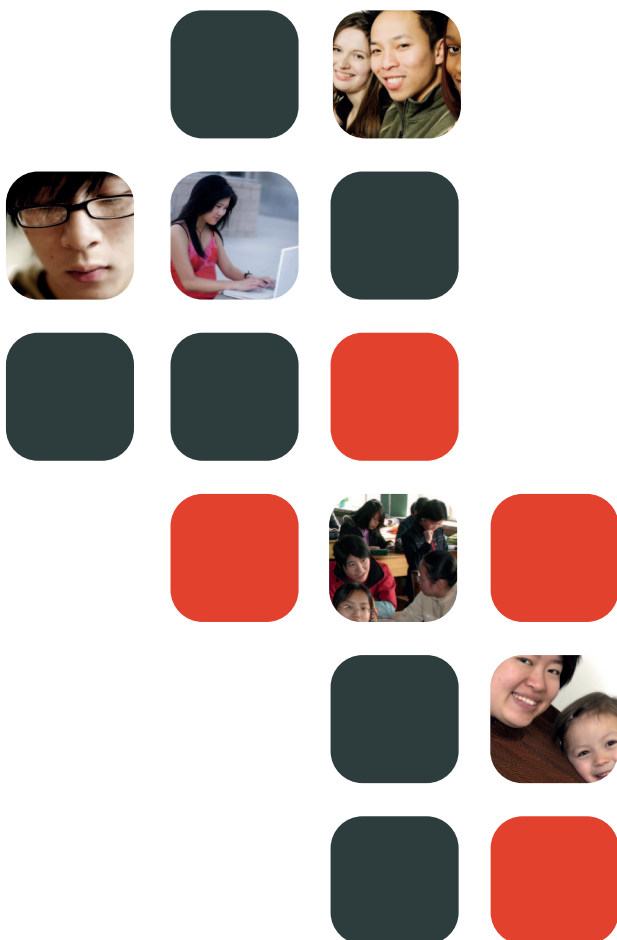




BTEG

BLACK TRAINING & ENTERPRISE GROUP



What more can we takeaway from the Chinese community?

British Chinese Community and Educational Achievement

A BTEG policy
briefing paper

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1 INTRODUCTION

This briefing aims to explore why British Chinese pupils consistently outperform other ethnic groups in education. According to the UK's last census, the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) population increased from 6 percent in 1991 to 9 percent in 2001. The British Chinese population in the same period grew from 0.3 percent to 0.4 percent¹.

The latest GCSE statistics released in December 2009 by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)² now the Department for Education (DfE), shows that British Chinese students are consistently outperforming other ethnic groups regardless of gender and income by a considerable margin. A staggering 87.5 percent of British Chinese students attain 5+ A*-C GCSE grades whilst their white counterparts manage only 69.6 percent. Black students from African and Caribbean descent attain a combined 67 percent respectively. Children of Indian heritage are the closest ethnic group in gaining similar levels of attainment but still only manage 82.2 percent exposing a gap of nearly 5.5 percentage points³.

Rather than focusing on why other minority ethnic communities are underachieving, this paper looks at the cultural emphasis that the British Chinese community place on the value of education. This briefing does not focus on effects of racism, institutionally or otherwise. However, institutional racism has a significant and detrimental effect on educational achievement.

Institutional Factors

A recent important study⁴ carried out on Standard Assessment Tests (SAT) results at the age of eleven concluded that *"there are enduring and significant differences in teachers' assessments of pupils from different ethnic groups"* when tests were marked internally and externally. The study concluded that Chinese (and Indian pupils) are unconsciously marked-up by their teachers while Black Caribbean and Black African students are marked down through stereotyping in contrast to other factors.

Although this study concludes that there is an over assessment of British Chinese pupils in examinations the implication of Black Caribbean and Black African students getting marked

1 Statistics taken from <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles/commentaries/ethnicity.asp>. Commentary based on 2001 census conducted in the UK.

