RAISE Project case studies – Rotherham

The Formation of a New School

The complex process of meeting the needs of Pakistani-heritage pupils, as two secondary schools merge.

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

Introduction

Two schools merged in September 2003: one has a substantial proportion of Pakistani-heritage pupils, the other virtually none. This paper describes steps taken to prepare for a new, linguistically and culturally diverse school, in which the needs of Pakistani-heritage pupils are recognised and met.

PROFILES OF THE TWO SCHOOLS

	School X	School Y
Catchment	• town centre • mainly owner occupied • some social housing • majority – areas of social deprivation • ethnically mixed • some housing designated for asylum seekers	• suburban: high status • mainly owner occupied • some social housing • majority middle class/professional • 'all-white' • some housing very recently designated for asylum seekers and 'move-on' (no school impact as yet)
School roll	• 668 pupils • 20% of minority ethnic background (most with EAL) • undersubscribed	• 1158 pupils • 0.6% of ethnic minority background • oversubscribed
GCSE 2002	• English A*—C: 23% • Maths A*—C: 19%	• English A*—C: 62% • Maths A*—C: 64%
EMAG devolvement	Pre-2000: funding for 1 EAL coordinator, 1 EAL teacher,1 BCA 2000: funding for1 EAL teacher, 1 BCA	None BUT in September 2002 • school funding for EAL coordinator to work between the two schools in preparation for amalgamation
Special circumstances	• in a small EAZ • OFSTED 2001 and HMI 2002: 'serious weaknesses'	• City Technology College • targeted for admission of pupils with physical handicaps

Key mechanisms

- Reference group on ethnic minority issues
- Staff development workshops
- Implementation and monitoring of a race equality policy
- Closer links with the local Pakistani community.

Intended outcomes

- improved staff understanding of the varied needs of Pakistani-heritage pupils
- improved staff confidence in their ability to develop strategies that will have a positive effect on the learning and attainment of Pakistani-heritage pupils
- increased involvement of Pakistani-heritage parents and community members
- increased pupil confidence that their needs will be recognised and met.

Key Issues

The initial proposal to merge the two schools was resisted by many pupils, parents and staff in both schools. It was felt that there had been a lack of genuine consultation, and that the emphasis on building a 'world-class school' overlooked those aspects of a school community that go beyond bricks and mortar.

Operating on a split site while the new school is being built brings the two school populations together gradually. Present Year 9 pupils from School X move to School Y to start their GCSE courses in 'sensitively setted' mixed groups of Schools X and Y pupils. This is contrary to the original information they were given, which led them to expect little change, as they would stay on at School X until it closed. Interviews with Year 9 Pakistani pupils and their parents reflect their concerns.

This case study draws heavily on interviews of School X pupils and their parents, and pupils at primary feeder schools. It also refers to perceptions held by staff. The names of all the interviewees have been excluded or disguised.

Anticipation of the merger: pupils

> They just said year 8s, so we didn't bother… I think they should leave it like it is. *(Tanveer)*

> You know when they start this, when they said the school were gonna close, they didn't say that we were gonna go. We didn't think we were gonna go… They just said school were getting old. It would be better if they build a new school, but I think it will affect our education. When they made this idea up, of moving us, nobody ever asked us, they've been playing with our lives, cause something goes wrong like we don't get really good grades, it's gonna affect our life in future, not theirs, like they didn't even ask us anything about it. *(Shakeel)*

Anticipation of the merger: parents

Shakeel's father seems philosophical about the changes:

> It's up to the government, really, I think they both are really good schools, so it doesn't matter which one he goes into. If they want to close it down, build a new school, I've got no objections.

But he also sounds a note of warning:

> If they're breaking two schools for it, it should be a really good school, they should have some good rules in it.

Tanveer's father, a parent governor at School X was one of the most vociferous objectors to the closure of the school but seems to have accepted its inevitability:

> We were told it would be best for the kids, best for the community, best for Rotherham… maybe in the long run… We thought that School X was going to close all at once. Gradually coming together, it's a better idea, it's a lesser evil, best way round.

