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OPENING LOCKED DOORS

Educational achievement and white working class young people

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There is a growing awareness that the impact of social class on young people is uneven. Specific groups of young people suffer greater disadvantage at the end of statutory schooling than others.

The NUT decided that the last thing schools and their local communities needed was a response based on blame and recrimination. It focused therefore on making a practical contribution to tackling the two groups experiencing greatest educational disadvantage. The first result was: *Born to be Great: A Charter on Promoting the Achievement of Black Caribbean Boys*. Its proposals were drawn from a group of black Caribbean boys, their teachers, and their parents, and were moderated by Professor Gus John. Launched in March 2007, the charter had a major impact on the thinking of the Government as well as schools.

The NUT has taken a similar approach to the achievement of white working class young people. Unlike the Government's 2005 White Paper, it understands that girls as well as boys experience underachievement.

It has set out practical and positive policies in its document, *Opening Locked Doors* which it believes will contribute positively to improving the educational achievement of white working class young people.

Opening Locked Doors makes a number of strategic recommendations. They include the following proposals.

- Government is urged to provide a ring-fenced grant for all children and young people in need of intensive support. Its agencies, including the National College and the Training and Development Agency, are recommended to provide specific professional development on school success involving working class communities.
- Local authorities should be required to have regard to maintaining continuity and stability in school provision and in curriculum and pastoral support when considering competitions.
- Schools should consider how their curricula can reflect the histories and development of their local communities and how people from all backgrounds in local communities can be encouraged to apply for teaching and support staff posts in local schools.
- School governing bodies should encourage co-options representative of local communities and receive training on the relationship of social class to pupil achievement.

A full set of proposals are set out at the back of *Opening Locked Doors*.

Introduction

1. Knowledge of the impact of social class on attainment is not new. In education, working class boys and girls face enormous barriers when compared to pupils who are economically better off. However, the effect of social class on education for children of all ethnicities remains a neglected topic, despite its ramifications for millions of children and entire communities.
2. A recent literature review conducted for the National College and the National Union of Teachers found that, while gender was an important and significant predictor of educational attainment, the social class attainment gap between young people from socially deprived and well-off backgrounds was three times wider than the gender gap.
3. There is also a growing awareness that the impact of social class on young people is uneven. Specific groups of young people suffer greater disadvantage at the end of statutory schooling than others. Two of the starkest examples are white working class young people and black Caribbean boys. The descriptions are drawn from Government definitions of attainment. It is important to emphasise, however, that social class differences are pervasive, irrespective of ethnic background.
4. The 2005 Government White Paper 'Higher Standards: Better Schools for All' seemed to recognise the problem of underachievement of specific groups. However, it contained two key paragraphs.

"There is a way to go before every child, regardless of their ethnicity has an equal chance of reaching their potential. We will, therefore, build on 'Aiming High' to ensure that every school receives advice and support to meet the aspirations of BME parents and pupils. In particular, we will extend our support for bilingual learners to secondary schools; expand, in both primary and secondary, our programmes to target underachievement of young black people; and focus on driving up the attainment of Muslim pupils. We also recognise the severe underperformance in Gypsy and Traveller communities, and will introduce a targeted program to address this issue.

Many white working class boys can also fail to fulfil their potential. Those in receipt of free school meals perform less well at GCSE than almost any other group of pupils. Some schools have developed successful approaches to meeting the needs of this group and we will ensure that this best practice is shared more widely."

5. For the NUT, these two paragraphs caused deep concern. The White Paper failed to recognise the social class influence behind underachievement. What was worse was the inequitable approach to the proposed solutions to underachievement. Albeit that funding such as the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant is inadequate, a range of groups were rightly considered to need targeted programmes and the only group not offered specific additional support was white working class pupils.
6. The NUT decided that the last thing schools and their local communities needed was a response based on blame and recrimination. It focused therefore on making a practical contribution to tackling the two groups experiencing greatest educational disadvantage. The first result was: 'Born to be Great: A Charter on Promoting the Achievement of Black Caribbean Boys'. Its proposals were drawn from a group of black Caribbean boys, their teachers, and their parents, and were moderated by Professor Gus John. Launched in March 2007, the charter had a major impact on the thinking of the Government as well as schools.
7. The NUT has taken a similar approach to the achievement of white working class young people. Unlike the 2005 Government White Paper, it understands that girls as well as boys experience underachievement. At the time of the publication of the White Paper, the NUT met Jon Cruddas, MP for Dagenham. His constituency contained a white working class community on the defensive, and a local authority prepared to do something about white working class underachievement. He too was concerned about the potential inequity behind the Government's response to the needs of white working class young people and agreed to chair two seminars set up by the NUT to explore policy solutions to the underachievement of white working class pupils.

