

Hyacinth Hall

■ Biography

Place of birth: St. Mary, Jamaica

Date of arrival in Bristol: 1985

Hyacinth was brought up in Jamaica, and went to school from the age of four. She was inspired by Miss Crosbourne, a teacher who taught her to enjoy learning. She was expected and encouraged to go to Teachers' Training College, which she did and left after a year. At one point she worked at the Salvation Army Institute for the Blind where she worked in Braille with visually impaired primary children.



Hyacinth Hall
Photo courtesy of Hyacinth Hall

In 1958, Hyacinth came to England to visit a friend and took an office job here. In 1964, she decided to go back to college in Norwich to finish her teacher training. She taught for nineteen and a half years in Haringey in London, and after ten years became the first Black headteacher there. She also did an Open University degree in Education Studies in 1971.

In 1985, Hyacinth came to Bristol and became headteacher of St. Barnabas, a Church of England primary school in St. Paul's. She chose Bristol because she wanted to stay in education and in schools, and because Bristol had a strong African-Caribbean community contributing to the city's economy.

She found Bristol at the time to have a different approach and expectations from London. She felt that her new school was uncared for and she refused to open it unless it was properly cleaned. She felt that if a school was to set high standards for children, it had to be clean and well equipped. The school also had shabby old furniture which Hyacinth tried to get replaced.

She also felt that Black and minority ethnic parents should not have to accept poor standards of teaching or have low expectations. However, there were some difficulties with both Black and white parents when Hyacinth tried to set higher standards of attendance and behaviour, and introduced a new system of lesson plans.

Hyacinth believed it was important for teachers to live in the inner city communities in which they taught, and so she bought a house near the school, and she also chose to attend Ivy Church nearby.

The school was always part of the community and joined with others in important events such as St. Paul's Carnival, and even country dancing for Avon schools at Blaise Castle. There were also a lot of events to inspire the pupils, like Book Fairs with famous authors, and some entertainers, artists and musicians were involved with the school because of Hyacinth's efforts. One important project was when Diane Leemans worked with different classes and with parents, both Black and white, to make a community quilt, with portraits of the children, celebrating the life of St. Paul's. The quilt is a Pamodzi quilt, which means togetherness in Njanga, a language of Zambia. It is currently carefully stored in the Commonwealth and Empire Museum. Reflecting on these experiences, Hyacinth said, "St. Paul's is a very creative area."

Hyacinth spent countless hours with parents both in school and out of school, often dealing with their problems, but she saw herself as just helping others to succeed. When teachers got frustrated because she kept children in school who they thought should have been excluded, she said, 'If I start excluding them this is the end of them.'



Hyacinth receiving her MBE from the Queen in 2004

Photo courtesy of Charles Green photography

Hyacinth was awarded the MBE in 2004 for all her work in school and in the community.

Hyacinth's message is:

“ I wanted to feel, that wherever I went, I was making a contribution – it was the guiding principle behind my deciding to live and work in this country – to make a contribution to the country and also to Black people and to Black children. ”

Hyacinth Hall

■ Teachers' Background Notes

Hyacinth was born in Jamaica and educated from the age of four. She was inspired by Miss Crosbourne, a class teacher who taught her to enjoy learning. She was expected and encouraged to go to Teachers' Training College, which she did for a year and started her teaching career there. This included a short spell with the Salvation Army Institute for the Blind where she worked in Braille with primary children.

In 1958 she came to England to visit a friend and took an office job here. In 1964 she re-entered education to do a Teachers' Training course as a mature student, graduating in 1967. She taught for nineteen and a half years in Haringey, London and after ten years became the first Black headteacher there. She also did an Open University degree in Education Studies in 1971.

In 1985 Hyacinth Hall became headteacher of St. Barnabas, an inner city Church of England primary school in Bristol. She chose Bristol because she wanted to remain in education and in schools and Bristol had an African-Caribbean community contributing to the city's population and economy, but she felt she would not have coped without her London experience.

She found Bristol different and more inward looking than London. The new school was uncared for and she refused to open it unless it was properly cleaned as she felt if a school was to set standards for children, it had to be physically suitable. This caused problems with the School's Adviser, but Hyacinth eventually won her battle over the cleaning. The school also had shabby old furniture and equipment, which Hyacinth tried to get replaced. She also attracted support from outside agencies. The governors applied to the Merchant Venturers for financial support which led to an on-going relationship and they also gave the school money which was used for books, equipment and week-long school camps.