2 The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) formally changed to the Department for Education (DfE) on 12th May 2010 as a direct result of Britain's 2010 election

3 Figures obtained from www.dcsf.gov.uk. To view table for Ethnic Achievement, 5+ A*-C grades please refer to Chart 1

4 Simon Burgess and Ellen Greaves 2009, Test scores, Subjective Assessment and Stereotyping of Ethnic Minorities, Centre for Market and Public Organisation, Bristol Institute of Public Affairs, University of Bristol

Chart 1: Percentage of ethnic groups received 5+ A* - C grades All Pupils 2009



Source: www.dcsf.gov.uk

down is disturbing. The study also found that pupils from particular ethnic groups that typically scored highly in subjects also tended to be over assessed i.e. British Chinese students that do well in Mathematics will also get over marked in that particular subject. The study concludes that it cannot fully explain the “statistical role of ethnicity” and would therefore only clarify that the educational gap is at most for British Chinese pupils, slightly exaggerated.

Family structure

The 2001 census also revealed that only 15.09 percent of British Chinese families with dependent children are headed by lone parents while 47.81 percent of black Caribbean families share the same experience⁵. This means that black Caribbean children are over three times more likely to be raised in a lone parent household than their British Chinese counterparts.

5 <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/product.asp?vlnk=10991>, Focus on Ethnicity and Identity data, Families and Households, Table 4.3



2 THE VALUE OF EDUCATION

BAME communities have a greater proportion of people achieving higher qualifications but a larger number of people without any qualifications. A lot of research has focussed on the possible disadvantages that they may experience in and around the educational system. There is a propensity in the media to report on the disadvantage of ethnic groups with recent press looking at the low educational attainment of white working class boys. There seem to be few studies in comparison on why British Chinese (and Indian) pupils are performing best in the education system and why as an ethnic group, they seem to be negating the effects of disadvantages such as racism and financial deprivation that other ethnic minorities and migrant communities experience¹.

N. Kristof an American journalist, and a winner of two Pulitzer Prizes expressed his appreciation for the Chinese attitude towards education in an article he produced for the New York Times “The Educated Giant” in 2007. Kristof who lived previously in China for 5 years said that one of the main reasons that China is becoming one of the most influential countries in the world is the cultural effort it puts into building human capital. This is remarkably apparent in the Chinese attitude and culture towards education. The Far-East attitude towards achievement, education or otherwise, is centralised on a person’s amount of effort rather than natural ability. This attitude may also have a bearing on the British Chinese communities.

An example of this attitude towards education achievement was highlighted by Kristof on a visit to China.

“Students show up at school at about 6:30 am to get extra tutoring before classes start at 7:30. They go home for a lunch break at 11:20 and then are back at school from 2pm until 5. They do homework every night and weekend, and an hour or two of homework each day during their eight-week summer vacation...China has an enormous cultural respect for education, part of its Confucian legacy, so governments and families alike pour resources into education. Teachers are respected and compensated far better, financially and emotionally...Chinese students are hungry for education and advancement and work harder.”²

Francis (2005) explores the theme of ‘value of education’ further in her research paper entitled “*British-Chinese pupils’ and parents’ constructions of the value of education*”

1 Hidden from public view? Racism against the UK’s Chinese population, The Monitoring Group, 2009, reports that the Chinese community suffers from “even higher levels of racial violence or harassment than those experienced by any other minority group”

2 Excerpt from, The Educated Giant, The New York Times, Nicholas D Kristof, 28/05/07

Francis held semi-structured interviews with three different groups that included 80 pupils of British-Chinese origin (from Years 10 and 11), their parents (numbering 30), and their teachers.

