



BLACK BOYS & SCHOOLS: A PERSPECTIVE FROM SCHOOL BEHAVIOURIAL SPECIALISTS & MENTORS

BTEG SUBMISSION TO THE REVIEW OF BAME REPRESENTATION IN THE CJS

'In school institutional racism is an issue and parents need to know what they are doing to their children. Parents need to be involved and should not wait for something to go wrong'

Key recommendations

- i. Schools should review their policy and practice to make sure there is no institutional racism impacting on BAME staff, pupils and parents.
- ii. Schools should find creative ways to engage black parents in the life of the school.
- iii. There is a lack of black male teachers and other black role models in schools
- iv. Schools should review their sanctions to determine if black boys are treated less favourably and given harsher punishments compared to other ethnic groups.
- v. Teacher training institutions should prepare new teachers for the challenges they will face in inner city schools in deprived areas. This should include an unconscious bias module.

1. Introduction

For the past three years BTEG has delivered Routes2Success (R2S), a community role model programme that connects young black males 11-25 with successful black men in schools and Pupil Referral Units. When we approached schools we were sometimes contacted by the school Behavioural Specialist and Mentor. These staff tended to be from African and Caribbean backgrounds. It's a role that many parents and policy makers may not be aware of. We have no idea how many schools have these non-teaching positions.

We hope that a key aspect of the Review will be to identify actions to reduce the number of young BAME people entering the CJS. For many within black communities the problem for boys starts in school with the interaction between the boys, parents and teachers. The Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer 2012, *'Our Children Deserve better: Prevention Pays'* showed that 86% of boys in the youth justice system had been excluded from school. Black Caribbean pupils are nearly four times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion than the school

population as a whole. For black boys school exclusions can be the start of the journey that ends in the CJS.

We think the experience of Behavioural Specialists especially in secondary schools offers a valuable insight into the treatment of black boys. We think the issues they have highlighted are common in many schools and help to explain why black pupils continue to have lower attainment rates and higher school exclusion rates.

It's important that the perspectives of Behavioural Specialists are heard by the Lammy Review, policy makers and parents. We decided to host a roundtable to hear their views on the challenges facing black boys, their parents, schools and policy makers. At short notice four Behavioural Specialists from four London schools and a representative from a youth charity agreed to attend a half day roundtable on Saturday 18 June. The conversation focused on black boys, parents and teachers.

2. What do Behavioural Specialists and mentors do?

According to our roundtable participants Behavioural Specialists form part of the non-teaching support staff and undertake the following duties:

- Train teachers on how to manage challenging behaviour
- Work with and mentor young people with challenging behaviour
- Lead internal exclusions in schools
- Undertake home visits and family support
- Manage 'isolation' where children are withdrawn from the classroom. There are short- term and fixed isolation.

Behavioural Specialists are not required to have specific qualifications but tend to have a youth work background. Some had undertaken a four day mentoring training programme delivered by Children's Workforce Development Council (closed in 2012) and undertake various development courses at school. One stated that, *'I am everything and nothing in the school. We are social workers, a parent and a counsellor all wrapped into one. But where is the support for us?'*

3. Black boys

'The labelling of black boys starts in school and by the time they are 15 they are already looking at negative role models. If they have strong and involved parents at home it helps.'

'The rate of exclusion is ridiculous. What are we doing to address that?'
(One participant had created an on-line exclusion programme for young people).

'Boys are less mature than girls. Silly behaviour is mistaken for serious misbehaviour. If the teacher gets scared that's it, the child goes on report. The child can be put on all day detention.'

'There is a lack of black male teachers for black boys to look up to - they don't have anyone. If black people are in schools they are Teaching Assistants and other support staff such as cleaners but not teachers. Even the kids question this situation.'

'There is not a lot of empathy between teachers and black boys. Black boys get punished harder. Kids are not stupid and they are smart when they want to be. White kids are treated different to black kids. Dealing with these issues in Year 10 is too late.'

'Some teachers lack pastoral care expertise and their first action is to put a child on report. They need to look at the root cause. We often ask - has anyone evaluated the impact of what has been done to date for the child?'

'They (teachers) are pushing black boys 'emotional button', it's a game and the boys need to know how to play and navigate their way through.'

'It's about educating people. I ask staff - what if Ofsted were to come here and look at our exclusion rates - what would you say? This helped to raise awareness with the Head of Exclusion.'

Black boys are encouraged by the Behavioural Specialist to: 'use' being on report to aid themselves to demonstrate they can behave and be on time. Teachers like to write negative things about black pupils. So black boys should use reporting as a positive tool. Black pupils are documented (i.e. put on report) and other pupils are monitored verbally. We are trying to teach black boys how they are perceived in the school. To be mindful of the 'talk and swagger' and think about their behaviour. All the focus is on how they look, they are stereotyped but they are just normal teenagers.'

