



London Schools
and the Black Child

London Schools and the Black Child Conference 2013

“Black Children & Education: After Gove, where next?”

2013 Post Conference Summary Report



Leading education
and social research
Institute of Education
University of London



INTRODUCTION

Diane Abbott MP



Despite the struggle, and the last minute difficulties we're here for the 10th London Schools and the Black Child conference. What is happening to our children and the future of our children in Britain's education has been a passion of mine ever since I became a Member of Parliament, and we're now looking at my 25th year as a Member of Parliament. We have had this program of conferences and events over the years. Sadly, because of Boris's unwillingness, we've not been able to have the annual conference for a few years. But what we have continued to do (which I know some of you have to come to) is the London Schools and the Black Child award which has showcased and celebrated some of the brilliant black children out there, many of them doing so well academically in adverse circumstances, because I believe that it is important to talk about the challenges, it is important to empower people to meet the challenges, but we also need to celebrate success.

But we know despite the real improvements in educational outcomes for black children since I first

started these conferences, there are some sad disparities. A report by the children's commissioner for England found that an underprivileged black boy is 168 times more likely to be excluded than a rich white girl. And with the increase in university fees there an increase in anecdotal evidence that young black people are being dissuaded from attending university, particularly if they're going away to attend university, because they're faced with not only a high level of debt, but no guarantee of a job after graduation. Academics, particularly on my panel today, continue to highlight these issues while parents and community groups continue to call for action.

So, with the help of black academics, black business and black community relations managers, we've been able to have this event this morning. I'll say a few more words towards the end of the morning.

For a black person to become educated is to become human. Nothing is more astonishing than to hear a black (wo)man express themselves properly, for then they are putting on the white world. Education in this sense is not about the process of learning or teaching or schooling, it is about refutation.

Let me tell you something from nothing about that, because I'm not a researcher, but I know this. In the east end of London, over the years, there were black teachers that had got their heads down and risen to be head teachers. What I've seen in the past decade is more than one black head teacher driven out of their role. The job isn't over when you become a teacher; the job isn't over when you become a head teacher. Our community has to be aware of the need to support our teachers in what are often very difficult circumstances.

Conference Programme

Chair: Diane Abbott MP

9.40 - 11.00 Session One

Black Children and the school system: How do we achieve the best for our children in the new environment?

Professor David Gillborn Director, Centre for Research in Race & Education, University of Birmingham

Rosemary Campbell-Stephens *Director of RMC Consultants and Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Education, University of London*

Professor Heidi Safia Mirza *Professor of Equalities Studies in Education, Institute of Education University of London*

Dr. Keith Davidson *Author of "Education: A pathway to success for black children"*

11.00 - 11.10 Windrush Foundation: Emancipation 1983

Arthur Torrington

11.10 - 11.30 Refreshment break

11.30 - 1.00 Session 2

Young Black people in further and higher education: Will our young people be priced out and how can they access the top institutions?

Aaron Kiely *NUS Black Students Officer*

Zita Holborne *Mary Seacole Campaign*

Ifeanyi Odogwu *LSBC Higher Education prize winner*

Dr. Victoria Showunmi *Institute of Education*

David Wood *London Schools and the Black*

Educational opportunity for all without exclusion

Adam Porte *School Exclusions Project*

Tony Massiah *Tooks Chambers*

Deuan German *Communities Empowerment Network*

This session will end with a free advice surgery held by *Communities Empowerment Network*.

1.00 -1.15 Closing remarks

Professor David Gillborn

Director, Centre for Research in Race & Education, University of Birmingham



History shows us that the only time that we get any movement towards greater race equality is through the direct pressure of the black community. Without that pressure, the system has historically ignored black kids. But at the moment, the situation is worse than that, because the system isn't simply ignoring black students, its policies are systematically working against the interests of black kids and their parents. It amounts to an undeclared war against black achievement.

For example, the key issue of achievement. The government has introduced a new measure of academic achievement. In the recent past, you were considered a success if you achieved five higher grade passes, including English and maths. But now, we have the English baccalaureate, and to get an E-BAC, you have to have higher grade passes in a particular group of subjects, and that group of subjects includes two sciences and a foreign language. And we know from research that these are high-status subjects, which teachers are less likely to even allow black students to study. So the impact of that is that the E-BAC, overnight, automatically widens the black-white achievement gap.

Historically every time research has bothered to look for ethnic disparities in exclusion, we found that black students are much more likely to be permanently excluded from school. Currently about three times more likely than the equivalent white child, and that's only the official statistics because we know there are at least as many

unofficial exclusions happening all the time that are not being recorded.

