

## Executive Summary

# Beyond the school gates: Developing the roles and connections of supplementary schools

*Selina Nwulu*

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## How might supplementary schools evolve, broaden their connections and help improve the life chances of the black and minority ethnic young people they serve?

*RSA Investigate-Ed* is a series of investigations on key education issues. Speedier than a commission approach, but more in-depth than a traditional seminar, these investigations offer policymakers, practitioners and other stakeholders structured spaces to diagnose problems and generate solutions.

This investigation focused on the UK's supplementary school sector and the role it plays in tackling inequality. Supplementary schools offer valuable educational, cultural and language provision to young people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. Such schools bridge not only the attainment gap caused by inadequate mainstream provision but cultural and generation gaps that can form within diasporic communities. Although they are relatively unknown outside the communities they serve, such schools play an important role in tackling ingrained inequality in many local and national education systems. This report seeks to highlight the existing value of supplementary schools and understand what currently prevents them from having wider impact on inequalities lying beyond the school gates.

Supplementary schools have a rich history as mission-driven organisations, able to mobilise community resources, leaders and volunteers into action. Their effectiveness is evident in the rapid improvements made in BME attainment in the last decade, with BME pupils outperforming their white British peers at GCSE. Such improvements are the result of hard work on the part of mainstream schools, supported by a number of external partners as well as families and communities, and working within a policy framework that recognised the importance of removing educational inequality. Supplementary schools have played a significant role in these improvements.

Unfortunately while there has been improvement within schools, the post-16 outcomes for BME young people demonstrate that significant inequalities remain. In the further education sector BME students are far less likely to undertake A-levels or formal apprenticeships, instead opting for other vocational qualifications. The picture in universities is similarly distorted. BME students are concentrated into new and urban universities and are less likely to be accepted into Russell Group universities even where they have similar grades to white British applicants. These educational inequalities are mirrored in the labour market where BME young people are more likely to be unemployed.

Supplementary schools have a part to play in tackling these challenges, but cannot, and should not be expected to do so alone. The wider learning ecology, including policy makers, schools, cultural organisations, employers and universities will need to work with supplementary schools to mutual benefit if these inequalities are to be addressed.

### Our investigation was based on:

- Analysis of the historic role of supplementary schools and their impact on BME outcomes.
- In-depth discussions with key practitioners and experts within the supplementary school field.
- Interviews with practitioners, local authority employees, local authority advisers and activists.
- Focus groups of supplementary school leaders and volunteers.

### The outcomes of the investigation include:

- Key recommendations for supplementary school policy and practice in the UK.
- A mapping exercise demonstrating the key strengths, weaknesses and challenges facing the supplementary school sector.

## Conclusions

In a challenging climate, it could be tempting for supplementary schools to focus inwards on surviving tougher times; consolidating their existing offer; meeting new codes of practice to allay government fears of extremism; and increasing the supply of volunteers. Our analysis suggests otherwise; many supplementary schools, with appropriate external support, are ready to harness their existing strengths to be more ambitious, in four ways:

- Articulating a broader purpose to support the development of young people's social, emotional, creative and cultural capacities.
- Developing a deeper set of connections with people, mainstream schools and other organisations who also aim to improve outcomes for BME young people.
- Finding new approaches to understand their impact on young people and communities.
- Building new partnerships to support their longer term financial sustainability.

Supplementary schools are justifiably proud and protective of their independence and distinctive mission. We believe that they have the experience, expertise and values to become better connected to the broader education landscape, whilst retaining their power as a movement and continuing to challenge mainstream assumptions and practices.

Our recommendations aim to stimulate debate and action amongst both supplementary schools and those who should support and learn from them. Although aimed primarily at England, we hope that they might resonate beyond its borders.

## Post-16 inequalities

### FURTHER EDUCATION

- BME groups are more likely to stay in full-time education than their white peers but are more likely to pursue vocational qualifications rather than taking A-levels.
- BME participation in apprenticeships is disproportionately low (8.7 percent) and those undertaking such apprenticeships are less likely to progress into employment upon completion.

### HIGHER EDUCATION

- BME students are concentrated in new and urban universities eg there are more black students attending the University of East London than the top 20 universities combined.
- BME students are less likely to be offered a place at Russell Group universities than their white peers with similar grades.

### SOCIAL NETWORKS & CAPITAL

- BME young people often lack connections to powerful and influential social networks.

### LABOUR MARKET

- BME young people are more likely to be unemployed with black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups twice as likely to be unemployed as their white peers.
- BME graduates with degrees from prestigious universities are more likely to be unemployed than their white peers.

### ARTS PARTICIPATION

- People from BME backgrounds make up only 2 percent of amateur arts groups.
- People from BME backgrounds make up only 7 percent of the UK's creative workforce.

### HEALTH

- People from BME backgrounds are more likely to work in temporary or precarious employment which has been linked to lower wellbeing.
- Young black people are more likely to have higher rates of mental health problems.

