222 for their encouragement and support and for giving us the bags for the parents' packs

Roy at Wadada's Café, Grove Glade Shopping Hall (West Ealing Market) tel: 020 8566 3497 for catering for this event

Monique Mc Curdy , and Marie Desai, from Brentside High School and to Diarra Greene for their contribution to the programme

Keith Waithe, for the Kwaanza exhibition and for his support

Alex Joseph, youth representative for African-Caribbean Initiative, for his help on the day

Omari John-Bailey, Kenneth Jones and Angelina Jones, for their help on the day

The Staff and young people at Descendants, especially Stephanie Ifield, Lisa Thomas, Harriett Thomas and Johan Moore for closing their usual activities to run the young peoples' workshop

Bob Anderson, Bernice Bedminster, Eddie Capone, Elayne Carby, Robin Das, Delores Graham, Patricia Joseph, Joy Morning, Linda Prince, Linda Rafferty, Gary Redhead and Michelle Samuel for their practical help and support

Radlyn Booth, Benson Chinenzurah and Marcia Gordon and Zebulon at KWAZEN (Education Resources For The African Child), Unit 20, Grove Glade Shopping Hall, 9-13 The Broadway, West Ealing, W.13. Email: kwazenbooks@ginikanwa.com for facilitating workshops

Cllr John Cudmore and Cllr Sonika Nirwal, Cllr Leonora Thomson, and Dr Caroline Whalley For their expressions of support for this meeting

Helene Lembanaka of Flashback Studio for photography

A very big thanks to the many people from community organisations who helped to make this meeting happen by circulating information about it to the people who matter

## African-Caribbean community education organisations in Ealing

Organisation	Activities for Children and Young People
<p><b>Acton Saturday School</b> 29 Wells House Road London, NW10 6ED Contact: Mr C Carter</p>	<p>Supplementary School for children and young people, Saturday afternoons. Meetings for parents</p>
<p><b>African-Caribbean Initiative/Parents' Education Network</b> C/o 2 Williamson Way Rickmansworth Hertfordshire, WD3 2GL Contact : Ms C Villaruel (activities based at Priory Community Centre)</p>	<p>Advocacy for parents, support for parents, support for schools, study support, supplementary classes, cultural activities, counselling, IT project, music and training workshops for parents, schools and young people.</p>
<p><b>Caribbean Parents Group</b> 93 Ascot Gardens Southall Middx UB1 2SE Contact : Mr Willis Wilkie</p>	<p>Supplementary school, running in Acton Thursday after school and Southall Saturday pm. Support and advocacy for parents. Cultural events and conferences.</p>
<p><b>Descendants</b> Priory Community Centre Acton Lane, Acton W3 8NY Contact: Ms Margaret Noel</p>	<p>A wide range of educational and cultural activities relating to African and Caribbean history, arts and heritage. Sessions at Priory Community Centre on Friday evenings, and holiday projects.</p>
<p><b>Excel Saturday School</b> 88 Bathurst Walk Iver, Bucks SLO 9EG Contact: Mrs Patricia Barzey (activities based at Drayton Manor High School)</p>	<p>Classes to support the school curriculum, including GCSE support.</p>
<p><b>South Acton Skills &amp; Arts Collaborative</b> Community Room Webb Court, Bollo Lane Acton London W3 8QZ Contact: Sydoney Massop</p>	<p>Children's and young people's art activities based around the South Acton Carnival.</p>
<p><b>The Sparc Foundation</b> 27 Blondin Avenue Ealing, London W5 4UL Contact: Ms Cheryl Burke</p>	<p>Educational projects and tuition based around IT, and including web design and research.</p>
<p><b>Stardust Steel Orchestra</b> 16 Hoylake Road East Acton, London, W3 7NP Contact: Rhonda Baptiste</p>	<p>Steel orchestra tuition</p>
<p><b>West Indian Saturday School</b> 51 Camborne Avenue West Ealing , London W13 9QZ</p>	<p>Supplementary classes for children young people</p>
<p><b>Ealing Windrush Consortium</b> 141 Coldershaw Road Ealing W13 9DU Contact : Mr Eric Huntley, Chairman</p>	<p>Network of African-Caribbean organisations. Information sharing and cultural activities.</p>













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