The School X parents interviewed expressed concerns about the extra distance their children will have to travel, up a fairly steep hill. Kiran's mother put it thus:

> It's further for her to walk. It doesn't matter about summer but in winter it's dark when Kiran goes and comes home.

Tanveer's father wondered

> If they can provide some kind of coaches or school bus… We have to go one step forward, to help the kids… maybe first few years, then after they get used to it.

There is also an awareness of possible racism when a virtually all-white school joins one with a significant percentage of pupils from ethnic minorities. Samina's father comments:

> Somebody told me that children a bit naughty, they not like coloured children, especially in that area.

He has confidence in teachers' ability to "deal with that" although he recognises that some may have more experience than others:

> I'm happy that teachers from here will go.

Shazad's mother is similarly concerned about teachers' understanding of pupils from different backgrounds:

> …teachers can only teach if they've got that relationship and they know… they've got to be able to communicate, they can't just stand there and not know their personal backgrounds… I don't know how much they know about these children's backgrounds. Is it gonna be 'all black faces, they're all Pakis' ?

Anticipation of the merger: staff

In January 2003, staff of both schools joined for a training day entitled 'Preparing for Cultural Diversity'. It included workshops on:

- diversity across the curriculum
- racial harassment in schools
- bilingual students: a diversity of need
- British Asian students
- language, literacy and culture
- The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and implications for schools
- teaching students who have English as an additional language
- addressing expectations, hopes and fears
- antiracist education and the global dimension

The concern expressed by Shazad's mother (above) features in some of the evaluations by staff. With regard to the keynote speech, for example, comments included:

- Hit a few nerves. We must raise the debate at all levels.
- Made me think an awful lot in a slightly different way.
- Raised general issues but started you thinking of your own situation.
- Too long, too many metaphors, uncertain of relevance to the topic.

Responses to the workshops included:

- Promoted real awareness.
- Parents would benefit from this kind of session.
- Made me question my ideas and think about my heritage.
- Raised importance of discussion of policy and practical implications of implementing.
- We need a community liaison coordinator in the new school.
- Interesting ideas for working with bilingual pupils in the classroom.
- Good overview of issues and ideas around teaching pupils with EAL.
- Good overview of legal standpoint and policy.
- I learned so much about the community I will be working with.
- Extremely relevant to the classroom situation.
- Excellent - lots of real experiences highlighted.
- Made you think of aspects of planning lessons.
- Walking on eggshells with some staff!

- Some teachers are starting to panic about how bilingual pupils will impact on their teaching and learning.
- Developed confidence about my ability to manage situations.
- Racial harassment—only touched the tip of the iceberg—need to do much more to explore this subject.
- Too short, needed more time for discussions.
- Too much information and input – more time needed for interaction.
- Questions raised- not enough answers given.
- Need more practical advice on specific ways of combating racism.
- More practical applications would be appreciated.
- Responses to the final plenary session:
- Good to get permission to get things wrong.
- A good start has been made.
- What we are facing is not a problem but an opportunity.
- It's an exciting prospect. I am looking forward to learning from it.
- We need to spend much longer on these issues—addressing them in whole school and departmental groups.
- I feel we are just touching the surface of the cultural issues.
- This needs to be the beginning of an ongoing programme.
- More staff development is urgently needed.
- We need to feel more like one staff together preparing for one new school.

The following training needs were identified:

- race equality policy—understanding and practical implementation
- language and curriculum development and support strategies

- cultural awareness with regard to Pakistani-heritage pupils
- sensitive use of data.

Staff Development

Race Equality Policy—understanding and practical implementation

A small staff working party produced a joint interim race equality policy based on CRE and LEA guidance. Although it has been approved by the school governors and circulated to all staff, an immediate task is still to make everyone familiar with the content of this policy and give them the opportunity to consider the implications for the school, their department and themselves. The school also needs to address the requirement to monitor and assess the impact of the policy.

