
EVALUATION OF THE EXCELLENCE IN CITIES/ETHNIC MINORITY ACHIEVEMENT GRANT (EIC/EMAG) PILOT PROJECT

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Introduction

The Excellence in Cities (EiC)/Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) Pilot Project was initiated by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in 2002. Thirty-five primary and secondary schools participated in the initiative by identifying target groups of students and running a wide range of programmes and activities aimed at raising achievement. The evaluation of the Pilot Project, carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) between August 2002 and July 2004, involved an annual headteachers' questionnaire survey and ten case-study visits which included interviews with school staff, students, LEA officers and parents..

Key Findings

- The EiC/EMAG Pilot Project has served to enhance existing EMAG activities aimed at minority ethnic groups in most participating schools and initiate new approaches for others. Where schools had previously been active in their work to raise the achievement of minority ethnic students, the project provided the scope for them to deliver some of the best practice ideas which they may have previously identified.
- Schools were given the scope to interpret the Government's central aims of the EiC/EMAG Pilot Project when devising their own strategy for raising achievement of their targeted groups of students at the local level. As such, over the two-year period of evaluation, schools have sought to enhance the self-esteem and self-confidence of minority ethnic students, as well as raising the achievement of these groups of students.
- Whilst project coordinators in schools made considered decisions in order to select participant students upon whom projects were likely to have the most impact, they were sensitive to the challenges which could be created by alienating groups of students. Schools were keen to avoid forming groups of students who could be viewed either as high profile or as groups of underachievers with behavioural problems.
- Most projects were either currently engaged in or had plans to start some form of monitoring and evaluation, often by obtaining the views of teaching staff about the impact of projects on students and also by assessing students' test or examination results. LEA officers had carried out monitoring and evaluation activities in schools to varying degrees: from in-depth termly and annual assessments to no form of intervention at all. Evaluation activities included school visits, target setting and end-of-project conferences.
- Two of the main barriers to learning which were identified included 'lack of language skills' and 'cultural stereotypes'. Some school staff, concerned about the language skills of students, focused their attention on students for whom English was a second language (EAL). In other schools, where cultural stereotypes were thought to be hindering student progress, projects were directed towards addressing issues such as peer pressure and negative expectations.
- For some projects time demands and limits on finance presented the main challenges for teachers. Some teachers struggled to fit project requirements, such as planning and management, in with their other teaching duties. Likewise, in some cases, particularly where activities clashed, students had to make choices between project involvement and other extra-curricular activities.

Background

The EiC/EMAG Pilot Project commenced in 2002. A range of projects have been implemented across primary and secondary schools in England with the purpose of raising the achievement of minority ethnic students. Thirty-five schools situated in Excellence in Cities areas participated in the initiative: EiC is a targeted programme of support for schools in disadvantaged areas of the country. Schools received Government funding for their EiC/EMAG projects (up to a maximum of £40,000) via their LEAs, most of which was used to meet staffing costs.

The evaluation of the Pilot Project, carried out by the NFER focused on the work of teachers and other support staff who were active in the implementation and operation of projects in schools. In addition, the NFER research team obtained the views of students, parents and local education authority (LEA) officers who had experienced project involvement.

Methods

In conducting this evaluation four main research methods were used:

- Visits to the ten participating LEAs during the first year of the pilot projects, including face-to-face interviews with the LEA officers responsible for projects in their areas. These visits were followed up during the second year of the evaluation with telephone interviews.
- Annual surveys of headteachers at all participant schools, the first of which took place in January 2003 followed by a later (2004) survey, allowing for longitudinal comparisons to be made.
- School case-study visits, arranged with ten schools which were visited twice during the course of the evaluation. School managers, project coordinators, project practitioners, other teaching staff and students contributed to semi-structured face-to-face interviews.
- Discussion groups with parents of students at nine participating schools, which allowed the evaluation to determine parental awareness of projects and obtain their views about their children's experiences.

Findings

- Whilst the EiC/EMAG Pilot Project schools shared a central aim to raise achievement, they chose different groups of children with which to work, dependent upon local priorities. Essentially, a range of students of various year groups and backgrounds, such as those for whom English is an additional language (EAL), Pakistani, African-Caribbean, Somali and refugee students amongst others, benefited from project activities.
- Students benefited from the expertise of project staff, particularly Learning Mentors, who assisted with academic work (both inside and outside lessons) and social interaction skills (in one-to-one and group meetings). Project workers reported successes in keeping students on-task and, through observation and assessments, in the identification of key areas to work on.
- School staff reported that they felt EiC/EMAG projects had both directly and indirectly made a positive impact on student attainment. Headteachers added that projects had benefited students by raising their self-esteem, motivation and achievement.
- Year 11 students, their parents and project workers confirmed that project activities had encouraged students to be more pro-active in considering their future career aspirations. As a result of the projects, students developed a commitment to their studies and gained a better understanding of higher education opportunities.
- Project staff had attempted to raise the profile of their pilot projects by presenting details about project work to teachers at meetings, through school newsletters, through training and displays or relevant materials. Interviewees reported that efforts to raise the profile of projects over the past two years had resulted in more teaching staff taking an interest and engaging in joined-up working with EMAG project staff.
- Analysis of the headteacher surveys revealed that in both years of the pilot projects, project activities had a positive impact on both involved and uninvolved teaching and non-teaching staff. Most typically, individuals had benefited from shared learning resources and/or teaching approaches.

- The evaluation focused on projects funded by the EiC/EMAG grant but it should be noted that links between EiC/EMAG Pilot Projects and other EiC initiatives were established across many schools. Examples exist where EiC/EMAG Pilot Projects have benefited from transferable skills which teaching staff had gained from their EiC involvement. In addition, students involved in EiC/EMAG Pilot Projects have also participated in EiC activities, where these activities were running simultaneously and had the same goals.
- Case-study visits revealed that pilot projects had made an impact on LEAs and wider communities, including colleges and non-pilot project schools. However, interviewees were also conscious of the limitations of what they considered to be a relatively small scale EiC/EMAG Pilot Project.

Conclusions and recommendations

The NFER evaluation assessed the EiC/EMAG Pilot Project in terms of its impact on students and its ability to engage parents, teaching staff and others in the drive to raise the achievement of minority ethnic students. It highlighted many areas of success, such as the level of support that students had received from project staff. Students have participated in activities which have directly and indirectly had a positive impact on their confidence and ability to make a positive contribution towards their learning experiences. In some cases, teachers also provided examples of raised attainment which they partly attributed to the EiC/EMAG work. However, the importance of the need to secure the commitment of senior teaching staff was highlighted by several students, their parents and other project workers. The research team made several recommendations for consideration by schools, LEAs and the DfES, including:

- in many cases, the relatively small grants sometimes facilitated significant improvements in schools, but more thought needs to be given to the issue of security of funding and project sustainability: several respondents stressed that improved government funding of projects is crucial to the effectiveness and sustainability of projects
- some schools should raise the profile of their projects: school management teams should be

encouraged to gain a full appreciation of the projects in their schools through improved communication and training

- parents need to be included at an early stage of projects as appropriate and kept informed about project activities; schools need to be more proactive in involving parents.

Additional Information

Copies of the full report RR583 - priced £4.95 - are available by writing to DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.

Cheques should be payable to "DfES Priced Publications".

Copies of this Research Brief RB583 are available free of charge from the above address. Research Briefs and Reports can also be accessed at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/>

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