The government acknowledged that that exclusion rate is a problem, but they think the problem lies with the students and their parents, and not with the schools. So the government has made it easier for head teachers to exclude children than it was previously, and it entirely removed the possibility of reinstating an excluded pupil no matter how clear the evidence is that the exclusion was unjustified.

Now research has demonstrated, and many of my colleagues on the panel have established this as a clear fact, that schools with a diverse teaching force are better for all students. They work better with kids from lots of ethnic backgrounds. But, six months after the coalition came to power, the funding body in charge of these particular programs to encourage the recruitment and retention of black teachers announced they were going to cut all funding straightaway. And the reason they gave for cutting it is that they were going to "mainstream" race equality. Now, in principle, "mainstreaming" race equality is supposed to make it everyone's business, but in practice it means nothing happens.

So they cut the funding and said it's a good thing, because now everybody's responsible. Mainstreaming is also what's happened to the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant. We know that a lot of the funding is being cut within local educational authorities, and we also know that several EMAC teams, which used to lead this work, have been closed down. They simply don't exist anymore. So that expertise, that force for change inside schools has been removed as part of mainstreaming.

That is a list of current policies that are demonstrably having a negative impact on black students. The smart people in Whitehall either haven't noticed, or they don't care. The government proclaims high standards for all, but their policies are damaging black children. Things are bad, but unless we can force a change in the current policy, they are going to get worse.

Professor Heidi Safia Mirza

Professor of Equalities Studies in Education, Institute of Education University of London



Being a black teacher is a very rare thing. There are only 6% of black or ethnic-minority teachers in this country. So 93.7% of teachers are white. So the likelihood of your child being taught by a white teacher is extremely high.

So here we have a situation that in our schools about 25% of the pupils in our state funded schools are now black and minority ethnic backgrounds. And in some schools like in London you can have up to 60% of the pupils who may be from an African /Caribbean background. I've just done research on a girls school, about 97% of the students are Muslim and Bangladeshi girls, so you can enormous concentrations of particular minority ethnic groups in schools but all-white teachers.

Now there nothing intrinsically wrong with all-white teachers; what we want are really good teachers. But there's a sense in which we need to think through what the implications are for their not being enough black and ethnic minority teachers.

We have a situation where the white staff don't feel comfortable teaching black and ethnic minority children as well, and the governments own survey of newly qualified teachers show us

that 60% of teachers don't feel prepared to teach in diverse classrooms in the inner city. And I know this, being here I was asked to do the two hour session on diversity on a complete one-year PGC, and I know that there is no government standard for what diversity should look like in a teaching curriculum, and I think that that's a huge gap that we are not looking at. What are we being taught, what are teachers being taught. So it's not just children that are being taught, it's what teachers are being taught.

We need to have really radical social justice agendas that bring our white colleagues on board. That's the only way forward because we're an ever-decreasing minority in terms of our movement.

We need to have anti-racist teacher training as I just described. What the white teachers were saying was that we need a space to feel safe, that we can say things like that young man was saying, and understand them without being shot down. Otherwise we won't go there. We need safe places for discussions, we need to be confident in the skills [we learn]. There was a colleague there who was describing when she was doing her teacher training, she wanted to discuss issues about islamophobia, and the tutor did not want to go there. You want to discuss issues about race in the classroom, but they don't feel confident enough to do that. And we need to have these inclusive classroom pedagogies in the curriculum, and we need national legislation to support that.

Finally, we need leadership, whole school leadership, where the whole school is raised up in order to change, that it isn't just particular pilots for black and minority ethnic children. We do need a whole school approach and we do need to think about how we can do that.

Keith Davidson

Author, *Education: A Pathway to Success for Black Children*



The petition you gave raised five issues. Number one, the impact of Gove's educational changes on black children, two, the damage of public sector cuts on resources available for the committee- directly or indirectly beneficial to education programs. Thirdly, the removal of black history figures from the curriculum. Fourthly foreign exclusion, and finally what will happen to underprivileged black children-price of the education sector. I will not propose to cover all of that because colleagues here have covered a number of those issues.

I want to talk about the proposal in terms of the GCSE program. The question really is what is Mr. Gove really proposing? I'll draw attention to September last year; he did propose the abolition of the GCSE program. Then, in February he had a change of heart because there was a coalition of teachers, the unions, and the regulators themselves. The House of Commons committee itself had a report on it. With that assembly of opposition to his proposed reform, he backtracked in February, and he now has another scheme.

