

London Schools and the Black Child IV Empowering Our Children For Success

2006 Post Conference Summary Report



Introduction



London Schools and the Black Child IV – “Empowering Our Children For Success” was the fourth Londonwide conference jointly organised by Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London and Diane Abbott MP around the issues of black children’s underachievement in schools. Nearly 6,000 parents, students, teachers and educationalists have attended the three previous conferences in 2002, 2003 and 2004.

This conference saw the launch of a Black Teachers in London report, commissioned by the Mayor of London following his call for a more representative teaching workforce in London and following on from the LDA’s Education Commission report of 2004. The LDA report found that low teacher expectations were a major contributor to black boys’ perceptions of the reasons for underachievement.

Speakers at the conference included London Schools Minister Lord Adonis, and 2005 winner of the BBC TV’s “The Apprentice” Tim Campbell. Delegates had the opportunity to discuss current initiatives on eliminating the achievement gap and delivering a responsive education system. Workshops included successful initiatives to raise achievement, improving outcomes for African heritage children, pupil exclusions, supporting black teachers and empowering parents to participate in their children’s education. The conference also saw the launch of a comprehensive report on Black teachers in London, and a new website to help parents negotiate the paths to engagement with schools.

In the four years since the first London Schools and the Black Child conference a number of achievements have been recorded. The Department for Education and Skills has launched the “Aiming High” initiative, with additional resources available to schools to raise the achievement of ethnic minority students. The conference has also seen the launch of new networks, including the Afroice Parents and Governors Network and the Achieve network, as well as bringing about unprecedented attention on the critical issues amongst communities, politicians and media. Most important, however, is that there has been some improvement in educational attainment for Black children, and black boys in particular, in recent years. However, there is still a great deal of work to do, and in addition to ensuring the momentum of improvement is not lost, other huge challenges remain, including reducing exclusions among African-Caribbean children. While these challenges still need urgent attention, the London Schools and the Black Child initiative will remain to keep the pressure on and ensure that the culture and ethos of our schools can only be of inclusion, not exclusion.

Conference Programme

Chair: Diane Abbott MP

10.00—11.30	Opening Plenary	
	Diane Abbott MP	Welcome and Introduction
	Ken Livingstone	Mayor of London
	Tim Campbell	2005 Winner, BBC TV's "The Apprentice"
	Lord Andrew Adonis	London Schools Minister, Department for Education and Skills
	William Atkinson	Headteacher, Phoenix High School
11.30—1.00	WORKSHOPS	
1.00—2.00	LUNCH	
2.00—3.00	Afternoon Plenary	
	Rosemary Campbell	Programme Manager, Investing in Diversity, London Centre for Leadership and Learning
	Lee Jasper	Director, Equalities and Policing, Mayor's Office
	Trevor Nelson	Presenter, BBC Radio 1 and MTV
3.00—4.30	WORKSHOPS	
4.30—5.00	Closing Plenary	

Morning Plenary

Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London



“London schools are improving. Since 1997, in inner London the number of pupils achieving at least 5 grade Cs or equivalent has increased by half. Across the whole of London, one third more of our pupils have gained at least 5 A* to C grades in the same period and credit should be given to the teachers and schools involved in bringing about these improvements and to the Government that has made the money available.

I am pleased to read that recently so many Black children achieved excellent grades in their exam results. I am especially pleased that some of those children who were recognised at the London Schools and the Black Child awards ceremony that Diane Abbott MP organised at the House of Commons. However, despite the welcome improvements in London, it’s still the case that change is not coming fast enough for Black Caribbean heritage children, notably in diverse boroughs such as Tower Hamlets, Newham and Haringey.

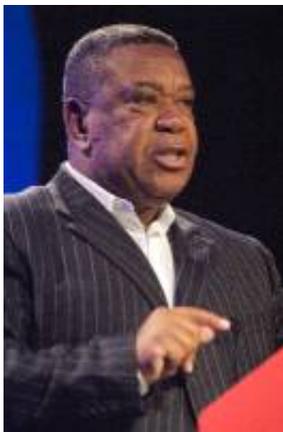
28 per cent of Black Caribbean boys in London achieve the standard of five or more A to C passes at GCSE. Furthermore, only 19 per cent of Black Caribbean boys in London stay on in education beyond their GCSEs compared to 36 per cent of White boys and 53 per cent of Indian boys. 11.5 per cent of young Black people and 12.5 per cent of mixed race people aged 16 to 19 are not in education, employment or training, compared to eight per cent of young White people.

