

RAISE Project case studies – Redbridge

They Will Need Time

Three initiatives to raise the achievement of Pakistani and Muslim pupils in the London Borough of Redbridge: developing LEA links with Muslim supplementary schools; a mentoring scheme in a secondary school involving local imams; and promoting Pakistani pupil achievement in the Early Years

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This paper was contributed in 2004 to the RAISE Project. There is background information at www.insted.co.uk/raise.html.

Context

Redbridge is a very diverse borough in the northeast of outer London. It includes areas of affluence (in the five per cent least deprived wards in England) that fringe the Green Belt to the north of the borough, and areas of deprivation (in the 11 per cent most deprived wards in England) around the urban town centre to the south of the borough. The population of Redbridge was 238,635 in 2001 and is growing. It is the ninth most diverse multi-ethnic borough in the country, 43 per cent of its population being from ethnic minorities. The largest ethnic minority groups are Indian (14 per cent of the Redbridge population) and Pakistani (6.2 per cent). Although the ethnic minority population is spread across the borough, the greatest density is in the south, which correlates with the highest deprivation. Redbridge is a multifaith borough, home to the fourth highest percentage of Sikhs (5.5 per cent of the Redbridge population), Hindus (7.8 per cent) and Jews (6.2 per cent) and the twelfth highest percentage of Muslims (11.4 per cent) in the country.

Within the school population the number of ethnic minority pupils is higher, just over 50 per cent approximately. Pakistani pupils form ten per cent of the total school population. Until the DfES changes to ethnic categories in 2001, the LEA had no knowledge of the make-up of the local Pakistani community. It was decided to break the category down at local level into Kashmiri, Mirpuri and other Pakistani groups. However, most Pakistani pupils were registered as Pakistani and not as one of the specified groups. Of the nearly 4900 Pakistani pupils in July 2003, only 289 identified themselves as Kashmiri and 246 Mirpuri. Clearly the local picture is still unclear.

Following the analysis of the 2001 Key Stage tests results by ethnicity, it became apparent that there was variable achievement by Pakistani pupils across schools within the LEA. Subsequently a research project was carried out in 2002 to ascertain the pattern of Pakistani achievement in schools where there was a significant grouping of Pakistani pupils and possible underlying factors. Other LEAs were contacted to identify strategies and initiatives aimed at raising the achievement of Pakistani pupils. Some schools in Redbridge were successfully meeting the educational needs of Pakistani pupils against the national and local

trends. From the findings, it was recommended that the Early Years and Key Stage 3 should be a focus for further initiatives within Redbridge.

Three very differing initiatives subsequently evolved. Each initiative sought—through partnership with members of the community, schools and parents—to explore effective ways of raising the achievements of Pakistani and Muslim pupils:

1. **An LEA initiative to develop links with local Muslim leaders**, originally to promote child protection practice within madrasahs and subsequently to develop links between madrasah teachers and state school teachers, including dialogue about teaching methods
2. **A mentoring scheme in a secondary school** which had identified a group of underachieving Year 11 students, involving two local imams as mentors
3. **A project to promote Pakistani pupil achievement in the Early Years** by developing parental understanding and involvement in their child's education

Developing LEA links with Muslim supplementary schools

The 2001 census revealed that Redbridge has a Muslim population of over 28,000. Most Muslims living in Redbridge are of Bangladeshi, Indian or Pakistani origin. The Muslim community also includes people from Middle Eastern and African origin who tend to be more recent arrivals. 21% of students in Redbridge schools are from a Muslim background. It has been estimated that over 1000 Muslim students attend supplementary classes—madrasahs—held at mosques each after school each weekday.

Muslim parents want their children to receive an Islamic education, which focuses on the Qur'an and the Muslim way of life. Boys and girls usually attend a madrasah from the age of four or five until they are thirteen or fourteen years old, in either mixed or single sex classes. Most will attend for two hours each weekday after school. The children are expected to learn to:

- read and recite the Qur'an in Arabic
- perform wudhu, the ritual washing in preparation for prayer
- prayers which are recited during salah
- actions to perform the prayers
- important duties and beliefs of the Muslim faith

Historically in Redbridge, Urdu has been used as the main language of communication within madrasahs. However, as English becomes the main language of the Muslim community this is increasingly becoming the main language of communication and is used for teaching purposes.

In 2002, a working group was formed to develop links between the Local Education Authority and the Muslim Community. This was particularly important following the events of September 11th 2001. The group included LEA officers, members of the Child Protection Team and local Muslim leaders. Originally the focus for the group was to map the nature and organisation of Redbridge Muslim supplementary classes, and to explore how these classes are organised and how child protection issues are handled.

Whilst addressing the original purposes of the group in drawing up draft child protection guidelines for Madrasahs, there have been unexpected positive spin-offs. During the various meetings and ensuing discussions, greater trust and a closer working relationship has been built up between the LEA officers and the Muslim leaders. A network has evolved which schools are beginning to tap into. The cohesion that has developed has come from understanding each other's perspectives and experiences. It has been a springboard for further developments.