8. Two seminars were held in May 2008 and April 2009. External participants included:
 - Sir Keith Ajegbo (author of the Diversity and Citizenship Curriculum Review, 2007);
 - Phil Beadle (teacher/journalist/author);
 - a representative of the National College for Leadership in Schools and Children's Services;
 - Professor Denis Mongon (Institute of Education, University of London) and Dr Chris Chapman (University of Manchester);
 - Jo Dibb (head teacher, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Girls' School, Islington);
 - Dr Máiréad Dunne (University of Sussex);
 - Dr Gillian Evans (University of Manchester);
 - Paul Grant (head teacher, Robert Clack Comprehensive School, Dagenham);
 - Chris Childs (head teacher, Lancelot Primary School, Lewisham);
 - Sean O'Reagan (head teacher, Edith Neville Primary School, North London);
 - Graham Robb (Youth Justice Board); and
 - Dr Alice Sullivan (Institute of Education, University of London)
9. The seminars provided a rich background for the next steps in the NUT's work in finding educational solutions to white working class pupil underachievement.
10. Additionally, Teachers' TV has shown a half hour feature programme of the NUT's professional development programme, 'Class Action', run by Phil Beadle.
11. The NUT agreed with the National College for Leadership in Schools and Children's Services to commission from Professor Denis Mongon and Dr. Chris Chapman a research study on the characteristics of successful leadership for promoting the achievement of white working class pupils. Published in November 2008, the research achieved widespread publicity including a full page analysis in the *Education Guardian*.
12. The National Union of Teachers is deeply grateful to both its members who have helped in the formulation of this report's proposals and to all its external partners and members who have provided an incredibly rich and diverse range of advice and information.
13. In particular, the NUT would like to thank Jon Cruddas, who has maintained an enthusiastic watching brief over the genesis of this report, and who has also provided a powerful counterbalance to the activity of far right groups not only in his constituency but nationally.
14. The term 'white working class' is not a perfect phrase to use. It needs to be understood in the context of the definition of social class and that what it means to be 'working class' is a multi-racial phenomenon. Without this it is impossible to recognise that the working class in Britain is multi-racial. There are many working class communities which are not challenged by social and economic deprivation, although working class communities in general are likely to experience the impact of economic crises deeply. The use of the phrase is not intended to imply deficit. The use of the term 'working class' is intended to indicate that there continues to be a group of people in society whose children are extremely likely to reproduce the social and economic conditions of their parents' lives, if not see a deterioration in life conditions relative to their parents. As soon as that is no longer true in Britain, there will be no need to talk of the working class because social mobility will be available to all. The NUT believes, however, that division by social class in our society is real and cannot be ignored.

Defining the issues

15. In the years following publication of the 2005 White Paper, there has been a growing awareness of the reasons for white working class pupil underachievement. For the first time, the Government recognised explicitly that social class had a major impact on the attainment of young people. The DCSF 'Extra Mile' project identified the impact of intergenerational poverty on expectations, aspirations and achievement. It focuses explicitly on children whose families have been poor for generations and on the work of 50 successful secondary schools in the most deprived wards in England. Its findings complement the NUT's own work in the specific area of white working class underachievement.
16. The NUT itself believes that the impact of social class on educational achievement has been given far too little attention by recent Governments, and indeed by all parliamentary parties. A welcome debate is now emerging, particularly on areas around social mobility or the lack of it. However, that debate needs to be more precise. Just as the underachievement of black Caribbean boys and indeed groups such as Pakistani pupils need dedicated and specific attention, so does the underachievement of white working class pupils. While the subtitle of the 'Extra Mile' pamphlet, 'how schools succeed in raising aspirations in deprived communities', indicates vital and welcome knowledge about the role of successful schools, precision is still needed.
17. Gillian Evans' paper for the first seminar indicates the issues.

"My concern right from the outset is to make clear that a focus on the white working classes is not the same as a backlash against multiculturalism. It is vitally important that we don't do the job of the British National Party for them, better than they are doing it for themselves. From my point of view, the highlight on the white working classes is necessary but the danger lies in not also considering what is perhaps the most pressing question in contemporary times: what is it that black, white and Asian working class people share in common in Britain, and why is it that we don't tend to think of what it means to be working class as a multiracial phenomenon?"
18. The NUT agrees with this analysis. It believes that Governments need to go the extra mile and recognise the commonality of working class experience across different ethnic backgrounds. Evans, however, moves on from a class analysis and identifies a specific problem which the NUT believes ought to be recognised in any policies tackling white working class underachievement.

"Part of the problem is that Black and Asian young people in Britain are typically classified, for example in statistics and reports about education, in terms of their race, religion, ethnicity... and cultural background. White young people, in contrast, are usually described in terms of their social class position. This means, by default, that young white people in Britain appear to have no ethnicity or culture at all, except insofar as they are not non-white immigrants from the Commonwealth and the class position of black and Asian young people is rendered irrelevant. Perhaps, then, black and white working class boys have far more in common than anyone ever thought to imagine, and perhaps part of what they share is the challenge of having to overcome at school and in university...an institutional class prejudice."
19. Again, the NUT believes that Evans raises profound questions about how Government definitions of underachievement and inequity obscure the questions posed by the realities of social class.
20. Although Evans focused largely on analysis in her paper, she also provided clues for practical policy solutions. A number of paragraphs in her paper refer to her book, 'Education Failure in Working Class White Children in Britain', which arose from her long-term research in Bermondsey, London.

"Of all the things I learned in Bermondsey, what surprised me most was to discover that relatively poor people are not united by a shared preoccupation with their difficult economic position; on the contrary, I found white, working class people are divided amongst themselves and across closely defined ideas of territory, lamenting the death of their community and struggling desperately to define their way of life against the increasing influence of immigrants from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Here, despite the success of multiculturalism, which was rightly being celebrated nationally as a resistance movement against racial and cultural prejudice in Britain, were white working class people crying out in defiance of this victory: 'What about us?' 'Why are we feeling under threat in our own neighbourhoods?' 'What about our way of life?' And even, 'What about our culture?'"