This is a major social issue and it’s also an economic one. London’s prosperity depends on enhancing and developing the skills of all diverse communities in the capital. Our biggest challenge is to deliver an excellent education for all of our children. Two years ago I said London needed more Black teachers in order to better reflect the communities we serve. Sadly there has been little progress since then. The number of Black teachers in London has only gone up by a third of one per cent. The change has to be greatly accelerated.

At this conference we are launching a new Black Teachers in London report, looking at the experiences of Black teachers in our schools, and you will have seen this reported in the press today and yesterday. Those teachers are a precious resource. It is not only about recruiting. We must also ensure that the diversity we have is supported. This report raises a number of important issues as to how we best utilise our teachers and support them to do the difficult job for which they have my total admiration.

If we think this is too big to resolve, I would say look at the progress we have made on policing. If you change the police force, you must be able to change the education system so it properly serves all children.”

William Atkinson, Headteacher Phoenix High School



“I am very, very interested in how some of my parents, the vast majority of my parents, support the young people in my school to bring about success.

We do need to ensure that our teaching force as quickly as possible, reflects the diversity of the young people in our school. We need more Black teachers but it is interesting to note that the people who support my children most effectively are excellent Black teachers and excellent White teachers. For me, the key issue is excellence. Those teachers who are excellent, know how to engage and motivate our young people, to raise the expectations our young people have of them.

What I am going to focus on now very briefly, is the role of my parents. Our best parents are those who are prepared to challenge me, to challenge the institution. We are not just talking about people who send their children to school and accept what the school provides, we are talking about people who actually engage with the institution, and support the institution when they think it is functioning appropriately and who when they believe there is something amiss, they are prepared to challenge in the appropriate way.

Just a few points which I will share with you this morning. First thing they do is that they ensure they know what rules and regulations are. Secondly, they also ensure that their young people get at least eight hours' sleep at night. And the third point is that parents ought to ensure that the equipment, the material that the young people needs that day at school is known in advance and is readied in advance.

In getting ready for school, the parents need to ensure when they young person wakes up they have a proper breakfast. Children who are not nourished in the morning are unable to concentrate, to focus on the learning.

With regard to attendance, a student who achieves something like 80 per cent attendance over five years of secondary school is off school for the equivalent of one year. Even 90 per cent attendance is still six months of those five years when you are not in school. If you are getting below 95 per cent, start worrying about that.

Another responsibility of the parent is to check that the homework is there. Where it is not there, or the quantity is not there, then it is part of their function to notify the school. The other role our parents play in our school is to look at the exercise books to read what is in the book, to comment on the stands of the book, comment on the teachers' notes. The parents need to look at that because they need to be re-enforcing those messages to the young people.

In conclusion then, I believe the role of parents have to play in their success of the school is very, very significant indeed. It's a vital role and sometimes overlooked because we are focusing on what national government should do, local government and the school and the teachers.”

Lord Andrew Adonis Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools



“We are never too old to learn and we in Government have to continually be in the process of learning to see how we can advance your cause and the cause of education more widely. I would like to pay tribute to many Black children themselves. Last year, black pupils demonstrated nationally the greatest progress in GCSE results of any ethnic group, improving at twice the rate of White pupils and it is not a one-off. Across inner London as a whole, the number of Black pupils achieving five or more GCSEs has risen by more than 50% in the last few years.

There are however ongoing challenge. As a Minister, I tell you I fully recognise we need to do more to tackle, including exclusions rates and the stereotyping of Black children as underachieving, troublesome or both. That is why we are taking forward a Black pupils achievement programme which extends to over a hundred secondary schools across 25 local authorities, 15 here in London, and an equivalent programme too for primary education.

Let me give you one encouraging statistic. Black and minority ethnic groups are now over represented in higher education relative to their proportion of the working age population. Last year 18% of higher education students were from minority groups as against 11% of the young working age population.

An absolutely key issue in achievement is that we recruit more teachers and head teachers from the black and ethnic minority community. Not just teachers but the right teachers, excellent teachers in every school. Schools need to reflect the communities which they serve and the more good teachers and head teachers there are from the black community able to serve their community, the better. Nothing will do more to provide the role models the leadership and the aspiration we need for the future.

It is not just more good black teachers we want to see but more good school leaders too. That is why Investing in Diversity programme at the institute of education has been funded by us under the leadership of Rosemary Campbell. It helps teachers to be recognised early and assists them in progressing rapidly and improving the skills and self-confidence they need to do so. Already 400 London teachers have taken part in the programme and one-third have gained promotion.