'It's harder for black kids to make it. You can't just work in one area; there is lots of stuff out there for young people to deal with.'

'It starts first thing in the morning and how they are greeted when they enter the school gate. Instead of teachers saying good morning, how are you? They are spoken to with, 'GET YOUR EARPHONES OFF, (some even pull the earphones off the boys); PULL YOUR HOOD DOWN; WHERE ARE YOUR SHOES? They are treated like animals.'

'I try to 'buffer it' (the way the boys are treated). We don't know what each other is fighting on a daily basis (i.e. black staff and black children in the school).'

'A lot of teachers are 'scared' of the boys and therefore behave aggressively. New teachers might be frightened and the pupils detect poor teachers. If you don't show you are the best the students will eat you alive. Today boys are taller and stronger.'

4. Parents

'Institutional racism is an issue and parents need to know what they are doing to their children. Parents need to be involved and should not wait for something to go

wrong. And its not just children, black staff are not getting promoted while white staff with less experience are fast tracked and promoted.'

'A lot of parents want to fight the school. Those parents that volunteer in the school are the parents that the school listens to. We don't have enough black/BME parent forums in schools.'

'More needs to be done to educate parents. One participant set up an after school programme for boys teaching English, Maths and Science but the school didn't want to pay for it. We had a graduation and all the parents came. Ofsted heard about the programme and praised it. '

'Some parents find attending parents evening a negative experience. When we call the parents to find out why they say they are not coming to hear the same thing - negative comments - again.'

'We need to get more black parents volunteering in schools to influence the culture in schools. But it has to be worth their while. Many parents are working so they need to be incentivised e.g. given shopping vouchers for Tesco or Asda.'

'A lot of parents are not reading the school newsletter. We need to find ways of getting black parents back into school. Schools now tend to do large parents evenings in the school hall so they can have power and control over parents. Teachers don't want to be in a room with the parents one-to-one. In the large hall parents feel intimidated. Teachers have a lot of power and are supported by the unions.'

'Sometimes we call parents to say something positive about their child but before we can say anything the parent has said 'what is it now? Positive praise is important.'

'Rather than exclude a pupil the school will try and send a pupil to college. Some parents object to this.'

'In isolation (in school exclusion) teachers are supposed to send work for the pupil. One boy was put in isolation because he was selling sweets in school. We have boys who are there for weeks and months. They start at 10am and finish at 4pm and they are not allowed to integrate in schools.'

'Community service in school includes picking litter up.'

'It is better to build support into the sanction. Students are not learning anything from internal exclusion. Children do need a specific behavioural framework.'

5. Teachers

'It's all about the staff and a lot of staff need help.'

'Teach First graduates are top of the tree but have no idea about the issues in inner city schools. Many 'come into my office crying'.

'Teachers don't read SEN plans. If the Teaching Assistants weren't there it would be harder for the pupil.'

'I feel there is resentment every time you do a project for back boys. Why do I have this resistance? If it was middle class white children it would be different.'

'I would like to take teachers for a walk around the areas. They don't realise they are in the most deprived areas.'

'We see teachers screaming their heads off at students. Some teachers are brilliant and the Senior Leadership Team should observe them more frequently and make this part of CPD of new teachers and teachers struggling to manage the behaviour of their students.'

'If there is little white boy with ADHT they go out of their way. If it's a black boy they don't want you (Behavioural Specialist) to do anything. They don't want it to work.'

'They don't like the fact that I speak out. They don't like it if the children like you.'

'There should be 'Rooney Rule' for senior positions in schools. Where there is a qualified BME candidate they should be interviewed.'

'Super Heads come in and clear out black boys. Academies are good at removing black boys from school.'

'Boys from Ark schools in Brent that are excluded are sent to the Lighthouse Education Service in Lambeth rather than the locally situated Right Track service. These children have never been out of the borough. Who is saying to them that this is not allowed?'

6. Possible solutions

- Educating teachers is important (e.g. the PGCE course and Teach First) - graduate teachers need to be better equipped to be culturally competent and aware of their conscious and unconscious bias. There should be a module on behaviour management and ethnic diversity for trainee teachers.
- Develop a programme that addresses the issues identified in inner city schools. Teachers need to understand what it's like living in deprived communities.
- There should be better recognition in schools, unions and by the Government of the role played by Behavioural Specialists and Mentors in schools. Posts are advertised by schools without pay grades. Progression and Continuous Professional Development need to be developed for Behavioural Specialists.

Four of the five participants believe institutional racism in school is a key issue. One participant tries to look at the situation without seeing race first.

BTEG would like to thank the participants for taking time out to share their experiences.

Jeremy Crook OBE

Chief Executive

BTEG.

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