21. She described a challenge to educationalists in this context:

“The challenge for educationalists is to understand these forces, to gain an appreciation of their complexity and history in particular localities; to acknowledge the concerns of the white working classes in Britain and to avoid the temptation (in a multicultural climate) to force the white working classes to have to conceive of themselves as a new ‘ethnic group’. A more productive and perhaps necessary strategy, in the short term, is to find a language that makes it possible to support and to follow the lead of those collective organisations in working class neighbourhoods and elsewhere that aim to bring black, white and Asian people together in their common struggle for improvements in health, housing, schooling, neighbourhoods and employment conditions, etc... and employment is crucial.”

22. Evans then explores what she believes to be the unasked question; ‘Why are working class people relatively poor?’ She believes that this important question is obscured by the far more common question; ‘Why are working class people relatively uneducated?’ These questions, Evans believes, force us to focus on the decline of manufacturing and industrial employment in many working class areas of the country and on the fact that the people who relied on labour in these economies are now communities in transition to a service economy which is, itself, in deep recession. Teachers need to be aware of these deeply sensitive and profound changes at work in the background of British society. These issues, she says:

“force us to have to come to terms with the fact that a well-educated middle class person who knows nothing about working class life and values is not a well-educated person at all.”

23. The challenges and questions Evans raises provide very real pointers to new policies on white working class achievement. Her work, especially where it focuses on institutional failure in schools and chronic neighbourhood problems in working class areas, suggests that working class children’s chances of success in education are substantially improved by:

- safe neighbourhoods for children to play in without the risk of gang violence;
- supported but not necessarily conventional family structures;
- plentiful employment for parents engaged in work that pays a living wage;
- good schools where those who want to learn are not disrupted by the minority of children with more complex problems;
- specialist provision in place for children with more complex problems; and
- the opportunity for aspirational families, who are in the majority, to see the evidence that it is worth having aspirations.

24. Dr Máiréad Dunne also highlights the fact that ‘white’ is a multi-ethnic description in itself as it is composed of people of different ethnic and religious heritage, e.g., Jewish, Irish, Polish background, etc.

25. Paul Grant, head teacher of Robert Clack school in Dagenham, highlighted the impact of a legacy of poverty and inequality in the seminars, which he said meant that the attitudes of the local community were extremely relevant to the success of his school.

26. Grant said that teaching in schools with deprived social intakes was difficult, and that it was necessary to admit that fact. Some families, including those from white working class backgrounds, could be hard to help. At Robert Clack school, however, all groups of pupils were doing well and the school represented a community moving forward together.

27. Part of Robert Clack school’s success is due to the role of the excellent teachers and learning mentors. The school in the past had been identified as a failing school, indeed an atmosphere of chaos and gang culture in the school and its neighbourhood could undermine those efforts. As head teacher, Grant sought to guarantee to pupils and their parents that they would be treated with respect in school, and that respect would be expected in return from them. This was not introduced as an imposition but an agreed position with the school community. It involved shared discussions, establishing a collective vision for the school, and finding time for families and their concerns, difficulties and aspirations.

28. Clear boundaries were also set on exclusions, but within the context that the pupils would ordinarily be granted a second chance. Pupils were always included in any discussions that affected them and their views sought. Once parents were able to see that their children were in a school with an atmosphere of respect and professionalism, and with a culture of discussion and negotiation, they were able to become more supportive of the school and its culture.
29. Grant said that he had not found that the National Curriculum had acted as a hindrance to changing the culture of the school. The approach had been to build on good ideas that could promote respect throughout the school, for example, recognising the tradition and histories of the community locally and within the school. He said it was necessary also to ensure that the school's approach was sustained, as communities were often fragile. One way to achieve this was to ensure that parents were involved in the life of the school, for example, through volunteering.
30. Grant also reflected on the nature of the school itself and the optimism it could trigger in the local community. He said that any moves to close school sixth forms could be counter-productive as they provided pupils in the early years of the school with a realistic aspiration and model for continuing future education. Having teachers with whom pupils identified as being from the same background and community as them was positive. Former pupils who had gained relevant qualifications were welcomed back as staff. It also helped to ensure the sustainability of links between school and the community. Indeed, the DCSF's 'Extra Mile' document itself highlights the fact that a considerable number of teachers at Robert Clack School attended the school as pupils.
31. In short, Grant believed that his school appeared as a beacon of hope, both as a community and physically. Critical to Grant's ethos is that the school can be a conflict mediator in the community. This raises questions about the level of additional community based training and resource support needed in neighbourhoods experiencing serious difficulties. What difference do Children's Centres make to this picture?
32. A number of other contributions provided positive additional perspectives.
33. Graham Robb from the Youth Justice Board said the biggest fear for young people was crime and becoming involved in crime and that early intervention was the key, along with supporting families who were struggling to cope in an individualistic society. He identified the 'spirals of risk' in relation to offending, and emphasised the vital importance of tackling the real issue of poverty. He also highlighted two positive strategies, which he felt schools and social services could use: family conferencing and restorative justice. Also critical in Graham Robb's contribution was the need for data for those in the criminal justice system by social class.
34. Dr Alice Sullivan along with Jo Dibb also emphasised that the terms of debate should focus not only on white working class boys but on girls as well. Sullivan concluded that:
- the impact of social class on educational attainment is similar for both sexes and across ethnic groups;
 - the privileging of 'poor white male disadvantage risks ignoring the problems faced by other groups';
 - both women and minority ethnic groups face disadvantage in the labour market; and
 - working class girls are often channelled into low status and 'feminine' qualifications, leading to limited occupational opportunities.
35. Jo Dibb's perspective, as head teacher of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Secondary Girls' school, provided important insights into the particular pressures of white working class girl pupils. She suggested that in single parent households, for example, from puberty the relationship between white working class girl pupils and their mothers often became one of mutual support rather than one of a parent supporting her child. This could often lead to working class girls becoming principal carers in their families if families went through hard times. Girls who had been doing well at school previously could become preoccupied with caring at home. These girls needed particular kinds of support and so did their mothers.
36. Both the statistics and the contribution made in the NUT's seminars emphasised that the problem of white working class underachievement is common to both sexes, and for that reason the Union's proposals address the needs of both white working class girls and boys.