## Key Findings

### STRENGTHS

- Supplementary schools are spaces for BME children to improve wellbeing, and social and emotional outcomes.
- Supplementary schools act as community hubs.
- Supplementary schools engage BME parents in ways that mainstream schools have often struggled to achieve.
- Small scale studies have shown how BME students attending supplementary schools have achieved significantly higher grades at GCSE level.

### CHALLENGES

- Supplementary schools are perceived with a mixture of suspicion and indifference from both national and local government.
- Supplementary schools often have unproductive, fragile partnerships with mainstream schools.
- Demonstrating the impact of supplementary schools on formal attainment is difficult.

### WEAKNESSES

- The mission of the supplementary school sector is evolving and can be difficult to define and communicate.
- While some supplementary schools work with youth and supplementary school alumni, there is currently a limited capacity to develop a coherent extended offer.
- Supplementary schools would benefit from building stronger partnerships with a broader range of organisations.

- There are shifting levels of demand for supplementary schools.
- There are mixed perspectives about the future of supplementary schools.
- Supplementary schools are struggling to recruit and retain volunteers.
- Supplementary schools struggle to find sustainable revenue streams.

## What are supplementary schools?

The term **supplementary school**, or **complementary school** as it is also known, incorporates a diversity of provision including **Saturday schools, homework and after school clubs**. Supplementary schools are usually **community spaces, led by volunteers, which offer educational and cultural opportunities outside of mainstream school provision for minority ethnic children and young people**.

**Supplementary schools have existed for at least a century, with a significant expansion in numbers since the 1960s, driven by increased immigration. With approximately 3,000 supplementary schools across the UK they represent a powerful network of grassroots organisations, purpose driven and**

**responsive to the needs of their community. Research identifies two main overlapping categories of supplementary schools:**

- 1) Schools that focus on improving the educational attainment of their students and who provide support in national curriculum subjects. This type is particularly dominant within African Caribbean communities where the rate of educational attainment has tended to be below average.**
- 2) Schools which focus on the cultural and/or language traditions of a particular community, common in Bangladeshi, Punjabi and Chinese supplementary schools.**

## Key Recommendations

- 1. There should be greater encouragement and support for supplementary schools to work with youth (between the ages of 14–19), directly supporting their further and higher education, career ambitions and transition to adulthood.**

Given the links supplementary schools have with students and their families, many are well placed to play a pivotal role in supporting BME youth from low income backgrounds as well as youth who are new to the country. Depending on the relevant connections and motivations of the supplementary school, schools could offer careers advice, organise work placements and formalise links with higher education institutions and local businesses for future employment opportunities.

- 2. University outreach, bursary and widening participation programmes aim to connect with supplementary schools in their area, giving them similar opportunities to those offered to mainstream schools.**

By working with supplementary schools, as well as engaging directly with specific communities who are underrepresented within their academic institutions, higher education institutions can help embed these schools in the wider educational network and increase their visibility.

- 3. Wherever possible and appropriate, mainstream schools open up any professional learning opportunities to staff from supplementary schools.**

We also recommend that Teaching School Alliances also extend their Continuing Professional Development (CPD) offer to supplementary schools.

- 4. All local organisations who work directly with young people consider the scope to build relationships with supplementary schools.**

Local ‘brokerage’ organisations, (for instance, education business partnerships, Arts Council Bridge organisations, or youth sector networks) should seek to integrate supplementary schools into their existing networks.

- 5. Supplementary schools, both individually and through their local and national networks, connect with the youth sector – in particular**

**through the new Centre for Youth Impact – to improve approaches to evaluating impact.**

- 6. Mainstream schools should consider whether pupil premium funding could be used to support partnerships with supplementary schools particularly in using the expertise of supplementary school teachers to support BME students.**

Mainstream schools could hire supplementary school practitioners as advisers in how to connect with low performing BME students or students newly arrived in the country. They could also hire supplementary school teachers to develop and implement strategies in how to have more meaningful engagement with parents from BME communities in their school.

- 7. Local and national government, and national agencies, trusts and foundations, should consider options for offering some ‘stability funding’ to supplementary schools – three to five year agreements that support their longer term viability as sustainable, ‘commission-ready’ organisations.**

This funding model would be appropriate for supplementary schools willing to formalise their role and operating methods, for example, by strengthening safeguarding and off-site procedures. The duty to assess the risks associated with out-of-school settings, including supplementary schools, has been passed on to local authorities but without allocated funding. An intelligent compact with supplementary schools could support their stability and improve procedures and trust.

- 8. Arts Council England should consider using its strategic funding to support supplementary schools as cultural organisations, and to encourage its national portfolio of funded organisations to develop partnerships with supplementary schools.**

Supplementary schools offer a range of cultural, linguistic and artistic activities in an environment where community heritage is valued. The Arts Council should look to supplementary schools as a powerful network of cultural ‘points of contact’, connecting with parts of the community that the rest of the arts sector struggles to reach.

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*To find out more about the RSA’s education programme, and opportunities for partnerships on future investigations, contact [education@rsa.org.uk](mailto:education@rsa.org.uk), or call Joe Hallgarten on 020 7451 6917.*