He's proposing that there should be a reform of the existing GCSE programs. Just to recap, he wanted to abolish all of that, and replace it with the English Bacallaureate Program, which would mean a step-up of the qualification bar. The argument that there have been advances for many years is that there have been a fall of standards. I would challenge that. There is no persuasive evidence to justify that position. One

reason that is happening is that more children are passing their current GCSE programs.

The impact of that will be that less children will pass, and that's behind the proposal. There's a belief, and the English education system has been afflicted by a terrible disease called elitism. For centuries there's been a belief that only some children can succeed. I want to say that you should dispel that from your system. Eradicate that from your system, because we actually believe it. That's when we talk about gifted and talented. I want to say to you that all children are gifted. It's for us to identify what they're good at. When all our children are capable intellectually, there is no situation where some can achieve academically, and others not.

Finally, I want to say to us that we believe that all children can achieve. If you're biblical there's the story of Daniel, and he's friends were studying, and it is recorded that they were found to be ten times better than the others. My challenge to us is that we have to establish these institutions for ourselves, teach with our own teachers and have them be ten times better, because that's the only way for the future because with the economy, competition will be very high. We can't sit around and not educate our children. WE need to be in the business want to thank you for listening.

Arthur Torrington

Windrush Foundation



The Windrush Foundation was set up about 16 years ago, but Windrush has been here since 1948. I work with Sam King who really is the father of Windrush. Sam kept the name of dozens of Windrush people and would send the postcards every year. Every Windrush person nowadays is in their eighties, some old as 87, and are still going because we're working together all the time.

The Windrush foundation is the body that really highlights the contribution of the men and women who came and laid a foundation for you and me. As a fact, I've done this study, they've laid the foundation in the sense that they bore the brunt of racism, but they fought against it. They fought against it physically, mentally, and everything. I have records of lots of fighting; in fact, before Windrush came, they were fighting in the War. They were fighting the Germans, but a lot of people felt that they shouldn't dance with white people, or go to parties. In that sense, these people laid the foundation for us. It's important for us to also realize they served in the War, and they came back on the ship. They were the first wave in the sense that Britain has always been an ethnic society. That is not the right word, but not multicultural. That is the difference. Multicultural in the sense of celebrating culture. Before, in 1948, it was a monoculture. That's why there were so many fights in the 1950s, just because of a particular set of people wanting to celebrate their own

culture. But then, again, the generation fought the Teddy Boys, and beat them to bits.

This year, Windrush is celebrating 65 years. It's a great achievement in the sense that these men and women, who are still around, they've done their bit and are still doing things. It's a journey in terms of laying the foundation in all respects.

It's been a long journey in terms of moving on. The Windrush Foundation is also doing a project called "Emancipation 1838" which looks at the journey of the ancestors from 1838 to now. The children especially, as in those days the children didn't go to school, they had to go to work and up until 1938 the situation in the Caribbean was almost like 1838, it hadn't moved on. There were a lot of racisms in the Caribbean at the time and control of the black population was such that there was little progress. 1938 was a big change; the commissions went to the Caribbean and recommended things like trade unions. It was banned up until 1938 and in fact, there were so many riots in the 1930s everywhere, such as Guyana, Trinidad, Barbados and Jamaica. They had had enough, the people there at the time couldn't stand it anymore. So the journey on education really is a tough journey and still goes on. It has not been easy and will not be easy, but as the last speaker said, we must take the situation ourselves in our hands and do a lot, a great deal. So finally, this year we are commemorating those of you who can remember one hundred and seventy five years since the ancestors left the plantation, that's a long time as well. That is a time; I would say that although there was freedom, it was partial freedom. The only time things began to change in terms of feeling free is independence in 1961 for Jamaica and onwards. So the black community has endured a great deal and of course I'm speaking as an Afro Caribbean, but those of us who have that sort of background, whose ancestors were taken from Africa to the Caribbean, we've had a hard struggle and it still continues, so therefore I say to you, keep the fight, keep fighting and fight on..

Rosemary Campbell-Stephens

Director of RMC Consultants and Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Education, University of London



It's been a very emotional journey that I have been on with London schools and the black child and I wonder whether people here would join with me to recognise the contribution that Diane Abbott MP has made and history will recognise it. It's not easy operating as a conscious black person within the belly of the bees. Do not take for granted what is required to create the kind of space that we have here in this place.