The study found that Chinese parents also showed a strong parental commitment to further their children's education via supplementary schooling and that a number of parents admitted that they were paying for extra tuition as well as sending their children to weekend Chinese school. This surprisingly was not exclusive to affluent Chinese parents as it was also a feature of a number of working class parents too. A British-Chinese pupil reflected her parents' commitment to educational achievement by comparing her parents' attitude with one of her English friends:

"It's just their (Chinese parents') expectations are so much higher. And they just expect you to do better than other people. Like I have one other friend who her parents doesn't really mind, just as long as she does alright and tries her hardest that's ok. My parents expect me to get the best grades. They expect me to be better than other people. And if I don't then they'll continuously start nagging at me to do better and everything, whereas white, I mean my friend's parent will be like, 'oh ok, you tried your best, make sure you try to improve it'. Well my parents will continuously be like 'try and practice your maths and get it better'. Like if I get a B, they'll be like, 'why didn't you get an A?'"³

Francis comes to the conclusion that the Chinese value of education is "exceptionally high" and had "positive consequences both for the educational performance of British-Chinese pupils in the British education system, and for their potential social-class mobility". She also stated that "This value was consistent in Chinese pupils and parents irrespective of social class, gender, or ability".

Modood 2004⁴ echoes Francis' claims and reinforces that the ambition among South Asians and Chinese to be educated is seen as integral to their social mobility ambitions. Modood goes further by explaining the process in his report and suggests that "the 'motor' of the British South Asian and Chinese overcoming of disadvantage lies in migrant parents getting their children to internalize high educational ambitions and to enforce appropriate behaviour". This 'motor' is internalized and reproduced from generation to generation and would go a long way to explain the continual drive of the British Chinese population to succeed at high levels in educational attainment. High educational attainment it seems is proportionately linked to high levels of social mobility and is seen as an important mechanism in achieving

3 Becky Francis, 2005, British-Chinese Pupils' and parents' constructions of the value of education, Roehampton University

4 Tariq Modood, June 2004, Cultural Trends, Vol13 (2), No.50, pp87-105, Capitals, Ethnic Identity and Educational Qualifications, University of Bristol, Routledge

success. Additionally, according to the 2001 census, 30 percent of the British Chinese post-16 population are full time students compared to a UK average of 8 percent¹.

It is evident that the cultural attitude of the Chinese community plays a large part in their success towards educational achievement, but what does this mean for other ethnic groups and migrant groups? It may mean that many pupils in the UK need less exposure to a popular, dominant culture of the latest computer games and TV programmes. All young people in the UK experience this culture but according to Modood, a large proportion of South Asian parents try to limit their children's contact with this 'counter-productive culture' as inferred below.

“There is working-class, popular culture, often American derived, especially in relation to youth culture, of Hollywood, soap-operas, music, clothes fashion, celebrities, football, pubs, clubs and binge-drinking. It is a dominant culture...Asian parents no doubt have little credence in this domain and try to limit their children's exposure to it.”²

1 <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles/commentaries/ethnicity.asp>.

2 Excerpt from Tariq Modood, June 2004, Cultural Trends, Vol13 (2), No.50, pp87-105, Capitals, Ethnic Identity and Educational Qualifications, University of Bristol, Routledge



3 FINANCIAL DEPRIVATION AND GENDER ATTAINMENT

The high value that the Chinese community put on educational attainment also seems to significantly reduce the effects of financial barriers and the economic climate. Statistics released by the DfE consistently show that poorer children are significantly more likely to achieve less than more affluent children in their exams. Financial deprivation in the UK is indicated by pupils who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and pupils who aren't. Using this indicator, the margin of disparity in educational attainment is significantly detrimental across all racial groups. For white children, attainment levels (achieving 5+ A*-C grades 2009) differ by as much as 29 percentage points with the margin for black children standing at 12.6 percent. While this is overwhelmingly apparent in every single racial category, the disparity between Chinese pupils is marginal. 85.2 percent of poorer Chinese children achieve 5+ A-C grades with more affluent Chinese children achieving 87.8 percent. This creates a 2.6 percent difference in attainment between poor and more affluent Chinese students in the UK³.