Background data on white working class pupils

37. Most studies on education use white children on Free School Meals (FSM) as shorthand for identifying white working class pupils. While this approach has its uses, it is revealing to look at Government data on children and issues of race, class, and poverty in a broader context and in greater detail.
38. In 2007/08, there were about 3.2 million children, or 25 per cent of all children, who lived in households in the bottom quintile of households by income.¹ Similarly, about 2.2 million, or 17 per cent, lived in households with “low income and material deprivation”, a category defined by the Government to mean those who are disadvantaged.²
39. The increasing inequality in the United Kingdom over the past three decades is a substantial cause of why millions of girls and boys are growing up in deprivation in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. An overall increase in income from 1977 to 2006/07 – slight for the bottom 20 per cent, but more than doubling for the top 20 per cent – has masked increasing inequality.
40. The share of income for the bottom 80 per cent of households has declined slightly but steadily over this period, while the share of the top 20 per cent has risen from 34.7 per cent to 41 per cent.³ United Nations data from 2007-08 shows that the United Kingdom was tied with Italy and Lithuania for the 3rd most unequal society in the European Union, above only Latvia and Portugal.⁴
41. Given that children are more likely to be in poorer households than working adults are, this relative redistribution of income share towards the top is likely to have affected children more than working adults.⁵ However, the repercussions of this social and economic trend are only now beginning to be explored in wider circles, after decades of neglect. This is despite the massive impact it is likely to have had on issues of social cohesion, education, public services, government finances and a whole swathe of other policy and social welfare issues.

Trends in educational attainment for the white working class⁶

42. For some white working class communities there are few barriers to achievement. Others have experienced a loss of long term employment due to the closure of traditional industries. Such communities are often ghettoised, alienated and marginalised, living in run-down council accommodation. Long-term unemployment or low income is a common experience. The use of post code data as a supplementary to FSM in capturing social class testifies to this ghettoisation.
43. In their study of the relationship between educational inequality and social cohesion, Green et al conclude that:

“Education impacts in two ways – first, indirectly, through the way it distributes skills and hence income, opportunities and status amongst adult populations; and the second, through how it socialises students through the formation of values and identities”. (Green, 2006, p.179).
44. Using a social cohesion index with measures for trust, civic co-operation, condoning tax evasion and violent crime, these authors find that there is a strong relationship between educational inequality, income inequality and lack of social cohesion. This is more noticeably so in countries such as the UK, USA and Canada where greater inequality in educational outcomes and skills coincide with lower measures of social cohesion.

¹ Department of Work and Pensions, “Households Below Average Income 1994-95 to 2007-08”, chapter 4

² Ibid.

³ Francis Jones, Daniel Annan and Saef Shah, Office of National Statistics, “The distribution of household income from 1977 to 2006/7”, Economic and Labour Market Review, Volume 2, No 12, December 2008

⁴ United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report, 2007-08; data for Cyprus, Malta, and Luxembourg not available.

⁵ Department of Work and Pensions, *ibid.*

⁶ This section, including references, has been taken from research commissioned by the NUT and the National College of School Leadership found in Denis Mongon and Christopher Chapman, Literature Review, “Successful Leadership for White Working Class Pupil Achievement”, November 2008.

45. The socio-economic differential in educational attainment, visible all through the twentieth century, was brought into sharp focus during its second half. The evidence then and now has consistently shown that, while white working class children are not the only underachieving group, they are the largest in number and by many criteria the greatest underachievers. Thirty years ago a fourteen or fifteen year old working class young person could walk out of school and into a decent working class job. That is no longer the case.

"If you want to know how well a child will do at school, ask how much its parents earn. The fact remains, after more than 50 years of the welfare state and several decades of comprehensive education, that family wealth is the single biggest predictor of success in the school system.

Of course some children from well off homes don't do well at school and some children from poor backgrounds succeed, but the overall pattern is clear: social class, defined in terms of socio-economic status, correlates closely with attainment at school." (Hatcher, 2006, p.203).