The group has published a booklet entitled *Muslim Madrasahs in Redbridge*, which provides background information for both LEA schools and the Muslim community.

The lead LEA adviser has initiated a doctoral research project to explore how LEA schools and mosque schools can work together to their mutual benefit. The project recognises that, although they come from different historical and educational traditions, they have much to learn from each other. LEA teachers will be paired with Mosque teachers to observe each other's practice and then discuss their experiences.

These teachers from maintained day schools and mosque schools are being used as a consultative group, to elicit views on various educational matters and provide a community perspective. For example, what is the best way of approaching Muslim parents to gather their views on the schooling their child receives? One Imam suggested that it was important to build trust and approach matters subtly, by chatting to parents informally in the playground rather than through a more formal survey or interview of parents. He thought that the first method would give 'a truer perception' rather than parents giving the response 'they think the school wants to hear' which would be manifest through more formal methods.

In the future, the stronger links that are currently being established will lead to a closer liaison between the faith communities and the local LEA schools.

Mentoring scheme in a secondary school, involving local imams

The school is a large coeducational, multi-ethnic comprehensive, with over 1200 students drawn from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds: 70% speak English as an Additional Language; 50 home languages are spoken; 10% are refugees; there is a high representation of Pakistani pupils; and the majority of pupils are Muslim. It has been a Beacon School for a number of years and has just achieved 'Leading Edge' status.

The headteacher is insistent that the performance of all pupils is rigorously monitored. In late 2001, he was aware that, according to national statistics, Pakistani boys were underachieving. In his school he identified 26 male Pakistani students in Year 11 who were likely to underachieve at GCSE. Data from 2000 Key Stage 3 results—analysed by ethnicity and gender—showed that the Pakistani boys were not necessarily the lowest attaining ethnic group but their achievement levels varied across subject areas, particularly when compared to students of Indian origin. Although there was little discrepancy between Indian and Pakistani boys at Level 5 or above in English, it was more marked in maths and science, as shown in the table below. Approximately 25% of the year group were Pakistani and 35% Indian.

	Pakistani boys		Indian boys	
Number in year group	17		26	
Key Stage 3 results Level 5 or above				
English	13 boys	76%	20 boys	77%
Maths	11 boys	65%	19 boys	73%
Science	7 boys	41%	13 boys	50%

The school was commended for being 'a successful multi-racial school with an enviable record of harmony among students' in its previous OFSTED report. The report also recognised the school intended to focus on under-attaining groups but felt that only tentative moves had been made so far and that a wider whole school strategy was desirable.

The school realised that strategies had to be developed to improve the achievement of ethnic minority pupils. This process began with a whole staff debate about this issue that challenged some staff views that it was wrong to focus on particular groups and treat them differently: this approach could not continue as it would perpetuate the underachievement of some groups of pupils. The school made a detailed analysis of available achievement data to identify the underachieving groups and individual pupils.

The headteacher writes:

We realised that much of what is central to the self-concept of our students was left outside of the school gates. On reflection, it seems logical that if the school ignored the language, customs, clothing, religion and culture of young people, then it was unlikely that they would feel positive about themselves.

This led the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) department to conduct research into the achievement of Pakistani boys during 2001—2002. The views of Year 12 Pakistani male students were sought through a questionnaire, as were the views of teachers on teaching these students. As this research got underway, the LEA school improvement adviser introduced two local imams to the school, to be involved in some assemblies. This developed into mentoring some of these pupils. The views of one of the imams were also collected. He has been willing to work in partnership with the LEA to provide a Muslim perspective

where required. Imam H has also been interviewed in connection with Pakistani research in other schools. (See below)

Reflections from sixth form Pakistani male students

- They live in two different cultures. Inside school they mix together well with all pupils and all ethnic groups are treated equally. Outside school they stay within their own culture.
- The school could put on more cultural and other extra-curricular activities, such as an Eid party, and football and cricket clubs. They liked the imam visiting the school and thought that community members should come into school more often.
- During Ramadan, the mosque does take time away from schoolwork. In Years 7–9, they attended Mosque for about two hours each evening. Girls attended more frequently as it provides a social outlet. Most Pakistani boys in school do not take religion seriously but some do so.
- Parents are more laid back and not so concerned about education than Indian parents. Parents see family and mosque as important so emphasise home and religion.
- Girls see the need to work hard to get a better husband. Boys will get a better wife by doing well but this does not motivate them..

Reflections from teachers at the school

- Only one teacher said that this group were involved in extracurricular activities—and that was cricket.
- Generally there was lower attainment and effort amongst the Pakistani boys and less involvement from parents at parents evenings.
- The pupils were better orally than with written work.
- Some thought the pupils were tired during Ramadan.

Reflections from the imam

- In Islam, education is important for everyone. "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave." Most parents will choose to send their child to the madrasah to learn to recite the Qur'an.
- Parents need to know about the English education system.
- Often parents are not well educated and feel awkward about helping their children. There is a lack of understanding between young people and their mothers. Sometimes mothers cannot communicate in English so they cannot check homework. Fathers often work unsocial hours and therefore are not involved in checking on child's progress.