Chart 2: Percentage of ethnic groups received 5+ A* - C grades Non-FSM pupils 2009



Source: www.dcsf.gov.uk

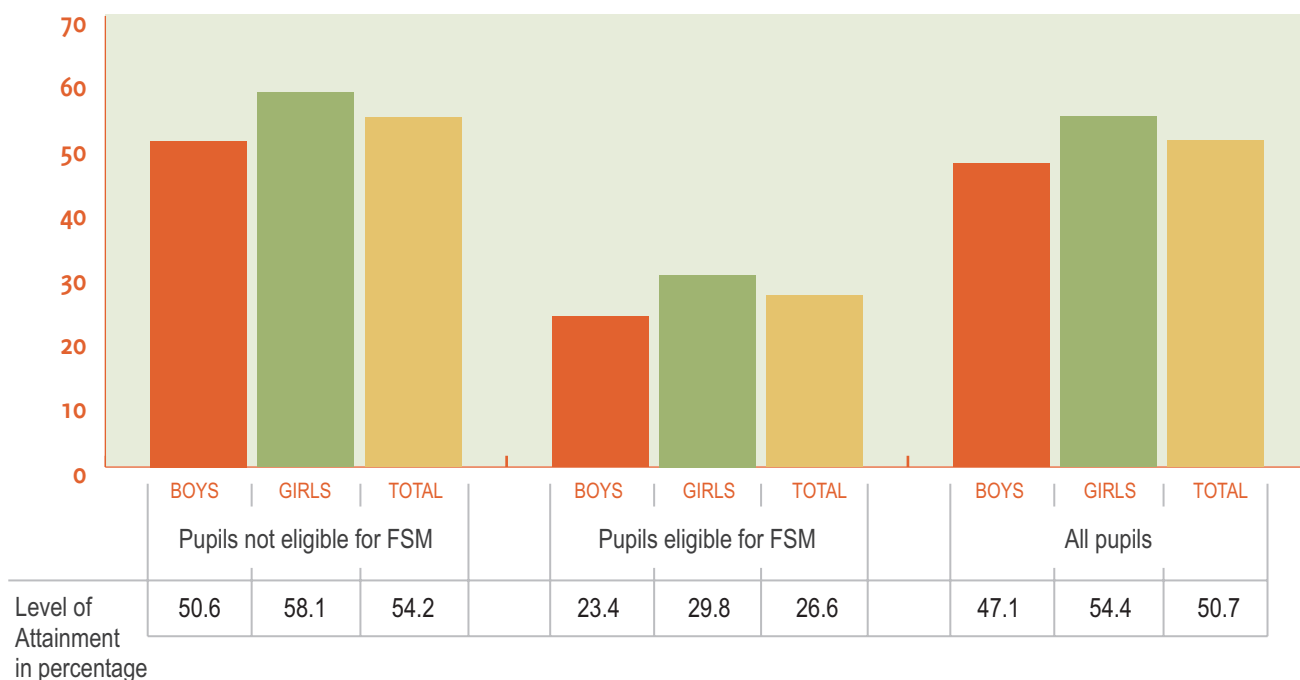
FSM and gender achievement it seems plays a big part in educational attainment and has recently been highlighted in the attainment levels of white working class boys with only 39.2

3 Figures obtained from www.dcsf.gov.uk. Please refer to Chart 2 and Appendix 1

percent achieving 5+ A-C grades. Black Caribbean boys are marginally better but still only achieve 45.4 percent. 78.3 percent of boys from Chinese heritage achieve 5+ A-C grades with similar levels of financial deprivation¹. This stark comparison could largely be put down towards the perceived attitude and culture instilled towards education and teacher expectations.

When taking into account educational achievement at 5+ A*-C grades including English and Mathematics 2009 there are some startling differences towards the national average. The national average of pupils achieving 5+ A*-C grades including English and Mathematics stands at 50.7 percent (just shy of 1 in 2 achieving) where British Chinese pupils attain 71.7 percent revealing nearly a 21 percent point gap². When you take FSM as a poverty indicator into account the differences are astonishing. The national average for FSM pupils achieving 5+ A*-C grades including English and Mathematics is just 26.6 percent³ amounting to nearly 1 in 4 pupils achieving the grade or conversely 3 in 4 failing. An amazing 70.8 percent of British Chinese pupils achieve 5+ A*-C grades including English and Mathematics exposing a gap of 44.2 percentage points while their nearest rivals British Indian are at 48 percent⁴.