46. There is also evidence reported in studies from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2001) and the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2001) that socio-economic differences in educational outcomes are greater in the UK than in many other economically advanced countries.
47. Descriptions and analyses of working class underachievement are a strong tradition in mainstream social analysis and in the sociology of education. Seminal work from the 1950s and 1960s in this area is associated with iconic publications by Floud (Ed) et al (1956), Douglas (1964) and Jackson and Marsden (1966). They also figure in writing on school effectiveness and school improvement which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. Some have begun to ask whether the evidence that schools have only a limited impact on underachievement could raise doubts about whether any form of schooling can fundamentally change the relationship between socio-economic background and educational achievement (cf Ainscow et al, 2006, p.125).
48. National government and academic reports since the turn of the century have confirmed the persistence of the trend for low achievement in low income groups and particularly in white British low income groups. The Government's own 2004 Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners acknowledged that 'socio-economic group is a stronger predictor of attainment than early ability' and that: 'this is not simply a case of the system recognising and labelling learners' innate levels of ability. The gap between the best and worst performers in our system actually widens as they go through education; and it is both significantly wider and more closely related to socio-economic status in this country than elsewhere' (DfES, 2004).
49. The 2007 summary from the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) of national curriculum assessment and GCSE outcomes (DCSF, 2007) provides simple but clear data showing the obstinacy of the relatively low attainment of pupils who are entitled to FSM. The relative decline through the key stages in the attainment of FSM students is shown in Table 1 using the data from the DCSF summary. This DCSF database does not cross reference FSM with ethnicity.
50. The 2008 report from the Youth Cohort Study and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (DCSF, 2008a), using parental occupation as a variable in its sample, confirms the persistence of differences across social classes. It draws particular attention to the recent rates of longitudinal improvement across all occupational backgrounds except for the group 'not classified' which is said to include many respondents for whom neither parent had an occupation. The report's use of parental occupation shows that the trend runs in a deeper and more complex pattern than can be explained by family income as reflected in FSM entitlement.

Table 1 (Source DCSF, 2007) Base Year 2007

Percentages achieving national target outcomes at each Key Stage by FSM entitlement

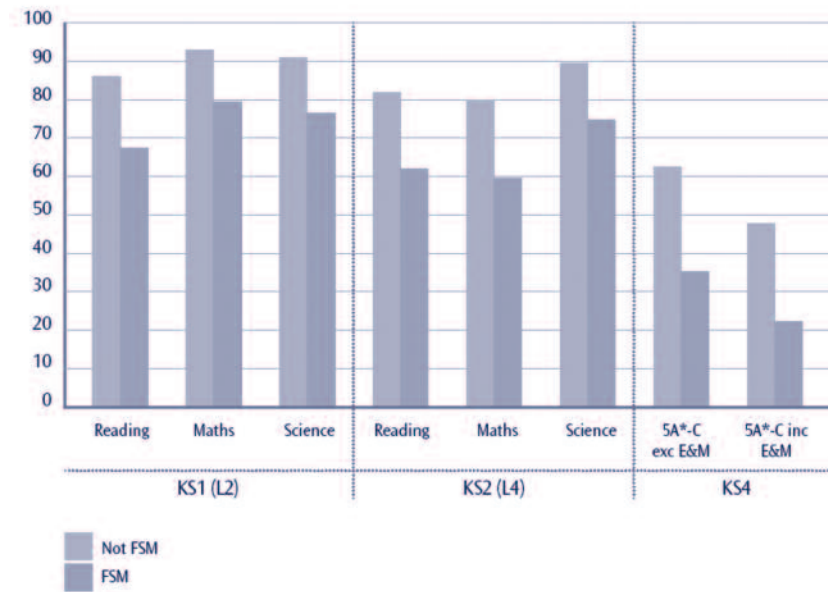
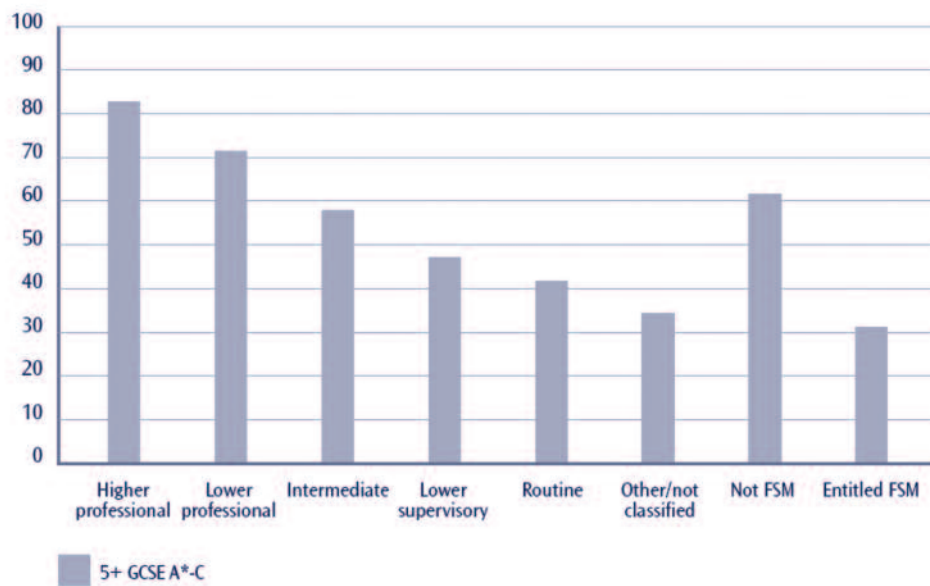


