

1:1 Background to the Project

Bristol Children and Young People's Services designated 2007 to be the Year of Black Achievement, as part of a drive to raise the attainment of Black pupils in the city. Using additional funding from the Lottery Heritage Fund and Abolition 200, a range of events and resources were developed to support this work.

"All we ever learnt about in Black History was slavery – anyone would think we weren't on this planet till we were in chains",
Daniel (reflecting on his schooling).

Consultation with Black young people revealed that many of them felt that they were invisible in the school curriculum and, if anything, they felt there is an over-emphasis on teaching the Transatlantic Slave Trade as the only aspect of their history consistently being studied. They were clear that they wanted to know about the thousands of years of Black history prior to colonial times and to hear about the achievements of people of African descent and of the great African empires. They also particularly wanted to hear about recent local history that seemed more relevant to them, and about the contribution of Black Bristolians in the 20th Century.

When asked at the Abolition 200 Conference, 24.3% of young people said that their school taught Black History 'Never or almost never' and 17.6% said 'Only in Black History Month'.

Taking account of these views, this unique teaching resource has been developed.

The Year of Black Achievement 2007

Young people themselves identified the key issues to be addressed during the year as:

- Low expectations (from teachers and themselves).
- Stereotyping.
- Unfair systems of rewards and sanctions.
- An irrelevant curriculum.
- Pressure to be "gangsta" or "keener".
- Lack of Black adults in schools.

In order to address all of these areas, Bristol CYPS has worked with a range of partners throughout the year to develop a programme of events and activities including:

- Teachers' and headteachers' conferences and seminars to improve their understanding of the issues relating to Black pupils, race equality and raising Black and minority ethnic (BME) pupils' attainment.
- A major conference on globalising the curriculum and making it culturally relevant.
- An Abolition 200 conference for young people to express their views on key issues.
- A conference for young people from supplementary schools with national motivational speakers.
- A research project focusing on reducing the fixed term exclusions of Black pupils.
- A positive action initiative to recruit more BME governors and teachers.
- A Black History Month (BHM) newsletter for schools and a BHM Newspaper Writing Competition.
- Initiatives providing mentors and raising aspirations such as the BME The Way Forward Programme with the University of the West of England, The Windsor Junior Fellowship Programme, The Pauline Weise Annual Achievement Awards.
- A targeted intervention in all the Bristol schools focusing on Black pupils at Key Stages 2 and 4, to ensure they get the support they need to meet their target grades.

Legacy

It is envisaged that none of these will be one off initiatives, but that they are the beginning of a long term drive to close the attainment gap between Black and other pupils, and to improve the quality of their educational experience. It is really pleasing to note that in 2007, at GCSE, the results for Black pupils were more positive than for other groups, gaining 5A* to C which was up 4.5% on the year before, and the percentage leaving with no passes was down 6.2%. The group making the most significant improvement on the previous year was African Caribbean pupils, whose results were up by 8.5%. This appears to show that the various strategies are working and should be continued.

Bristol Black Archives Partnership

For years local Black history was under-recorded and in danger of being lost, however the Bristol Black Archives Partnership (BBAP) was set up to protect this heritage. The partnership involves community people, heritage organisations and academic organisations coming together to collect and make accessible archives (i.e. films, photographs, documents and objects) that reflect the experience and contribution of Black people in Bristol. This ensures that resources are available for a more balanced history of Bristol as well as material to promote Black achievement and positive role models.

To protect this heritage for future generations, Bristol Record Office is looking after the archives and making them accessible to anyone interested in the history of their family, community, locality or the city itself. The city's Museums Service is caring for the objects and both archives and artefacts will be showcased in the new Museum of Bristol when it opens in 2010.

Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Bristol City Council, BBAP aims to provide learning resources for a better understanding of Bristol's multicultural history. BBAP's popular 2007 & 2008 calendars celebrate local Black achievers and have been widely distributed to schools and individuals, while copies of the "My Legacy Journal" are available for African-Caribbean people to record their own family history and stories.

For further information please contact:

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