Chart 3: Gender Totals of pupils achieving 5+ A* - C grades including English and Mathematics 2009



Source: www.dcsf.gov.uk

1 Figures obtained from www.dcsf.gov.uk. Please refer to appendix 1
 2 Figures obtained from www.dcsf.gov.uk. Please refer to appendix 5 and table 3
 3 Figures obtained from www.dcsf.gov.uk. Please refer to table 3
 4 Figures obtained from www.dcsf.gov.uk. Please refer to appendix 4

When we take gender into account, FSM British Chinese Boys have a 64.2 percent⁵ success rate (national average for FSM boys is 23.4 percent⁶) which is both higher than the total national average for pupils that are NOT eligible for free school meals (54.2 percent) and the national average for girls not eligible for free school meals at 58.1 percent. This seems to suggest that financial deprivation (based on FSM as a poverty indicator) does not have the same effects on the British Chinese as on other ethnicities.

Like in any other ethnic groups and on a national level, British Chinese girls outperform British Chinese boys⁷. British Chinese girls are the highest achieving group at 5+ A*-C GCSE grades including and excluding English and Mathematics and both combined⁸. British Chinese FSM girls also seem to negate the effects of deprivation when compared to the national average of girls not eligible for FSM (92.2 percent compared to 76.9 percent) and all other female ethnic groups not entitled to FSM. This surprisingly is also apparent in within their own ethnicity as British Chinese girls who are eligible for FSM achieving 5+ A*-C grades actually outperform British Chinese girls who are NOT eligible for FSM by 1.1 percentage point (92.2 percent to 91.1 percent)⁹.

5 Figures obtained from www.dcsf.gov.uk. Please refer to appendix 4

6 Figures obtained from www.dcsf.gov.uk. Please refer to table 3

7 Figures obtained from www.dcsf.gov.uk. Please refer to table 1 and appendix 5

8 Figures obtained from www.dcsf.gov.uk. Please refer to tables 1 and 2 appendices 1, 2, 3 and 4

9 Figures obtained from www.dcsf.gov.uk. Please refer to table 2 and appendix 1



4 CONCLUSION

This section summarises the main points that have been covered in this briefing and offers further thought on potential steps forward.



- British Chinese parents place a high value on education and recognize that attainment in education is a fundamental element towards higher social mobility in later life.
- Chinese culture emphasises effort over natural ability in regards to attainment
- British Chinese parents show a strong commitment to their child's education via supplementary education irrespective of financial barriers
- British Chinese parents appear to limit their children's exposure to counter-productive influences that might hinder their educational attainment
- The national average for all FSM pupils achieving 5+ A*-C grades including English and Mathematics in 2009 stood at 26.6 percent while British Chinese pupils who are entitled to FSM achieve 70.8 percent in the same category.
- British Chinese boys have a higher level of achievement than the national average for girls in all attainment categories.
- British Chinese students negate the effect of financial deprivation (using FSM as a poverty indicator) in education. This is highlighted by:
 - British Chinese boys who are eligible for FSM outperform the national average for pupils in the UK who are not eligible for FSM
 - British Chinese girls who are eligible for FSM outperform British Chinese girls who are not eligible for FSM

BTEG asked the Department for Education if they had a particular viewpoint on the high achievement of the British Chinese in educational attainment (taking into account FSM as an indicator of poverty and why the British Chinese as an ethnic minority seem not to be adversely affected by the disadvantages that other ethnic minorities such as Black Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani Pupils are experiencing). The DfE advised BTEG that *“Unfortunately, the Department does not collate such information, therefore we are unable to assist you with your briefing”*¹. This was an unexpected response from the DfE as a large proportion of statistical data used was in fact collated from their website.

There is a high propensity for government and media to compare BAME achievement against the ethnic majority in education. Perhaps, the focus of assessment in educational achievement should be drawn against the ethnic groups that have the highest level of attainment, and not the largest amount of pupils. This change of focus would not only inform the public about the wider gap in attainment between the lowest and highest achieving ethnic groups, but could also lead to more research and studies that identify the impact of cultural trends towards educational achievement, rather than deprivation indices or poverty marks alone.