My first concern about the current landscape that we have to navigate as black people in this place is that the deconstruction of our education system and local government and other bodies, leave nothing between schools and government. There is a very dangerous vacuum in a so called democracy with all the rhetoric about schools having autonomy about what they do and how they do it. What we have is a government driven system and for those of us who have any knowledge at all about our history, that place is us in a very vulnerable space.

My second concern is that initiatives that have propelled our children into higher levels of achievement such as aiming high. When people talk about London Schools and the Black Child just being a conference that brings people together, they don't know that it starts

behind the scenes. Aiming high would not have got government funding if it wasn't for Diane Abbott and London Schools and the Black Child. Investing in diversity which I run in this place, a leadership programme to get more of us as conscious educators leading in black schools would not have had the three and a half million pounds that was put into investing in diversity over seven years in this place if it wasn't for Diane Abbott and London Schools and the Black Child. We've got researchers and academics sitting right here. My third concern in this so-called post-racial age is that we no longer have either the data or the language to talk about race. There is no way that I could have ran a programme here as an institute saying that we need more black educators in London schools if there wasn't some data to show that they were under represented in terms of leadership. Aiming high couldn't get off the ground if we didn't have some data to show that African-Caribbean youngsters were being failed by the system, we need that data. But the deconstruction that has gone on has ensured that you cannot find that data anywhere.

Let me move quickly to the solutions. London Schools and the Black Child can become a national, international agency for racial and social justice in equity and education and humbly I suggest that that is our next step. It is really important that those of us who are activists going forward and the young people who are activists going forward are starting on a very firm and clear foundation of what has already been won. The ambition that Professor Gus John and Diane Abbott had for the London Schools and the Black Child to be the catalyst for developing the movement and the network that Heidi talked about that brings together black educators, black parents and black students needs to happen because we are a disjointed lot.

Aaron Kiely

NUS Black Students Officer



I am National Black Students Officer for the National Union of Students. I am elected to represent over one million students of African, Arab, Asian and Caribbean heritage in colleges, sixth forms and universities across Britain.

Let's be clear, I believe that the education system is failing. The government does not care about young people and this government certainly does not care about black people. If you are young and black then you are in trouble. We are in Britain's worst economic crisis in over seventy years which has already brought brutal consequences for young people, with over one million of Britain's youths unemployed. The prospects for the over one million black students who I represent on their graduation day are even worse with them less likely to find employment and new reports showing that 50 percent of young black people in the country are unemployed. Since his government came into power in 2010 a serious campaign to attack the most vulnerable in society has been launched. The decision to triple tuition fees and the introduction of commercial interest rates on student loans has disproportionately affected black students. Already 75 percent of all black communities live in the 88 poorest areas in Britain. As tuition fees have tripled to £3000 a year to now £9000, we are now seeing the average student leave education with about £55000 worth of debt which is just absolutely incredible.

So we all know the value of education and always encourage the young people in our community to aim higher. Well the government had a scheme that supported young people doing just that. Getting them to college and university. Even had a good name too "Aim Higher", but this government clearly had a different view, so they abolished it.

So to conclude, what should be done? The government clearly need to restore the Education Maintenance Allowance. The government need to start investing in education because young people are the future (as cheesy as it is). In Germany, they have just announced they are abolishing tuition fees. We should follow their lead here in Britain. We need to work to eliminate racism in education that holds back black students. There are already excellent projects that are happening across colleges and universities like University of the Arts, Saint Bradford University, Basingstoke college, that are bringing people together to really challenge the inequality that does exist. Most importantly it is up to every one of us, every single one in this room to continue to meet, discuss and keep on raising these issues like comities, like Longgrove and like Black Child. Obviously, some of these statistics that I have talked about are very uncomfortable truths. Government ministers, council officials, politicians would certainly not really want to hear what we have to say but there is a prior tradition in our communities of speaking truth to power and for the sake of black students we need to do that now more than ever if we want future generations to succeed.

Zita Holborn

Keep Mary Seacole Campaign



The initial threat to remove black historical figures such as Mary Seacole and Olaudah Equiano came about at the end of 2012. Michael Gold, the Secretary of State for Education stated that children should be taught about what he described as more traditional figures such as Oliver Cromwell and Winston Churchill. I have to ask, more traditional for whom? Certainly not more traditional for me. Essentially what he was talking about was having more white men and replacing black and female figures when at this time.