The most obvious aspect of the policy is the requirement to record individual racist incidents in schools, and to furnish a summary to the LEA and MAARI (Multi-Agency Approach to Racist Incidents). Incident slips already in use have been adapted to speed up the recording procedure. Flowcharts to make clear 'what happens if…' are being considered. A set of 'Frequently Asked Questions' is also being devised to clarify the reasoning behind challenging and recording racist incidents when it can seem so much easier to minimise or ignore them. Brief stories illustrating a range of situations in which staff and pupils may find themselves can also serve as prompts for discussion. Some examples appear below.

Identity
Overheard in the corridor: "Do you like being called British Asian?"
"I like Paki better, I'm a Paki."

Onlookers
A boy, telling what happened when he was 'offered a fight' by another boy:
"They just kept saying, 'Hit him, the Paki! Kick him, the black bastard!"

Guilty by association
Shortly after 9/11, two boys referred to an asylum seeker (who had been at the school for about three months and had settled in very well): "He's from Afghanistan. I bet he knows summat about it."

Pointed question
Parent at a parents' meeting prior to reorganisation:
"Is it true that there will be a mosque in the new school?"

Names
A teacher reacts to unfamiliar names on a register list: "You'll have to say that for me: I can't pronounce it."

Extended visit
A Year 11 boy, who returns from Hajj less than six weeks before GCSE exam leave starts, is told: "I don't know if I'll be able to enter you now: you've got two pieces of coursework outstanding. You made your choice, you'll have to live with it."

Language and curriculum development and support strategies

Some staff seem to assume that all pupils with English as an additional language will struggle in all lessons, and should be put on the SEN register. To correct this impression, individual profiles provide a more accurate picture of the capabilities and personalities of bilingual and multilingual pupils. Some examples appear below.

Eva is in Year 7. She was born in the UK and has had all her education here. Her parents are from Hong Kong. The home language is Cantonese. She is very reserved with adults, but quietly confident, and much more lively with her friends.

Miriam is in Year 8. She was born in the UK and has had all her education here. She has dual Yemeni/English heritage and balances her two cultures confidently, celebrating Eid and Christmas. English is her first and strongest language.

Farid is in Year 9. He came to seek asylum here from Afghanistan in May 2001 with his older brother. The rest of the family are in Pakistan. Although his brother has been given leave to remain for three more years, Farid is still awaiting a decision on his own case. He wants passionately to be a doctor and has chosen his GCSE options with that in mind. His first language is Dari and he also speaks Farsi, Pushto and Urdu. He is Muslim, but is vehemently opposed to the extremism of the Taliban.

Sueado is in Year 10. She and her mother came from Somalia in October 2000 to join her father who had already fled the country four years earlier. Her first language is Somali but she does not read or write it. Her first 'school language' is Italian and she has just taken Italian GCSE a year early. She is a Muslim with a western approach to life, continuing to grow in confidence socially and academically.

Habib is in Year 11. He was born in the UK, the youngest son of a now quite elderly widowed mother. His father died when he was in Year 8 and he made a lengthy return visit to Pakistan. He is a Muslim but no longer attends the mosque school. His first language is Mirpuri-Punjabi and he understands Urdu but has opted for Spanish as his GCSE language. Habib is able to describe what has helped him at school:

- the use of memorable visual examples (for example, in a maths lesson, pupils themselves 'modelled' mode, median, mean and range)

- careful explanation, slowly and with repetition, on the board using words and diagrams

- working with a friend you can help and be helped by, using English and Mirpuri – Punjabi

- learning that words can have more than one meaning ("Before we did osmosis, I thought 'solid' just meant baby food!")

- having older sisters who've been through the system

- linking new ideas with something you already know ("Like witches at Halloween and in 'Macbeth'!")

- parental encouragement and support.

Few departments have yet taken up the offer of workshops to discuss and plan different strategies to support pupils with EAL. The concept of partnership teaching with support staff is still unfamiliar and needs careful development through a formal bidding system: this puts the onus on departments to request support for particular topics or schemes of work, for specific periods of time. Work with small 'study support' groups in Years 10 and 11 may provide insights to share with colleagues.

Learning in another language

The questions and answers in the box below are intended to help staff to promote learning—including the acquisition and enrichment of English.