Table 2 (Source DCSF, 2008a) Base Year 2006

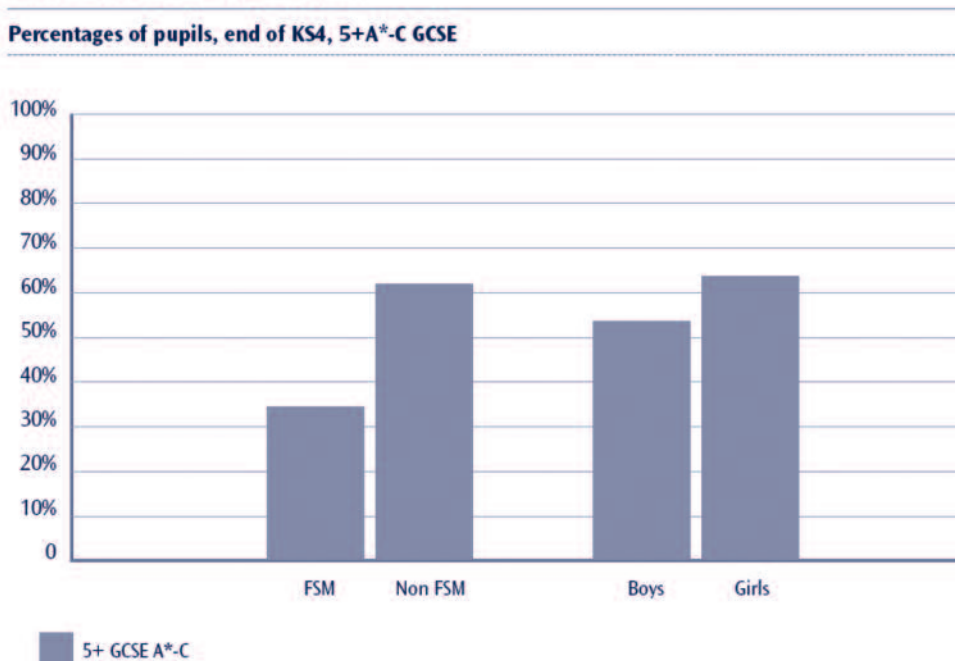
Percentages achieving 5A*-C in Yr11 by parental occupation and free school meals entitlement



51. The headline outcomes in the previous paragraphs disguise complex connections between educational provision, personal lifelines and geographical spaces.

52. The DfES' review, *Gender and Education: the Evidence on Pupils in England* (DfES, 2007b) concluded that gender is an independent and significant predictor of educational attainment although the social class attainment gap at Key Stage 4 (using GCSE results and FSM as the measures) is three times as wide as the gender gap. Table 3 below shows the 28 per cent FSM gap and the 9 per cent gender gap. With the exception of the small group of students described as 'Travellers', 'White British FSM boys' were the male group with lowest attainment (24 per cent gaining 5+ A*-C GCSEs, compared to the 57 per cent national average) and 'White British FSM girls' the female group with lowest attainment (31 per cent 5+A*-C). Eligibility for FSM is more closely associated with lower attainment for white British boys and girls than for children from minority ethnic groups.
53. These findings confirm that the phenomenon of underachievement in low income groups is not confined to boys, it is a problem experienced across both genders.

Table 3 (Source DCSF, 2007a p.57)



54. Despite the overwhelming evidence that low income and low educational attainment are linked, there is as yet no consensus about the causes or, therefore, the potential solutions. This section reviews the range of explanations, not least to identify those which might be within the remit of school leaders to tackle.
55. What might be called the first wave of explanation emerged in the 1950s and 1960s following the turbulence of the 1944 Education Act and included, for example, contributions from Bernstein (1961a and 1961b), Douglas (1964) and the Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967). This was widely interpreted as describing the experiences, practices and culture of working class families as pathological while schools and schooling were identified as having a given and neutral influence. It seemed to suggest that if families could be appropriately improved then schools could carry on much as they always had.
56. A second wave characterised by Freire (2000 reprint), Lacey (1970), Willis (1977) and Young (1971), and emerging in the 1970s, focused on the practices and culture of public education as problematic, on schools as places where inequality was not only played out but nurtured and sponsored. Across these two waves, the emphasis shifted between the effects of poverty, culture, social capital, parental perceptions, pupil perceptions, professional expectations, school place allocations, in-school differentiation, curriculum and pedagogy.
57. A third wave then shifted towards school effectiveness and school improvement. Indeed the most important path educationalists can take is to understand how the most successful schools work and how their practice can be transferred across the system.

58. However, little has changed for the 25 per cent of lowest achievers who continue to leave school with no accreditation above a D Grade GCSE and the fifth of those with no passes of any kind at GCSE or GNVQ. What has changed for that quarter of the students is that they are further adrift from the averages and the general achievement of their peers. At the same time, there has been a political reluctance to acknowledge contextual influences, in part for fear that these might be used as an excuse for poor professional practice and in part because they expose some profound social questions.