I think what he should have been concentrating on is the lack of black history still in our school curriculum and increasing the amount of black history that was taught. Mary Seacole, who has been voted the number one black Briton was one of those he stated should go. Mary's story is extraordinary, not just because she put herself at risk in order to give too others but because of the journey she embarked on at a time when women and black people faced far more barriers than they do now and I'm not saying that we don't face those barriers today as well and because of the way she overcame those barriers, ending with thousands of British people coming out to celebrate her on her return to Britain from the Crimea. In response to this attacks a small group of activists, both community and trade union activists together with members of the Mary Seacole Statue Appeal, OBV and Simon Woolly who is here with us today and should actually

be congratulated on the role he played in coordinating the whole campaign.

Black role models and historical figures are essential for black children, for self esteem, for confidence, so that they see people whole look like them acknowledged and celebrated and they can be inspired by these great achievements going forward in education and careers. But it is also crucial that white children learn that history to and important for all children to learn about the important achievements of a diverse range of people. Of those who like them and those who don't, so that they don't grow up with a limited and narrow understanding of what went before. It breaks down barriers; it dispels myths, lies and stereotypes and prevents ignorance, disrespect and hatred from developing and festering.

So to end, it said that 'it takes a village to raise a child' but I think that that village need to reflect the world and communities we live in, including our shared and our separate histories. Fredrick Douglas said that 'it's easier to build strong children than repair broken men. I believe that if we are to learn from the mistakes of history, we must first know that history and not a distorted version of the truth. If we are to overcome barriers today; we must understand what barriers were broken down before, and how. If our children are to rise up, aim high, challenge racism and achieve, they need to be inspired. That's why black history is needed, not just for the wellbeing of black children but for the education of all children. And that's why black role models, achievers, freedom fighters, warriors, civilisations must be celebrated and shared and importantly taught. Thank you.

Doctor Victoria Showunmi

Institute of Education, University of London



I'm going to be talking to you about why I'm putting black girls on the map. It is because there's not much going on with our voices for black girls at the moment. I say black girls and well being, because what's actually happening is according to some schools at the moment, looking at the experience of black girls and what that means is that many black girls are achieving, which is very positive. But the question you ask they are achieving by what cost?

When you actually ask and sit down in focus groups like I was with these girls, you'll be quite emotional because there are two types of girls, who are talking about their experiences in school and they are talking about you have to be a popular girl. I thought being a popular girl was being a popular girl meaning that you are doing well or you've got lots of friends. I was re-educated. Being a popular girl means being the type of girl who perhaps is getting into trouble and maybe more experience with issues which they shouldn't be experiencing at the age of fourteen. So that's the popular girl. Then you have the type of girls who are seen as moving up the school. Those particular girls, what I felt most emotional about was that they talk about leaving themselves behind and what they mean by that is that it's better to have relationships i.e. friendship relationships with white girls than it is to have relationships with their own girls. If I take a particular quote from one of the girls, they talked about their

identity and their impact and they are saying that the teachers talk about white girls, other ethnic minority girls but they don't hear our voices. They hear our voices only to describe us as loud girls and loud girls mean a negative response and they are trying to change our personality of being loud and what that means in relation to the way we express ourselves.

So that's where I'm at with the particular work I'm doing. So that's the kind of work I'm doing with research and yes I do work here and even working in an establishment like this, to bring us here, I wanted to do this because it speaks, this is our place as well. Yes it is a very elite establishment but it is our place as well. To bring it here is really fundamental because we do work in education, whether it is to do with training of teachers or whether it's to do with researching. We also have a voice of doing work around what's going on with our children in education and one of my colleagues here, Christine is educated in relation to teacher training and is very well known for her work in teacher education. The last thing I want to say and I'll move off is, we've also got an association that we've put together. We've put this together with some colleagues across England including; Professor Cecile Wright, also we've got Clive Fraser and some other colleagues and it is an association for black academics because we really feel that this is the time for us to move and collectively work together to support what's actually going on with black education at the moment.

Tony Messiah

Trainee barrister, Tooks Chambers



Essentially, I'm dealing with young people expelled from inner city state schools and consequences thereafter and the best way to deal with that is by sharing my story with you. I had somewhat of an unpromising start to life. I grew up in Tottenham. I was expelled from several schools and I was involved in crimes, gangs, received several convictions and to cut the long story short, I then got myself back into college, university, bar school and now I'm a trainee barrister at Tooks Chambers.