She felt that Black and minority ethnic parents should not have to accept poor standards or have low expectations of themselves. In London it had been accepted practice to have careful lesson plans and to set high standards but at her Bristol school she felt this was not so. The National Curriculum then came in and compelled people to plan and to look at how they were teaching children, but she felt it also added unnecessary burdens.

The Plowden Report stated it was important for teachers to live in the inner city communities in which they taught. Hyacinth agreed with this principle and bought a house near the school to be part of the community and she also chose to attend Ivy Church, an evangelical church nearby.

Hyacinth had support from Peter Barnett, the Vicar of St Barnabas. He was Chair of Governors, supported the school and even went looking for truanting children to get them back into school! She remembers that the curate, who was dual heritage would stand up for her especially when she was accused of being a “Bible Basher”! There were also some difficulties with both Black and white parents when Hyacinth tried to set standards of attendance and behaviour. Due to the reputation she had from working in London, she was asked to join a group being sent by the then Department of Education and Science to the USA. She feels it is sad that it took her inclusion in this DES team to change some people’s attitudes.

The school joined with others in important social and community celebration events such as St. Paul’s Carnival and even country dancing for Avon schools at Blaise Castle. There were also highly professional in-house events, like Book Fairs with famous authors, publishers and book illustrators attending. Many entertainers, artists and musicians were involved with the school and they did this because of the school's supportive staff and Hyacinth’s efforts. One important project was making a community quilt. Diane Leemans worked with different classes in the school and with parents, both Black and white, to make a quilt, with portraits of the children, celebrating the life of St. Paul’s. The quilt is a Pamodzi quilt, which means togetherness in Njanga, a language of Zambia. It is currently carefully stored in the Commonwealth and Empire Museum in Bristol.

Hyacinth was sad about the attitude of some middle class parents who, as an HM Inspector said, didn’t want the right thing for the school but the right thing for their children. She spent countless hours with parents both in school and out of school. A lot of her time was spent dealing with both children's and parents’ problems but she didn’t see herself as a social worker but as someone who helped others to achieve. When teachers got frustrated because she kept children who should have been excluded, she said, ‘If I start excluding them this is the end of them.’ Hyacinth found the most supportive teachers were those who had had dealings with what was then the Multicultural Education Centre.

Reflecting on her experiences, Hyacinth said, “St. Paul’s is a very creative area.” Hyacinth was awarded the MBE in 2004 for all her work in school and the community.

Hyacinth’s message is:

“I wanted to feel, that wherever I went, I was making a contribution – it was the guiding principle behind my deciding to live and work in this country – to make a contribution to the country and also to Black people and to Black children.”

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■ Suggested Activities

These are suggested activities based on Hyacinth Hall's biography. The activities in bold print have a detailed lesson plan on following pages.

Foundation Stage/ KS1 Activities	KS2 Activities	KS3 Activities
<p>Teaching each other Encourage pupils to teach each other something e.g. tie a shoe lace, write a word, kick a ball, say a word in another language.</p>	<p>Headteacher Interviewing the school's headteacher. Hot seating – I am the headteacher.</p>	<p>Making a difference Group work to consider how changes can be made in pupils' communities. Record on proforma* (PSHE)</p>
<p>Letter writing Write a class letter to Hyacinth Hall asking her questions. Address envelope, walk to Post Office, buy stamp and post letter.</p>	<p>Learning Discuss with pupils: What helps you enjoy learning? What do you enjoy learning about? How do you know you've learned something?</p>	<p>Community of enquiry activity – debate Read biography with pupils. Encourage pupils to ask questions. Sort into factual and philosophical. Select one to debate. (Speaking and Listening, English).</p>
<p>Community What makes up our community? Pupils to share own experience.</p>	<p>St. Paul's carnival Visit: www.stpaulscarnival.co.uk Create stories using photographs. Use Microsoft Photo Story 3 (free to download and accessible for pupils to use) to create story.</p>	<p>Achievements and awards What do pupils consider to be their achievements and what awards have they achieved? Find out more about the MBE Honours list. (See Guy Reid-Bailey KS3 lesson, in this pack). (PSHE/Citizenship).</p>

*See the resource list for details

Hyacinth Hall

■ Lesson Plan: Our community (Geography, PSHE)

KS1

2:6

Hyacinth Hall Lesson Plan

Learning objectives

- To learn from each other about parts of our community.
- To ask and answer questions about our experiences in the community.
- To know how Black and minority ethnic people contribute to education.