If we ever hope to produce the grades that British Chinese students are achieving for all pupils, we may need to start looking deeper at some of the fundamental attitudes that the British Chinese community have towards education. The existing focus on under-achievement masks the important and positive achievements that ethnic groups such as the British Chinese are making. Finding a way to inspire and reproduce these attitudes on a wider scale might bring other ethnic groups one step closer to reducing the ethnic achievement gap and to creating a real desire for educational success for generations to come. We do however recognise the importance of tackling racial inequalities in education and the impact of institutional racism.

1 Excerpt taken from email correspondence from DCSF 2010



5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- There needs to be research on why some ethnic groups are not being adversely affected by the disadvantages that other ethnic minorities are facing and why in some cases, they achieve significantly higher than their peers and national average.
- Parents do help to raise educational attainment and some parents need targeted support and guidance.
- Government should focus more on Chinese educational attainment and understand better what factors contribute to this success story.



6 WHAT DO YOU THINK?

In order to move the achievement debate forward in a way that truly corresponds to underachievement of disadvantaged BAME and migrant communities we would like to hear your views on the following questions and any further comments or suggestions you would like to share with BTEG and its network.

- Do you agree or disagree with the brief analysis presented in this document about British Chinese pupils outperforming other ethnic groups?
- What approaches/action would you recommend to make the case to better address under-achievement of other BME groups in education?
- Do you have any evidence (anecdotal, qualitative, quantitative data) to inform this debate?
- What policy advice/support do you need to effectively promote the needs of BME educational achievement in policy development and implementation?

Please contact James Daothong at james@bteg.co.uk or on 020 7843 6120



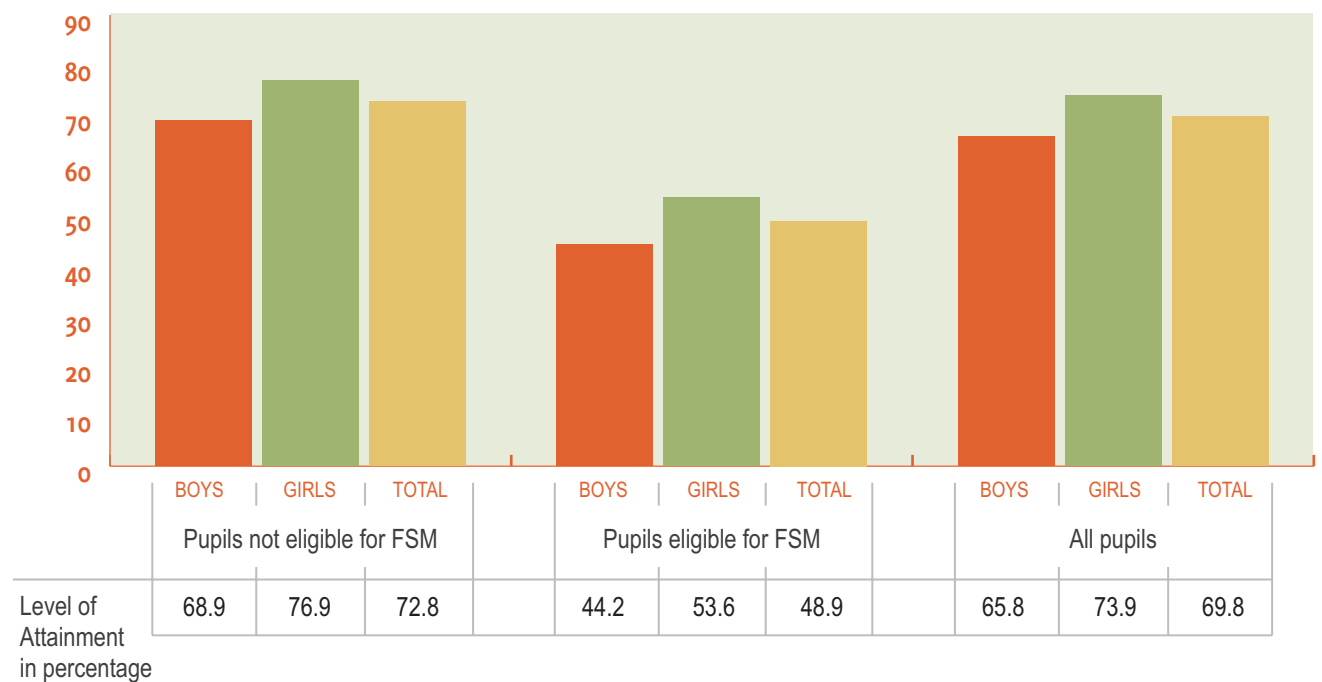
APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Ethnic Groups achieving 5+ A* - C grades FSM pupils 2009