The main point I wanted to highlight is when young people, in particular black youths are expelled from school. I was very hyperactive in nursery and primary school and that was my only problem. That behaviour followed me from nursery to primary school and I was expelled from several primary school and my poor parents, they lost their jobs because they had to come and pick me up and so on and it was really difficult and I do apologize.

The Haringey education services said to my parents, well your son will never get back into a mainstream school, he has to go to a pupil referral unit. My parents weren't born here; my mum is Tibetan and my dad. They had me very young but they trusted the education services. They thought that they knew what was best for their son so they said fine. As some of you may know, pupil referral unit is like a boiling pot of all the people who have

been expelled in the area being put in one place.

I managed to get expelled from a PRU which was thought impossible but it happened. So my parents said that's it, you are staying at home and we are going to teach you at home and that's it. Then the education services contacted my parents and said Mr and Mrs Messiah, "if you keep your son at home, it's illegal. You can't teach him at home, he needs to go to school". So my parents said, "well he can't get into a main stream school, he can't get into a referral unit, what do you want me to do? What do you suggest?" They said oh, this is what we suggest; a behavioural boarding school in Norfolk. Now they sent me there and I was the only ethnic student there at the time. Cutting the long story short I experienced much racism, physical abuse and so on. Just to highlight and paint the picture of the type of place the education unit sent me to, the head teachers of those schools a few years ago were convicted of child cruelty. That's the place they sent me to. That's the decision they made.

My parents took me out of there in the end and funny enough the education services didn't say anything to them after that again. They said, do whatever you are doing. So after that a lot of things happened, I left home, I roamed the streets of Tottenham and so on. After that I went to a training centre, I did an MVQ in computers and then that got me into college. I did a B-tech in computers and I thought that was what I was going to do because that's the directions teachers were pushing me. You hear this all the time; "your sons good and music, he could be a rapper, why isn't he doing music at GCSE? Why doesn't he do sport? Why doesn't he do media?" And I almost fell into that trap, until my parents said you could do better than that and then I went to university, read law, went to bar school finished that and secured a pupillage as I said at Tooks Chambers.

David Wood

London Schools and the Black Child



I am a school governor, a soon to be trustee of the London School the Black Child charity and a parent of two young children and I hope and education informed parent of two young children. As Diane mentioned, the conference is an event that I hold particularly close to my heart and it's how I've got to know Diane. As Diane mentioned, in previous existence I used to work for Ken Livingstone, a man whose commitment to this conference was total and in that role I used to work very closely with Diane in organising these events.

I've been inspired by this conference to get involved and be a part of the change that I want to see in education in this country. So for me standing on this platform following Diane and the fantastic speakers that we've had is a huge and humbling thing for me because it used to be me who was running round trying to find power point presentations.

The question before us was whether our young black people were being crossed out of further and higher education and how they connect us to top institutions. What I would say is that we are living in distinctly unnerving times and we have a government that under the current cloak of austerity or the misleading cloak of austerity should I say have embarked on some of the most pernicious attacks on some of the most vulnerable people in our society. So at the sharp end as ever are those who can least afford to bare

the pain as we've heard. We've heard about the Housing Benefits cuts that have just been announced and the Education Maintenance Allowance which we've heard about, which for many of our people who still can stay in education being forced to drop out altogether. It's been cut by 60% for Education College students (I think that's right) and for the higher education/university students tuition is at £9000 per year. What's clear is that our society is becoming increasingly polarized for the 'haves' and 'have nots' to such a degree that the young people at the lower end of the socio-economic scale have no choice a lot of the time but to drop out of full time education.

It is absolutely imperative that we as parents care, or as aunties and uncles, are as involved as we can be in our young people's education because that's their best chance to make it to the top and into the very best education institutions. So that might mean becoming a school governor and seeing at firsthand what goes on at schools and being involved in the decisions about exclusions or about how money is spent to raise achievement, because you are there to verify that what is being done is right and if not to make it so.

It may mean being on the parent- teacher association and it definitely means taking every available opportunity to engage with colleges and schools to show your active interest in what they are doing and how your child will benefit. It certainly means equipping ourselves with as much knowledge about the options facing our young people because the point I'm really making is that we have a responsibility to get involved because when we do the whole nature of this course changes and that's just because we're in the room and that's when institutions change and that's the best way of giving our young people the best possible platform to make it and more than that there is nobody else to do it for us.

Communities Empowerment Network Advice Surgery

The second session ended with a free advice surgery held by Communities Empowerment Network. Their team of expert advocate provide free advice for those that require support and representation in particular, for parents of children who are experiencing problems in school around school exclusion.