Key words/phrases	Resources	Organisation/Grouping
Community	Biography and picture of Hyacinth Hall	Whole class
Question words – who, why, where, when, what?	Large piece of paper or a few glued together	Individual

Suggested activities

- Share Hyacinth Hall's story and her picture with the pupils.
- Talk about the community around the school.
- With pupils in a large circle and a large piece of paper in the middle encourage pupils to add something word/picture to the class record of the community- include these prompts – people, buildings, spaces, activities (places of worship, supplementary schools).
- Individual pupils to record what parts of the community they have contacts with.
- Walk around the local community, pupils to point out places discussed in circle activity. Take photos and display.

Plenary

- Pupils to share with others what their connection with local community is, e.g. local football team or first language school. Pupils to ask and answer questions of each other.

Learning outcomes/Success criteria

- Pupils can make a connection with each other through the local community.
- Pupils have listened to each other and asked questions of each other.
- Pupils know about Hyacinth Hall and her contribution to Bristol.

Assessment opportunities

Questioning skills.

Homework task or Parent/Carer involvement

Encourage parents/carers to add to the class recording of the community.

Hyacinth Hall

■ Lesson Plan: Hot seat the Headteacher

(Speaking and Listening)

Learning objectives

- To learn about the job of the Headteacher.
- To ask and answer questions.
- To know that Black people have contributed to the world of education

Key words/phrases	Resources	Organisation/Grouping
Headteacher	Biography and picture	Whole class
Question words – when, what, where, why, who?	of Hyacinth Hall Hot seat	Groups

Suggested activities

- Share Hyacinth Hall's biography and picture.
- Brainstorm the job of headteacher. Groups to discuss and record questions to ask the headteacher.
- Interview headteacher of school about their job.
- Pupils to take turns to 'be' headteacher and sit in the hot seat. (This activity could take place at different times over the week).
- Other pupils to ask questions of 'headteacher'.
- Make a class book of questions and answers, asked and answered.
- Become headteacher for an hour/morning. Do the real job! Feedback to class/school about the experience.

Plenary

- Pupils consider whether they would like to become a headteacher, what aspects they would like about the job and what they would find difficult.

Learning outcomes/Success criteria

- Pupils can aspire to being a headteacher.
- Pupils can ask and answer questions.
- Pupils know about Hyacinth Hall and her contribution to Bristol.

Assessment opportunities

Questioning

Homework task or Parent/Carer involvement

Ask parent/carers about their headteachers when they were at school.

Hyacinth Hall

■ Lesson Plan: Making a difference (Citizenship)

KSS3

2:6

Hyacinth Hall Lesson Plan

Learning objectives

- To consider how changes can be made in the community.
- To collaboratively plan action that would make positive changes.
- To present action plan to peers.
- To know how Black and minority ethnic people have a positive influence on our communities.

Key words/phrases	Resources	Organisation/Grouping
Community	Biography and picture of Hyacinth Hall	Whole class
Contribute	Making a change in the community	Groups
Contribution	Proforma*	
Political		

Suggested activities

- Read Hyacinth Hall's biography.
- As a class brainstorm how changes can be made in the community - individual, political, and community action. Hear from pupils how they can impact on this.
- In groups pupils should plan a series of actions which would create positive change in their community, considering all aspects of their actions and the impact on different groups in the community.
- Pupils should present their plan to the rest of the class, answer their questions and receive constructive criticism.
- Groups can then readjust their plans based on feedback from the class.

Plenary

- Whole class to revisit Hyacinth Hall's biography and her contributions to education in Bristol.

Learning outcomes/Success criteria

- Pupils can identify different ways of making a difference in their community.
- Pupils can plan actions and consider possible impacts.
- Pupils know about Hyacinth Hall and her contribution to Bristol.

Homework task or Parent/Carer involvement

Pupils can be encouraged to discuss their plans with parents, local groups. Send copy of plan(s) to local councillor.

*See the resource list for details

Black Bristolians

2 : 6 : 8 9

Hyacinth Hall

■ Resources

- Making a change in the community Proforma - included.

Contact details

Name: Hyacinth Hall

Tel: 0117 924 9626

Willing to be contacted by teachers
for further questions? Yes

Willing to come into school to talk to pupils? Yes

Hyacinth Hall

■ Resources: Making a change in the community

What do we want to change?		How do we know?
Action 1		By who? When?
Action 2		By who? When?
Action 3		By who? When?
Evaluation How do we know?		
What needs to happen next?		