I believe that supplementary schools play a key role in helping young people to engage academically and socially. I am a great supporter of them. I see the excellent work they do in my beacon Cypriot community in London and in black communities too, boosting standards and instructing in the history and languages of London’s varied cultures. I was to see more good supplementary schools in London and I am personally in discussions to create an independent national agency to support supplementary schools to develop capacity of the voluntary sector for intensive dialogue with parents and community activists.

I celebrate with you the growing success of the black community and I hope that this conference and all that it represents spurs us all on to new efforts in the years ahead.”

Afternoon Plenary

Lee Jasper

Director of Equalities and Policing, GLA



“Of course today I want to talk about the education of our children, however in doing so I would like to open up a controversial theme.

Before I give you my views I want to make some important points up front. I fully support an artist’s right or an author’s right to articulate life as they see it, to provide commentary and analysis of the many difficulties and comment on the rich complexity and contradictions faced by and within any community.

What concerns me with the range of television programmes broadcast on the BBC and the focus on African and Caribbean communities, is that there is a common and recurring theme that points to an over-current of persistent stereotyping that fundamentally misrepresents the reality of black life. When one looks at mainstream television programs, one sees an array that reflects the good, bad and indifferent in relation to the complexity and tapestry of white communities in the UK. There is no such balance to programs when it comes to the black community, which is usually portrayed as entirely problematic.

What has this got to do with education? Well, I am acutely aware of how the media influences shapes and defines how we as black people are perceived and characterised in society but our children are characterised and perceived in the classroom.

This diet of imagery that surrounds our children and ourselves is harmful. As anybody knows if you tell a child they are stupid enough the child will eventually come to believe it. How are children supposed to respond when the overwhelming broadcast output is relentlessly negative?

The Mayor’s report confirms that there are black teachers who are working from sunup to sundown who can’t get recognition, can’t get promotion and are treated abominably in their places of work. Black people are denied their human rights and are from time to time driven mad by racism and the difficulties that they have to face. I also know that the dramatic portrayal of my community will be funded at the expense of the more mundane reality of black people taking care of their families and businesses, and seeking to lead a progressive life.

Nothing brings success like success. Children are to be loved and cherished. If they absorb what is in the press they see their peers as criminals, prone to be over-represented in jail, do not get jobs after university, and are discriminated against despite our best efforts. We must work hard to correct that framework. We do have successful people. They are a credit to our community.

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. In reality it would be up to us to tell a different story.”

Trevor Nelson, Radio and TV Presenter



“I was born in Hackney. I am what you call a third generation, maybe a second. I felt Hackney was a real community. I knew all of my neighbours, if my mum was not there, someone else would look after me, that kind of thing. Now we fast-forward, there seems to be a war on the streets.

There were only three black kids in my class. That was proper preparation because that was to reflect my life as it is today, working for the BBC, working for MTV or any corporation in the country, where there is a lack of Black people. I knew so many talented black people my around my age when I was growing up, who did not get that chance. Nowadays I tell my kids it has never been this good if you want to take it.

If you go to school in the West Indies, you know discipline is the main thing. I am not a disciplinarian, don't get me wrong, but I am saying I would not bring any trouble home and that was the joy of having both my parents bringing me up.

My dad always said: ‘Trevor, you got to be better than the next man, you got to work harder, whatever you get you got to get more’, a lot of pressure on a kid. I said ‘Why dad? Why do I have to do better? Why can't do I do like my mate here?’ They didn't want to tell me the full problems. They did not want to tell me the racism they encountered.

The problem is that it's not cool to be bright and be 15, 16, 17. It is a real problem. I am not here to blame the system. I am here to appeal to anyone who is a teenager right now. What we need to do is stop blaming everybody else.

Musicians, footballers that earn a lot of money and are immediately successful, more importantly, successful when they are young. Young people see young people being rich and they say that is what I want. They don't say I will gradually earn more and when I get to 40 I will pay off my mortgage. That is not sexy. ‘I don't want a mortgage Dad.’ ‘Don't worry son you will not even have a house!’

Whenever I speak at a school, I am targeting 15 year-olds. That is a very important age for me, they sit here, like the coolest kid in school is always the one who is doomed to fail, the geek who has his hand up, they all laugh at him. I always big him up, he has chosen to be an individual. Individuals I feel make it in life.

My reason for coming here is that I am a parent now and a lot of people don't see me as a parent because they don't know, my life is private. My kids go to local schools like your kids probably, I have the same fears as you in this room about the future and I would like to change in my lifetime.”