Source: www.dcsf.gov.uk

Appendix 2: Gender Totals of pupils achieving 5+ A* - C grades 2009



Source: www.dcsf.gov.uk

Appendix 3: Ethnic Groups achieving 5+ A* - C grades including English and Mathematics Non FSM pupils 2009



Source: www.dcsf.gov.uk

Appendix 4: Ethnic Groups achieving 5+ A* - C grades including English and Mathematics FSM pupils 2009



Source: www.dcsf.gov.uk



Source: www.dcsf.gov.uk

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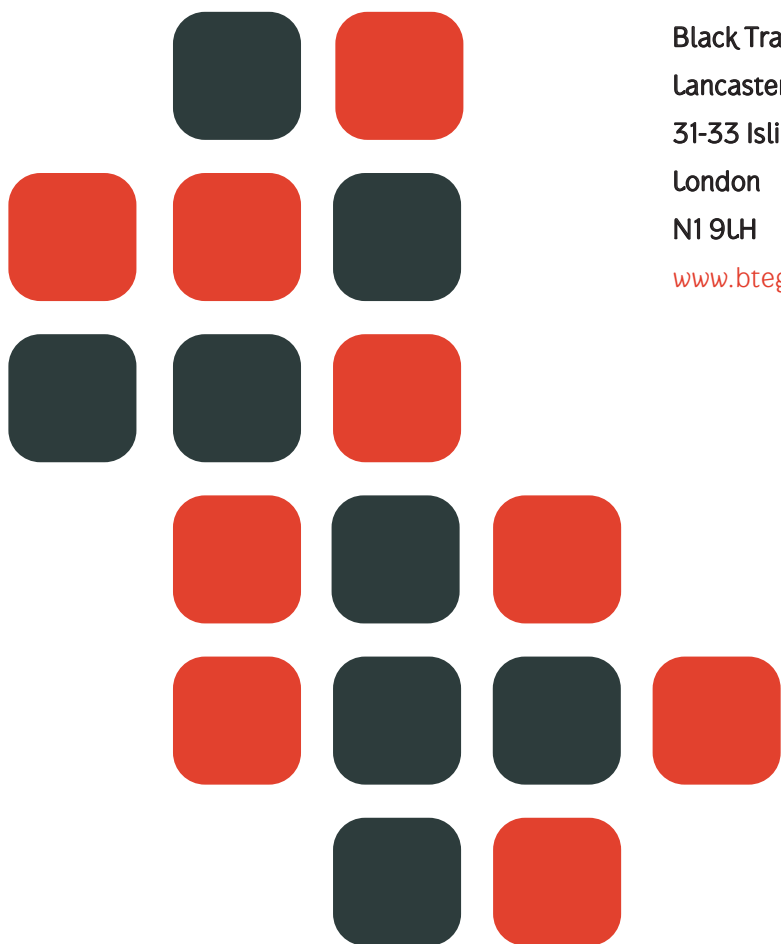
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<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles/commentaries/ethnicity.asp>

About BTEG

BTEG is a national charity providing a voice to government for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations. BTEG has a successful track record of advising government departments and non-departmental bodies and providing organisational support for local groups. BTEG is a member of several central governmental advisory groups including DWP's Ethnic Minority Advisory Group, the Department for Education's Third Sector Group and Communities and Local Government's Voluntary and Community Sector Board.



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