- The general attitude amongst young Pakistani males is to enjoy themselves 'now'. Mini-cabbing, transport jobs and postal work are seen as rewarding enough occupations.
- Pupils play up their parents and teachers.
- Girls stay on at mosque, as it is their social life and otherwise they are at home helping their mother. Boys get more freedom and miss Mosque in order to play with their friends outside.
- There is a difference between Pakistani culture and an Islamic way of life. Many Pakistani families are losing their culture and becoming 'liberated'.

The Mentoring Scheme 2001—2002

Two local imams led the mentoring scheme. The programme involved them visiting the school, meeting the identified pupils in small groups to discuss their attitudes to education, work/study patterns and aspirations for the future, talking to pupils in lessons and through an assembly programme to explore major festivals in world religions. Various faith leaders took part including the Imams who were interviewed during an assembly focussing on Ramadan. The Year 11 pupils were mentored in small groups and following the mock GCSE exams, suggestions for further development were made.

Impact on results

The headteacher met with the imams and LEA school improvement adviser to review the impact of the mentoring scheme. In the summer 2002 GCSE examinations, the results of Muslim pupils (including the mentored group) were remarkable: 64.4% of the Pakistani pupils and 60% of the Bangladeshi pupils achieved five A*—C grades (compared to 30% nationally for both groups). Comparing the results of the mentored pupils against the grades they were predicted to attain, all pupils improved a grade in at least one subject. The headteacher felt that this was because the self-esteem of these pupils improved when they saw their own community representatives being recognised by the school. Relationships between the pupils and staff also improved.

Mentored pupils' perspective

The mentored pupils were also surveyed by questionnaire to help evaluate the impact of the scheme. Their responses showed:

- The majority of pupils found the Imam to be encouraging. Some also described him as helpful and stimulating.
- The majority of pupils thought that the mentoring sessions helped to improve their attitude to work and study.
- All thought that the mentoring sessions should be repeated for the next year's group.

- Utilising the imams' experience and influence in the community was seen as positive, as the imams provided a link between the school and home. Imams are important, respected members of the Islamic community: if the imam visits the school and tells the pupils that school is important, the pupils also think that school is important.
- In particular, pupils said: "(It is) comfortable to talk to someone from our own background ... It is helpful talking to someone from outside school... Authority figures make us work... Religious people are good as they make us work."

Further developments

Following the success of the mentoring project, it was agreed to continue it in 2002—2003 with the next cohort of pupils. Both imams were keen to act as mentors again. Suggested improvements to the scheme from the mentored pupils included:

- increased mentoring time and more frequent sessions, especially when exams are imminent so the imams could assist with exam preparation
- more liaison between the school and the imam so that the imam can support the school by stressing its importance at a time of events at the mosque
- additional clubs such as maths or science club to help improve grades
- use of Muslim businesspeople, as they are also an integral part of the community

The first experience of mentoring and the evaluation of it led the school to:

- produce clear guidance for the mentors on their role and the mentoring process
- train the imams in target-setting and the use of data to help raise underachievement
- arrange a special evening for Punjabi and Urdu speaking parents to build links with some of the 'harder to reach' parents
- produce the school newsletter in these community languages
- employ a female Muslim education welfare officer for additional time to work with groups of parents (often mothers with minimal English language skills), to explain the expectations of the education system and how it works
- employ bilingual assistants to support pupils, work with teachers and to build links between home and school

All of these further developments have continued to have an impact on the achievements of pupils in the school. The school has used these strategies successfully with other ethnic groups and has significantly raised the level of

attainment of each group at GCSE and overall when compared to national averages. In 1999 51 per cent of pupils gained 5 A*-C grades and this improved to 67 per cent in 2003, making the school the ninth most successful secondary school in terms of value-added in England. As OFSTED commented in their inspection of the school in 2003: 'There is a very positive ethos, which embraces inclusion of all, regardless of race, religion or social background.'

Interview with Imam H

Imam H was involved from the outset of the initial project. He is a respected community leader who has actively participated in building links with schools and local madrasahs and has been an important part of the school mentoring initiative described above. He has been working in partnership with the borough's RE adviser in formulating child protection guidelines for madrasah classes and has provided invaluable support to members of the LEA in issues regarding the Muslim and Pakistani community.

Imam H has lived in England since birth and this has given him experience and understanding of both the English and Muslim cultures. His education in England has given him an insider's perspective into many of the issues that Muslim parents and children face in mainstream schools. During meetings to interview him, he talked passionately about the how Muslim children experienced three different domains or cultures in their everyday life which each had its own particular set of expectations and code of behaviour. One was that of their mainstream school; one that of the madrasah school and its teachers; one was the expectations of their parents. He spoke about how many of these children were balancing between these three very different areas of their lives. It was in the Madrasah that he had most contact with them and was able to provide some school support. Occasionally pupils came to the madrasah anxious about completing homework and meeting the deadlines, which they were not able to because of having to attend the Madrasah. Imam H said:

I try and provide an opportunity to enable them to complete their work but I can not do this regularly because their parents will not be happy, they would not like it.