Tim Campbell, Amstrad



“I had a strong Jamaican mother who looked after three kids. When she came to the UK she thought it was her responsibility to educate us. We were her kids and understood the power of education and she forced us to go to school, get good grades and not disrespect the family name. From a young age we were taught about pride and success. She worked three jobs, working until two or three in the morning and then took us to school.

It gave me a work ethic and I never disrespected that work legacy. It is part of my success. That is what I speak to kids about. There is so much that Diane and people in Parliament can do, and there is so much that head teachers can do to get the right teachers in place but the children have to believe in themselves and in the possibility that there is something out there for them.

I have a daughter who is five, every day I say, “What can you do when you try?” and she immediately turns round and says, “Anything Daddy.” That is what I’ve told her from day one. That is my responsibility as her father.

What I also want to emphasise is that it’s not just about getting any type of teacher in. You have to get the right kind of teacher in. I remember my teachers putting the fear of God into me, maybe because they had the use of a ruler, and not for measuring anything! But I still had a healthy respect for them in terms of knowing they were an extension of my mother’s rule. My mum sent me to school and she said, “If you get a bad report it’s not the lecture you get from them but from me!”

Now, what do we do in terms of empowering our children? This is the whole point of this conference, as I said, empowering our children for success. You keep on pushing them and you tell them never to give up. That is what all of us should be doing now, in terms of continuing to push them forward because we have people in power that we have to trust to put a system in place to support us. Now we have to make sure that our children meet them half way and are ready from day one to fight the fight.

It’s so important that it’s the right teachers as opposed to any teachers. It’s a process where there has to be a meeting in the middle. These students that we are putting forward have to be open and ready to fight because no one is going to give them anything. Whilst on the other side, the teachers have to realise the children are individuals and not just numbers. As long as we can get some way to making sure that those two meet in the middle, we are a long way towards making a success of the battle that Diane started and we are eager to take forward. Let’s give them hope.”

Rosemary Campbell-Stephens, Programme Manager Investing in Diversity



“Leadership does not happen in a cultural vacuum. There is no one community that has a monopoly on deciding what is professional, what is right, what is wrong, that can decide what is important in terms of learning, what is unimportant in terms of learning, there is no one community who has that right.

Surely the kind of leaders we have in these schools should not only reflect pupil population in terms of the pigmentation of their skin but reflect the pupil population in terms of their aspirations, in terms of their culture, in terms of their identity. We welcome the fact that Ken Livingstone, Diane Abbott, Lee Jasper and others are saying we need more black teachers. I’m saying we need more black teachers leading differently, and that is what Investment in Diversity is about. We need black role models within the education system who are connected to their communities, the only reason that I can stand here is because of the connection for my community, irrespective of where I have learned by my labour.

This is one of the things we talk about in the Investing in Diversity programme. It is a year-long programme. I think we have had over 400 teachers, either go through or who are currently on the programme and you heard from Lord Adonis this morning that he will be extending the programme so that we will be incorporating primary teachers within that.

We say to candidates that you are not here in a vacuum, we have a long and rich legacy in this country of our communities striving for education. I don’t know of any other community that could fill Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre on a Saturday afternoon, focusing on the education of their communities. We are active. We are proactive.

We try to spell out to our black professionals how we can stay on the course and stay sane. And I have to tell you that that is not by separating ourselves either from each other or our communities. We want to gravitate towards where our people are at. We want our Investing in Diversity colleagues to be working in schools where there are others who think similarly about how schools should be run.

People who live outside of themselves, outside of their cultural paradigms are at a disadvantage always. It is when we step within that and operate from within that we find it’s much easier for us to engage with our stakeholders and parents because we are one and the same. We need schools that truly challenge inequality. We need black professionals and white colleagues to support the equality agenda unambivalently.

The Investing in Diversity programme is about creating a different leadership paradigm for London. We want to see more black educators in senior leadership positions. We want to feel that when we go into their schools, their heart, their spirit, their energy, their spirituality. We want to see that reflected in the processes through which they manage the school. We want to see that reflected in the curriculum. We want their parents to feel comfortable in their own school. And we want to be leading the agenda and leading our students out of the abyss that is so often the school.”

Speaker Biographies



Diane Abbott MP

Diane Abbott was elected to Parliament in 1987 as the MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington. She was the first black woman elected to the House of Commons and is currently in her fifth term as an MP. Diane organised the first Hackney Schools and the Black Child conference in 1999 and since 2002 has organised the London Schools and the Black Child conferences with the Mayor of London. Formally a civil servant, Diane has also worked for the National Council for Civil Liberties and for Thames Television.