Successful Leadership for Promoting the Achievement of White Working Class Pupils⁷

59. The NUT and the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services jointly commissioned research on successful school leadership for white working class pupils. Professor Denis Mongon (now at the Institute of Education, University of London) and Dr Christopher Chapman of Manchester University carried out the research. It consisted of a literature review, vignettes from a variety of schools with predominantly white working class pupils, a summary of the research report, and the full research report, a copy of which is available at www.teachers.org.uk.

60. The research team was asked to:

- summarise the key leadership characteristics required to promote the achievement of white working class pupils;
- describe the key challenges faced by school leaders in promoting the achievement of white working class pupils;
- report on the good practice that exists and what it says; and
- outline the support and professional development needed to enable school leaders to develop the key characteristics and overcome the key challenges.

61. Pupils from low income, white British backgrounds were significantly more successful at the end of Key Stages 2 and 4 in the schools chosen for the study than their comparable peers in schools on average. The leaders in those schools appeared to follow basic strategies, or very close variations, used by most successful school leaders:

- *Building vision and setting directions*
Staff and students at these schools knew where they were travelling and what was expected of them. There was a strong, shared sense of purpose, goals were specific and well understood, and expectations were high for everyone.
- *Understanding and developing people*
Staff and students were provided with intellectual and emotional stimulation in which personalised support rather than criticism was predominant. Staff recruitment was a high priority, often ingeniously pursued.
- *Designing the organisation*
The structure and culture of the organisations were engineered to match their purpose. Lines of authority, responsibility, accountability and autonomy were clear to everyone. Close attention was paid to the appearance of the built environment.
- *Managing and supporting the teaching and learning programme*
The leaders were relentless in their application to the highest standards of teaching and learning. Success was invariably celebrated; difficulties for staff or students were never ignored. Mistakes were acceptable, underperformance was not.
- *Collecting, monitoring, analysing and using information*
Attention to detail was a remarkable feature of these schools. Both student progress and teaching standards were regularly monitored, recorded and analysed. Pupils and staff reported that this approach was comfortable and liberating.

⁷This section, including references, has been adapted from the Summary Report of research commissioned by the NUT and the National College of School Leadership found in Denis Mongon and Christopher Chapman, "Successful Leadership for White Working Class Pupil Achievement", November 2008.

62. These leaders appeared to draw on three characteristics which the researchers labelled as intelligences:
1. *Contextual intelligence*
These leaders show a profound respect for the social context they are working in without ever patronising it. They have deliberately chosen to work in these places.
 2. *Professional intelligence*
These leaders are very good at their core business: leadership and management to nurture the teamwork on which the school's excellent standards of teaching and learning are dependent.
 3. *Social intelligence*
These leaders appear to be sensitive to the emotional state of their pupils and colleagues and use that to guide their own thoughts and actions. In turn, they are deeply admired across their staff and student body.
63. These leaders appeared to show four personality traits:
1. *Self-efficacy*
This is a belief in your own capabilities and confidence of a kind that makes you more likely to tackle a task and to persist in the face of initial failure.
 2. *Internal locus of control*
The personal responsibility we take for our behaviour and its consequences varies. People who have an internal locus of control have a tendency to attribute events in their life to their own control and not blame anyone else.
 3. *Conscientiousness*
Conscientious individuals tend towards being self-disciplined, organised, careful and striving. They are generally hard working and reliable, sometimes even perfectionist.
 4. *Rapport*
Rapport requires a deep interest in other people with a tendency to be empathetic and helpful and to nurture a sense of team and community. It is associated with trust, openness, acceptance and shared understanding.

Recommendations

64. Many schools and teachers are already working effectively to raise the achievement of white working class pupils. The aim of this policy paper is to spread best practice, encourage policymaking and leadership practices for schools which allow teachers to innovate successfully, and to address the issue of white working class pupil achievement in the context of local, family, school, community, and policymaking dynamics.
65. Informing the NUT's recommendations below are proposals in *Successful Leadership for Promoting the Achievement of White Working Class Pupils*, recommendations contained in the NUT's Education Statement, *A Good Local School for Every Child and for Every Community* and recommendations arising from the seminars held by the NUT on white working class pupil achievement.
66. The recommendations which follow are framed in the following context.
- Adopting a one-size-fits-all solution is not the right way forward. Instead policy makers should proceed on the principle of building solutions for local contexts.
 - Aspects of the lives and experiences of working class pupils which occur outside of schools should be incorporated into the school curriculum.
 - Awareness of local dynamics, the economics of the area, family structure and caring responsibilities of pupils, the relevance of role models and future prospects, and other factors that may inform the outlook of white working class pupils and their families should be incorporated into pedagogy and the curriculum.
 - Underachievement should be seen not as endemic failure but as requiring a positive and committed response.
 - Teachers and schools should be provided with the necessary autonomy to meet pupils' individual needs.

- A goal of high achievement for all pupils should be maintained.
- An appreciation of local culture and role models should be built into the educational experiences of working class pupils.
- Each school's aim should be to appoint school staff from the local community.
- Openness and respect should inform relationships both within schools and within communities.
- Increasing self efficacy among pupils should be a top priority.
- Rigorous monitoring and analysis of outcomes are vital.
- Recognising and celebrating the achievements of white working class pupils and potential role models in their communities and broader society is also vital.
- Best practice should be shared.
- All schools, including those in impoverished areas, should be sufficiently funded.
- The stereotyping of white working class young people should be resisted as strongly as stereotyping of all people on the grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation and disability.
- Communication among all stakeholders and particularly among parents, school, and the community should be a top priority.