Parents take their children's learning at the madrasah seriously and may feel that time spent on school-related work whilst at madrasah was jeopardising their Muslim education.

Appendix A on later pages summarises an interview with Imam H: it explores his mentoring work and his views on support for Pakistani parents.

Promoting Pakistani pupil achievement in the Early Years

Context

The initial Redbridge research project on Pakistani and Bangladeshi achievement highlighted that whilst some schools in the borough had Pakistani pupils showing little or no underachievement, there were significant issues of lower achievement in other schools. This report coincided with the view that central government

was taking about raising the achievement of ethnic minority pupils. Many underlying causes were identified as factors contributing to Pakistani pupils not achieving their full potential. The most significant one was that, in the past, they have been grouped within the category of 'Asians'. This has masked their individual needs and presented an obscure picture of their achievements.

In the light of the research, similarities emerged between the achievement of African Caribbean pupils and Pakistani pupils, such as the effects of cultural stereotyping. There are, however, some distinct factors affecting the Pakistani community and the achievement of Pakistani pupils: the lack of knowledge about the linguistic experiences of Pakistani pupils on the part of school staff, English language acquisition, parental involvement in the school and parents' lack of knowledge of the British school system. Further, there is a resurgence of racism especially against Muslims, following September 11th and the Iraq war. Muslim identity became associated with negative images and, for most Pakistanis, being Muslim equates with being Pakistani.

A coordinator with the role of addressing the needs and academic achievement of African Caribbean pupils has been firmly established in Redbridge. This has tackled issues of challenging stereotypes, liaising with staff on the needs of specific pupils and families, networking with Black organisations and promoting their presence in schools by providing workshops. In addition to this the coordinator has worked closely with schools to reflect the perspectives and contributions of a range of cultures within the curriculum.

The recommendations made in the initial research project on Pakistani and Bangladeshi achievement led to the realisation that tackling this issue with commitment required a coordinated response: subsequently a coordinator was appointed. A lack of communication between schools and parents was highlighted as an influence on the attainment of some Pakistani pupils. It was important therefore that the person appointed as coordinator should be of Pakistani origin, so that they would have knowledge of the linguistic and cultural experiences of this community.

The analysis of ethnic data revealed that, while there do not appear to be significant numbers of pupils of Kashmiri heritage in Redbridge schools, there are schools with a high percentage of Pakistani pupils. There is an inconsistency in the achievement of Pakistani pupils and demographic factors play an important role. For example, the SATs results of Pakistani pupils living in the richer wards are in line with—or exceed—the LEA average. However, these pupils attend schools where the numbers of Pakistani pupils are relatively low.

The project provided a starting point for this case study and subsequent research. Two schools were identified as a case study to explore the learning needs of ethnic minority pupils, particularly Pakistani pupils.

In both schools the largest ethnic group is of Pakistani origin and their families share similar socio-economic characteristics. Both are in the same ward in the south of the borough and physically close. Despite the homogeneity in their intake, their pupils show no uniformity with regards to achievement—as evidenced by SATs results. School B was targeted as the focus school and the research there forms the main body of this case study. School A needs to be

revisited for further research as the information gained so far is lacking weight. Profiles of School A and School B appear in Appendices B and C on later pages.

Based on 2001 SATs results, School A appeared to have Pakistani pupils who were achieving in line with the LEA average for maths and exceeding it in reading comprehension and writing. At this time the LEA average for Pakistani pupils showed underachievement in all three elements. In 2000, Pakistani pupils had exceeded the LEA average in writing. In more affluent areas of the LEA, Pakistani pupils appeared to be achieving or exceeding the LEA average. In 2000, one-third of the roll of School A was Pakistani. 'All pupils' at the school underachieved in reading comprehension and maths but Pakistani pupils exceeded the LEA average in all three elements. In 2001 one quarter of the cohort was Pakistani, they achieved well above the LEA average in all three elements: in reading comprehension and writing, they were the highest achieving group. In 2002, the SATs results had been good again, except in reading and comprehension.

To gain an insight into the practice and ethos of each school, frequent visits were made and informal interviews were carried out with various staff members. The project coordinator was particularly interested in ascertaining the reasons for the pupils' success at School A. Interviews with the Ethnic Minority Achievement (EMA) teachers of both schools revealed many similarities between the schools. Both have staff that speak Urdu/Punjabi and are encouraged to use their home language with the children. Parental involvement is apparently minimal and neither school has an active PTA. Open evenings are generally well attended, as parents are keen to learn about the progress their children are making.