Andrew Adonis

Andrew Adonis was until the election the Prime Minister's advisor on education and public services. He was previously head of the Number 10 Policy Unit, joining the Prime Minister's staff in 1998 after a career as an academic and a journalist. Between 1988 and 1998 he was successively Fellow (in History and Politics) of Nuffield College, Oxford; Education Correspondent and then Public Policy Editor at the Financial Times; and political columnist and leader writer at The Observer. He is author or co-author of six books, including studies of the English class system (*A Class Act*, 1997), the rise and fall of the poll tax (*Failure in British Government*, 1993) and a collection of essays on Roy Jenkins published last year. Andrew was educated at Kingham Hill School and at Keble and Nuffield Colleges, Oxford. He is married with a son and daughter who attend local primary schools.

William Atkinson

William Atkinson was born in Jamaica and came to England at the age of seven. Educated in London, he has taught in Portsmouth and several areas of London. He is currently the Head Teacher of Phoenix High School in Hammersmith and previously held headships at Cranford Community School, Hounslow and Copland Community School, Brent.

William Atkinson was one of the original members of the DfEE Standards Task Force where he chaired a number of sub groups covering Schools in Challenging Circumstances, Teacher Recruitment and Retention.

He has been widely featured in the media, including a BBC Two profile portraying a day in his working life. William Atkinson has contributed to a range of TV and radio programmes, including Newsnight, Panorama, Any Questions, You and Yours, Today, Start the Week, Radio 5 Live, P.M., and, most recently, BBC Question Time and Breakfast Television.

In October 2002 William was named Teacher of the Year at the 2002 Leadership and Diversity awards.

Rosemary Campbell-Stephens

Rosemary Campbell-Stephens is Programme Manager on the Investing in Diversity programme run by the London Centre for Leadership and Learning to support BME teachers seeking senior leadership positions in London schools.

Her educational career spans twenty-five years in Britain in which time she has experienced the numerous changes in education from a variety of perspectives. Prior to her current role, she has been Head Teacher of a West Midlands secondary school and has also worked as a secondary school advisor for Institutional Review and Development and a 'reluctant' and OFSTED Inspector in Waltham Forest. She ran an African Caribbean supplementary school for ten years in Lozells, Birmingham and at its height the school had 250 African descent children attending.

Rosemary is currently one of the consultant advisors employed by the Department for Education and Skills to implement the government's Aiming High strategy to raise the attainment for African Caribbean schools.

Tim Campbell

The first winner of the BBC hit series "The Apprentice", Timothy Campbell is now Project Director of the new Health and Beauty division within Sir Alan Sugar's company Amstrad. He worked for London Underground as a Marketing Project Manager before applying for the reality business program. He lives with his fiancé Jasmine and their daughter Kayla in East London.

Lee Jasper

Lee Jasper is the Mayor of London's Director for Equalities and Policing Recognised by the European Union as one of only a handful of experts on race relations and equality issues, he is responsible for overseeing the delivery of the Mayor's vision of a vision of a prosperous capital city in which all communities can participate. He is chair of a number of independent committees and organisations tasked with addressing issues such as policing, voting rights, education, the criminal justice system, mental health, faith, cultural diversity and economic justice.

Ken Livingstone is Mayor of London

Trevor Nelson

Trevor began DJing from an early age but his career really began when he started up the Madhatter sound system, putting on big warehouse parties.

After ten years with Kiss FM; 1996 saw him move over to Radio 1 to present the Rhythm Nation show. In just a year he began a second show on Saturday afternoons as well as winning the award for 'DJ of the Year' at the MOBO awards. That same year he released his first compilation 'Pure Grooves' for Telstar.

In February 1998 Trevor joined MTV as presenter of their black music show 'The Lick'. In May that year he gained another show on the channel 'The Lick Chart'. Trevor has co-hosted the MOBO awards twice, and at the end of 2000 started hosting his own music show 'Trevor Nelson's Urban Choice' on BBC Two/BBC Choice.

Conference Workshops

A range of workshops on different themes took place over the course of the day:

- Reach: Enabling Black Boys to Achieve Their Potential
- Tim Campbell: Maximising Potential and Achieving Success
- Supporting Outcomes for African Heritage Pupils – tried, tested and working
- Pupil Exclusions
- DfES: The Black Pupils' Achievement Programme
- Empowering Parents I: Afroice Parents and Governors Network
- Empowering Parents II: Challenging Perceptions and Building Partnerships for Success
- Supplementary Schools: The Way Forward
- Mentoring and Life Skills
- Young Londoners: In Their Own Words