67. To Government and the National Agencies

- A ring-fenced grant should be established which broadens the coverage of the current Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant so that it covers all groups of young people in need of additional intensive support, including white working class young people, without reducing the funding available to existing groups.
- A similar ring-fenced grant should be available to schools providing services to parents, including such programmes as family conferencing and adult education.
- The DCSF guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion should include approaches which value all communities and celebrate the background experiences of every child, including that of white working class pupils.
- The DCSF should ensure that policies and practices on tackling social exclusion explicitly factor in issues arising from social class.
- Programmes for those students not in education, employment or training should contain an explicit focus on the needs of white working class young people.
- Further development work with accompanying research should be commissioned on successful interventions targeted specifically at white pupils from low income backgrounds. The purpose of this work should be to generate and share knowledge and to promote localised solutions with systemic relevance.
- The 14-19 qualifications framework should be re-examined to see if it meets the needs of children not in education, employment or training.
- The DCSF and related agencies should formulate specific guidance in partnership with schools with white working class pupils which encourages schools to adapt the curriculum to reflect local histories and developments and which provides practical examples of this work.
- The National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (The National College) should adopt the following approaches.
 - The professional development of school leaders should include school visits and exchanges with successful schools in working class communities, including to schools in white working class communities.
 - Such visits should be both proactive and interactive. Potential leaders should be expected to explore with school communities the reasons for school success.
 - The definition of school leaders, in this context, should be redrawn to include curriculum leaders, those responsible for outward facing work with local communities and those responsible for pupil welfare and behaviour.

- The Training and Development Agency (TDA) should ensure that issues around white working class pupil achievement are a particular focus in Initial Teacher Training and in relevant professional development programmes. Initial Teacher Training programmes should be reviewed in order to improve the amount of time spent on issues of equity and the way in which communities surrounding schools contribute to pupils' bank of life experiences and skills.
- The TDA should be given the responsibility for implementing a national programme for encouraging young people from working class communities to become teachers.
- Successful schools in working class communities should be part of a national professional development strategy for all teachers. Such schools should receive recognition and additional funding for their roles.

68. The National Professional Qualification for Headship and Initial Teacher Training courses should give equally high priority to the impact of social class, gender and ethnicity.

69. **To Local Authorities**

- When considering competitions, local authorities should be required to have regard to the need for continuity and stability in all school provision and required also to have regard to maintaining school provision in socially and economically deprived communities.
- Local authorities should be required to maintain an assumption in favour of maintaining successful 11-19 provision when considering secondary reorganisation.
- Local authorities should play a key role in 14-19 consortia and other collaborations to pay particular attention to:
 - the continuity of curricular experience;
 - pastoral support across phases;
 - the implications for students of behavioural expectations which might be different across different sites or phases; and
 - compiling, evaluating and using robust evidence from their own and similar projects to inform their work.
- Local authorities should support schools by creating an active, voluntary scheme for deploying staff on a seconded or permanent basis to schools with the greatest need, and provide support and help to schools which wish to establish local fora for parents and members of local communities.

70. **To Schools**

- Schools should consider whether their curricula can reflect the histories and development of their local communities.
- Schools should consider what steps are needed to encourage people from all backgrounds in the local community to apply for teaching and support staff posts.
- Schools should examine whether professional development for school staff can include a focus on white working class pupil achievement.

71. **To School Governing Bodies**

- School governing bodies should encourage co-options which are representative of the communities they serve.
- Governors should undertake training on the relationship of social class to educational achievement.

Conclusion

72. Action to improve white working class pupil achievement is vital. Failing to address the issue appropriately and effectively can fuel racism and prejudice and undermine local communities.
73. The proposals contained in this report are for discussion. They do not cover the issue of how communities in socially and economically deprived areas can be supported and stability secured. They are, however, based on the idea that the school is at the centre of the community; fostering not only educational achievement, but contributing to social and economic regeneration.
74. The NUT believes profoundly that the principle of a good local school for every child and for every community should apply across the education system. Nowhere is this principle more relevant than in areas of social and economic deprivation and for communities under challenge and pressure, such as white working class communities.

Further reading

The following documents are available at <http://www.teachers.org.uk>

- Literature Review, 'Successful Leadership for White Working Class Pupil Achievement', November 2008, Denis Mongon (now of the Institute of Education, University of London) and Christopher Chapman, University of Manchester. The literature review covers all issues of white working class pupil achievement.
- Vignettes, 'Successful Leadership for White Working Class Pupil Achievement', November 2008, Denis Mongon (now of the Institute of Education, University of London) and Christopher Chapman, University of Manchester
- Summary, 'Successful Leadership for White Working Class Pupil Achievement', November 2008, Denis Mongon (now of the Institute of Education, University of London) and Christopher Chapman, University of Manchester
- Report, 'Successful Leadership for White Working Class Pupil Achievement', November 2008, Denis Mongon (now of the Institute of Education, University of London) and Christopher Chapman, University of Manchester
- Report of the 2008 NUT Colloquium on White Working Class Pupil Achievement
- Report of the 2009 NUT White Working Class Pupil Achievement Seminar

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