Regular visits were made to School B to make links with parents, staff and children. The local preschool facilities were explored. Contacts were made with as many people as possible that were involved with the children's schooling. These included: the headteacher, the EMA coordinator, bilingual support assistants, nursery teachers, Sure Start project employees, family literacy provider, parents on the family literacy sessions and in the nursery, and the local imam

The attainment of pupils on entry to School B was lower than the national average and it appeared that Pakistani parents did not attach great importance to pre-school education. These two factors signalled the need for intervention in the Early Years—to tackle problems early and stop them occurring later on. It was agreed that the focus of the project would be support initially in the Nursery and later in Reception: the project coordinator would work closely with children, parents and staff. At this stage issues could be identified that were affecting pupils' learning as well as practices set that could be followed through the rest of school. It was also important to explore Pakistani children's pre-school experiences of play and language, as the acquisition of English language was also identified as one of the blocks to their learning.

This decision also based on the knowledge that practices within school were meeting the needs of its culturally and linguistically diverse pupil population. A committed and experienced EMA coordinator leads the EMA team and support

staff. The EMA team were recognised in the last OFSTED report as “one of the major strengths of the school”.

EMA Co-ordinator at School B

Having been at school B for over 18 years, the EMA coordinator has a thorough knowledge of the school and its surrounding community. As a member of the senior management team, she is involved in the decision and policy making process related to EAL and the teaching of children from other cultural backgrounds. The school has a bank of multicultural resources that are continuously updated, there is a room specifically designated for the team’s work, time is allocated for administrative duties and their work is given high status within the school. One teacher supports in Years 3 and 4, one full time in Year 2 and the half in Year 6, changing to Year 5 in the summer term. In addition, there are five full time bilingual support assistants: two speak Punjabi; one speaks Urdu and Pashto; and two speak Tamil. There are also three Urdu speaking SEN support staff. The teaching staff has no Urdu speaking teachers at present. There are five Muslim teachers.

Newly appointed staff are given training –involving demonstration lessons—on issues related to teaching ethnic minority children, including those who speak English as an additional language. Members of staff who speak other languages as well as English are expected to use these with children. There are also whole-staff training days on issues relating to EAL, refugee pupils and new arrivals.

Induction programme at School B

The induction procedure for children new to the school has proven to be effective and children settle well into school. This procedure includes admission procedures focussing on an interview with the parents to collect useful information about pupil’s background and linguistic competencies, filling in the admissions form, allocation to a class, up to the induction classes set up in school for all new children.

The induction classes have proved very successful by allowing children the time and space to integrate into their new school environment. New arrivals are taken in a group for set sessions either by the EMA teachers or by bilingual teaching assistants. During these sessions the children are also assessed in their learning and prior knowledge, using the base line assessment form. These induction sessions are provided on a regular basis and their duration depends on the progress of the child. The majority of children on these programmes are from refugee or asylum seeking families. These programmes provide them with learning, social and pastoral support, through sharing their experiences.

Parental attitudes at School B

Parental participation in many programmes set up by the school had been poor. Parents’ evenings were well attended because of the opportunity to find out about their child’s learning and what the school has done for their child but social events organised by the school were not as well attended.

The EMA coordinator suggested that this is because, "it's not within the parents' concept of everyday life." Encouraging parents to come to school was, she felt, an almost impossible task. She further considered that most of the school's Pakistani parents had different academic expectations for their children than other ethnic minority groups (such as Tamil): this was because many Pakistani parents at School B came from rural areas and few had a professional background; their own limited academic and work background limited their vision for their children. Although they did not want children to fail at school, the markers they held for their children being successful at school differed from those of school staff. She empathised with many Pakistani parents and understood why there was a lack of participation, especially by Pakistani women.

"At home they have a very different system—one in which they are very involved as mothers, wives and the extended family. They are always giving and doing for others and they do not want to or cannot continue this in school. It was not in their experience when they were growing up."

The event, which had been successful, was the summer fair in which parents could just turn up and participate at their own level. At the start of the autumn term she had tried to launch the new sessions of family Numeracy—with a crèche facility: 200 letters were sent out but there was no take up. Posters and personal one-to-one contact followed but only one parent applied.

Headteacher

The headteacher has been in post for at School B for nearly two years. His commitment to raising the attainment of the Pakistani pupils at his school and making stronger links with parents is shown by his willingness to take part in this project. The deputy head and the EMA coordinator mirrored his cooperation. He recognises that the school has issues related to the attainment of some of their ethnic minority children. However, his perception is that these were not necessarily as a result of teaching standards or practices at school. His concerns were: lack of involvement by parents in school; high numbers of unauthorised attendance; extended holidays taken by Pakistani pupils; the need for more community link. Many of these were on the school action plan as schools targets. He welcomed the support the project would provide.

Support staff

Sessions for parents led by the bilingual teaching assistants appeared to be an excellent idea. They had been initiated in an attempt to give parents access to the school in order to discuss their children's progress or any other concerns they had, using the medium of their home language. There was a crèche facility available for parents with younger children.

Mrs. S, one of the support assistants involved in the programme, explained that, where appropriate, she would convey parents' concerns to the teachers. The sessions were also used to support parents in helping their children—especially with homework, as most of the mothers did not understand some of the work

their children brought home. They highlighted parent's lack of knowledge of the teaching methods used. One mother had said:

"I don't understand her way of doing sums. I try to explain to her my methods, so that I know how she is working out the answers and can check them before the work is handed in, but she doesn't listen. She says that is not the way her teacher does it."

Eight parents attended the first session but in subsequent sessions the number fell. As this was an ineffective use of support assistant's time, the sessions were cancelled. She said:

"Parents want their children to do well but they think it's the schools responsibility."

She concluded that the school has continuously made attempts to reach out to parents and invite them in to participate in their children's school life but these attempts were not successful. However, the headteacher was continuously looking at new ways of inviting parents and the community to work in partnership with the school.

One of the SEN support staff (of Pakistani origin) reiterated many of the points that the EMA coordinator had made about Pakistani parents' attitudes to school: parents do not know what is going on in school and many do not want to know as they have too many things going on at home; the school provides almost a respite for them from the responsibility for their children so that they can get on with their duties at home. Whilst many parents have a choice, children do not.

"I feel so sorry for Pakistani pupils they have such a long day, have a little to eat and go off to the mosque. They are quite diverted as they have the pressure of school, the mosque and their mums with homework. The community does not take an interest in school. They are more interested to know what the school should be doing for them".

Another Pakistani bilingual assistant confirmed this view. She felt that many of the school's Pakistani parents know that school is compulsory: this differs from their experience of schooling in Pakistan, where it is not compulsory. Their marker for success at school is also different: once their children have picked up a certain level of English, they think their child is doing well. They do not have any idea of what is taught in the curriculum. This parental view of education is a factor the number of children who are absent for reasons that are not always valid: when parents take them on extended holidays, they are not aware of the learning their children will miss.

Interviews with nursery teacher

It was intended to: observe routines in the nursery; make links with the staff and gain their perspectives; become familiar with the children and learn how they settled in to the nursery; and, importantly, meet parents informally at the start of the year so as to gain their trust and cooperation.

The school has a large nursery with two classes, morning and afternoon, each with 26 children. Each class has one member of staff who speaks a minority language: in one class, the nursery teacher speaks Punjabi and some Urdu; in the other class, the nursery nurse speaks Gujarati and Hindi. These are the majority home languages of the nursery parents, who can therefore discuss issues with staff 'at the nursery door'.

Some parents took a very relaxed approach to their child's attendance at nursery. Open evenings were replaced with parents' days. In these, parents were invited to talk about their children's progress and to experience first hand many of nursery activities provided for their children. Most of the parents, the nursery teacher indicated, did not seem to take an interest in this. She categorised the parents as being between two extremes:

- those who did not bother getting involved, did not see the value of play and thought their child's education was the schools responsibility
- those who were over ambitious, wanting their child to be reading and doing operations with numbers beyond their understanding

Her concerns were that parents did not see the value of play or know how to play with their children. A lot of time, money and effort had been put into setting up a toy library in the nursery, with resources of good quality in a special area. A parent had volunteered to organise it and the cost of borrowing equipment was kept to a minimum. Many parents signed up to use the facility but, in practice, few used it and it was eventually stopped. The teacher believed that parents feared the equipment would either get lost or broken, despite being reassured that whilst care of the equipment was important the occasional lost or broken toy was not a problem. Closer examination of the resources suggested that many parents might not know how to use some items. There were storybooks but they should have included dual language storybooks so that parents would feel more confident in borrowing them.

Sure Start Project

The Sure Start project is relatively new in the area and has invested significant sums in early years provision. It provides high quality pre-school play and learning facilities and promotes their use. It supported an Islam-based nursery, as well as the toy library at School B. It works with families with children up to the age of four and has plans to raise this limit to five. There is a comprehensive database of existing and new parents in the area. Services are advertised by mail, posters and personal contact, and through providers at classes, such as the Muslim women's sewing classes. Planned for March 2004 is a neighbourhood nursery to provide 51 full/part time places.

The project manager's experience of Pakistani parents was that they took a very casual approach to their children's attendance at pre-school playgroups. The most successful sessions were 'drop and go': parents were not keen to stay with their children and those that did were often not sure of how to play with them.

Family literacy sessions

The family literacy sessions were attended regularly by five parents (all mothers), two of whom were of Pakistani background. The sessions were excellent in providing information and support in the technicalities of the English language but they required the participants to be able to speak a certain level of English. The Pakistani parents at these sessions shared their disappointment at the lack of social activities provided for the children, such as school trips. They were also concerned that most Pakistani mothers did not take time out to support—or learn how to support—their children:

“They just leave them at the school gate or class door and go home to their duties.”

Informal interviews with parents

Regular visits have been made to the school to make links with the parents. The majority of conversations to build these links took place in the school playground and at meetings organised by the school, such as those for the new Reception intake or secondary transfer. It was mostly mothers who attended the meetings, as they were responsible for dropping off children and picking them up from school. Some very varied responses emerged from parents.

The parents informally interviewed ranged from one who did not know her home address or telephone number to some who had high aspirations for their children to go to the Grammar school. Clearer pictures were formed of the background of many parents. Interviews held with EMA teachers, support staff and the imam suggest that it will not be quick and easy to build links with the Pakistani parents and change their understanding of education, so that they become more involved in the school and in their children’s schooling.

During visits to the nursery, informal conversations took place with parents in the playground. Most of them were happy to talk but they were only comfortable with questions to a certain depth. In a meeting with a group of nursery parents—all of whom had older children at the school—two mothers were quite responsive. As they had previously met the project coordinator in a secondary transfer meeting, they felt comfortable talking to her. They both said that they wanted their children to do well at school but admitted that they could not always support them—especially the older one—with homework.

One of the mothers had attended an English medium school and gained a high level of education in Pakistan: she was keen to say her family valued education. It seemed as though she recognised the low educational background of many Pakistani parents and did not want to be put in the same group as them. Another mother had an older child who attended a grammar school and indicated that she wanted her other children to do the same. Both mothers supported their children with homework when they could but there was time for little else because the children also attended mosque classes in the evening. Two more mothers—who were virtually observers—occasionally nodded in agreement but, when offered an opportunity to express their point of view, gave little response.

All these mothers were quite defensive about the importance of extended holidays and said the school also needed to recognise this. When pressed about the effect on school work, one of them stated:

“If they don’t go back, they will not know who they are or where they come from. They need to learn about their culture as well.”

The parents, it appeared, were not aware of the way the school values and promotes children’s self-esteem and cultural identities. Parents are investing time and effort with their children in order to maintain their cultural heritage. Parents were aware of cultural events at the school, such as Eid, but saw them as tokenistic.

A distinct ‘us’ and ‘them’ relationship appeared to be emerging. When discussing the possibility of involvement in school routines, parents laughed and said they could not think of anything they had to offer to teachers. One was quick to point out that she had so much to do at home that she had little time for anything else. The project coordinator sensed from the parents’ body language that they were not keen to discuss these matters further.

In interviews set up by the EMA coordinator with two parents just before the end of the school day, only one of them attended. Mrs. A had been schooled in Pakistan and had gained a Masters degree in English. She said that her role in her children’s education was:

“to push them, make sure they attend regularly, are punctual, do their homework and behave well in school.”

She was not typical of the parents encountered so far but even she admitted that she did not know what or how children were taught in school—including the literacy and numeracy hour. She was fortunate, she stressed, because her children were self-motivated and enjoyed school. She felt that the school was doing enough for their children but most Pakistani parents are not doing enough. In her opinion:

- The majority of Pakistani parents cannot support their children because they are not educated themselves.
- Children see their parents as role models: many Pakistani parents have menial jobs or are unemployed and this affects children’s aspirations.
- Many of the parents did not go to school: they send their children to school because they have to.
- Because they do not value education, they take their children on extended holidays.

Mrs. A’s thoughts and observations were useful to the project coordinator. Through networking with parents who are willing to support schools in this way, links could be developed with others.

Summary of findings from the research within School B

- Whilst it is recognised that School B has issues with pupil mobility, the Pakistani population appeared to be the most settled within the area.
- Some links had been made with the local imam but had not been pursued. Once someone from the local mosque had contributed to assembly but staff considered the approach inappropriate.
- There were plans for a new 60-place nursery to open in 2004; those already established were well used. There was a database of all new children and parents are given regular information on events and classes in the area. The Sure Start representative commented on the success of 'drop and go' sessions. Where parents were required to stay, these were not as popular. The educational development worker would be working on a programme similar to the one identified in this case study—to raise awareness of the importance and value of early year's play experiences.
- Induction programmes at School B meant children settled well into school. Initial parent contact with school was good but thereafter parents usually made contact at open evenings.
- The headteacher had concerns over the high percentage of unauthorised absence, including extended holidays.
- Weekly sessions with bilingual support staff gave parents opportunities to discuss any aspect of their children's learning (in Urdu, Punjabi, Gujarati or Hindi). Due to poor attendance these were cancelled. Use of home languages is encouraged within the school.
- The weekly family literacy sessions required a certain level of English: about five regular enthusiastic parents.
- Sure Start had the nursery £6000 to make provision for a toy library. It was abandoned because the number of parents using it declined. The nursery was over subscribed and the teachers reported that some parents took a very relaxed approach to attendance.
- Parents interviewed expressed their enthusiasm for more suitable social events in school: they could not identify with quiz nights. They confirmed that many of the Pakistani mothers were reluctant—or did not 'bother' to—get involved with school activities.

While recognising the diversity and complexity of the Pakistani community in the area, it is clear that many common concerns emerged from this project.

It is evident that many Pakistani pupils are not achieving in line with the school and LEA benchmarks in national tests, while some are achieving in line with or above these levels. It would appear that most pupils who are doing well are from affluent backgrounds or have parents with a good level of education.

Some events organised by the school had been unsuccessful for a range of reasons. A quiz night is not a familiar social activity in the Pakistani community and would be an alienating experience for many parents. Staff were surprised at the lack of parents attending the English classes: as classes were provided by an English speaker, parents would be hesitant to participate as they had little or no English to ask for help.

Recurring issues particular to Pakistani parents as identified by parents, staff at School B, the local imam and Sure Start project providers

- the relaxed approach to Early Years education
- the lack of value or importance placed on learning through play
- the need for supporting pupils with homework as this was something parents found difficult
- the lack of value placed on mainstream schooling
- the school's need to recognise the value of extended holidays
- lack of information and links between school and local madrasahs
- the lack of parental knowledge about the school system and teaching method.

The way forward from here

After an examination of the findings, the Pakistani and Muslim achievement project has begun to address some of the issues, in partnership with other educators and services. It will be some time before the effects of this can be measured and it is expected to be a slow process. The targeted group of parents is being introduced to a whole new way of thinking about their children's education.

To address the issues identified the project leader will:

- meet with parents in meetings at school, in the playground and in other organised events to promote the importance of early year's education
- work in partnership with Sure Start's educational development officer to provide workshops for parents on the learning gained through different play activities and offer support on how to use the resources
- encourage parents to rethink the toys they buy for their children, emphasising construction equipment, puzzles and other educational toys, rather than simply dolls and cars
- re-establish and promote the toy library
- liaise closely with mosque leaders to respect parents' strong affiliation with local mosques

- organise exchange trips between schoolteachers and madrasah teachers
- explore possibilities for homework support within the time children spend at the madrasahs.

APPENDIX

Summary of the interview with Imam H, which explores his mentoring work and his views on support for Pakistani parents

How did the project work?

He was approached by the school to act as a mentor after they had identified a group of students who it was felt, with support could achieve better grades at GCSE. He met regularly with these students, along with other mentors, before coursework deadlines and just before their exams. The mentors built a relationship of trust with the pupils and praised the successes they had already achieved. Imam H went on to say that current events were used as talking points to encourage discussion about their Muslim identity e.g. September 11th. On one occasion students talked about the lack of opportunities they felt they had once they left school. Imam H turned this around by asking them what they thought they needed to rectify this. Most answered "education". He used this to get them to examine how they were responsible for their own success.

Did you feel you made a difference to the students?

The Imam felt that his input had been successful and that the boys responded positively to him. They formed good relationships. In the end the boys admitted to sharing concerns that they would not with their teachers. When they were given the message of "pull your socks up" they said "We would rather hear it from you (the Imam) than from them". He was eager to tell me that due to the success of this mentoring project a new one had been initiated.

Is there capacity to work like this with other schools?

He felt it depended on the personalities involved and how much they valued this process. He could see the benefits as long as there was commitment.

What is Pakistani parents' perception of the British school system?

He was not sure. "They do not often talk about this with me."

How do mosques view making links with schools?

He felt that some of them are reluctant and view the reasons behind schools wanting links with suspicion. "Some mosques" he said "jump to conclusions, they see the mosque as their domain and feel that schools are 'putting their oar in' to find out what mosques are up to."

What do you think are some of the reasons why Muslim children do not attain their full potential?

He thought parents made mistakes by comparing children with each other, either siblings or other successful children within the community and that this puts pressure on the children. Imam H reported an example in his Madrasah class where a pupil had told him that he felt a failure because of the messages he was given at home which he perceived negatively. When choosing GCSE courses, Imam H felt that students are forced to take subjects that parents want them to do rather than subjects the children are good at or want to do. Parental choices are usually more academic subjects and that this contributed to them not then doing that well in exams.

Some children and parents who need support do not know where to get this support. There is a different perception of education by parents; some believe it is all up to the school whilst others only send their children to school because it is compulsory.

Imam H added that the family experiences of children at home are culturally different, the family system is very cohesive. One incident affects the whole family as relationships are so interlinked, the notion of 'Baraderi'. We also talked about how some significant life events such as marriages, religious festivals and death had an impact on the Muslim extended family and the duration of most of these in comparison to similar western events.

With fathers at work all day, it is left to mothers to look after the needs of the children. Many do not have enough English to communicate with school staff.

In what way can we move forward?

He suggested that we should look at models from other boroughs particularly where the community is much more concentrated and established such as Bradford and Lancashire. This would give us an insight as to what has been tried and tested. In addition to this he thought we needed to get people from the community in school. This would give the message that there was a partnership going on to children, staff and parents. The profile of community members in school could be raised through assemblies and workshops. We also talked about the appropriateness of some of the people going into school and the way they worked with children. This is something that Imam H said he relied on schools to give feedback.

A practical suggestion made by the Imam was that feeder mosques liaise with mainstream schools to share their calendars of events. Significant events and dates could be set in consultation between the two so that children are not overburdened such as during Ramadan or forced to make choices.

The interviews with the Imam were enlightening and provided an opportunity to get an insight into issues outside of the mainstream school. Overwhelmingly the message he gave was that schools, parents and the community could work together but it was going to be a slow process as there were different perspectives involved. In addition to this they all lacked knowledge about each other.