> **Some pupils seem to 'switch off' in class.**
> Listening to an unfamiliar language is tiring. Support pupils' concentration by speaking clearly, using short sentences and repeating important points and instructions.
>
> **Should we insist that pupils only speak English in lessons?**
> Many pupils (not just 'beginners') benefit from using their first language in the classroom. They may need reminding to use it appropriately, but if they are not given the opportunity to use it positively they may well react by using it negatively.
>
> **Sometimes pupils simply don't react to what I say!**
> Idiomatic English (such as, 'Pull your socks up!' or 'Get your finger out!') can be confusing for pupils, if taken literally!

I think she understands, but she hardly says a word!
Many pupils in the early stages of learning another language go through a 'silent period'. They will build up confidence by working in pairs or small groups, either with pupils who share the same first language (who will themselves benefit) or with competent native English speakers whom they can imitate. They can also be given opportunities to demonstrate their understanding in non-verbal ways.

Cultural awareness with regard to Pakistani-heritage pupils

Many staff are genuinely nervous about unintentionally offending pupils and have requested a list of 'tips' to be aware of regarding pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds in our school, most of whom are of Pakistani heritage. The questions and answers below address these needs. It is important to stress, however, that all pupils—whatever their background—are distinct individuals, with varied experiences and expectations.

Why do some pupils seem to avoid eye contact?
Don't misunderstand some (not all) pupils' failure to look you in the eye. In many cultures, downcast eyes are in fact a sign of respect for adults.

I usually shake hands with parents when I meet them.
Many (but not all) Muslims feel uncomfortable shaking hands with members of the opposite sex.

Are there rules about Muslim dress?
Most Muslim girls are not allowed to wear clothes that expose their skin or body shape. Many would also prefer to wear the hijab, or headscarf—if not in school, then at least on the way to and from school. Communal showers might also cause difficulties.

What do I need to know about food?
Muslims cannot eat food that is not halal and never eat pork or any product derived from pork (such as gelatine). In general, this means that they will choose vegetarian options if they have school dinners or if they are cooking in a food technology lesson. Alcohol is also forbidden.

What happens during Ramadan?
During the month of Ramadan (which starts this year on or about 26th October) most Muslim children of secondary age will fast during daylight hours. This means they have nothing to eat or drink, nothing should enter their mouths. They are proud of this abstinence, which teaches them self-control and what it means to be hungry. Understandably, returning home to 'close the fast' at the end of the day is very important.

How often do pupils go to the mosque?
Most younger (up to 13 or 14) Muslim pupils attend classes at the mosque school (madrassah) for one or two hours every evening, usually as soon as they get home from school. They will therefore start their homework later in the evening, after the evening meal. Many will take advantage of pre-school and lunchtime homework clubs. Older boys may also be expected to attend Friday prayers, especially if they have been on Hajj (pilgrimage to Makka).

Why do some pupils have such long periods of condoned absence?
Many families arrange extended visits to Pakistan for their children, often during the school holidays. They are understandably concerned to maintain family links, and the visits play a crucial part in developing pupils' sense of their roots and self-identity. If they miss weeks of term time, pupils will need support to catch up, but it is also important to recognise what they have gained, and to give them the opportunity to share their experiences when they return.

What do I need to be aware of when grouping pupils?
Some pupils may prefer to work in single sex groups for PHSE when discussing sensitive issues. Seating arrangements on a boy/girl basis may need introducing carefully.

Some pupils' names are unfamiliar to me.
If you are unsure how to pronounce a pupil's name, ask him/her to say it and repeat it carefully. Note which syllables are stressed as well as how the letters sound. Be careful never to appear to ridicule a name.

Sensitive use of data

While making use of the vast amounts of quantitative data on pupils' progress and attainment, it is also important to pay due attention to the qualitative information that is relevant and available: to 'measure what we value, not value what we measure'. This means using a variety of assessment tools, including observing and listening to pupils themselves, and recording their linguistic and cognitive development both in their first language and in English. We also need to consider how to recognise and value the skills they have developed outside school.

Community cohesion

North West Rotherham Schools Reference Group on Ethnic Minority Issues

This group was set up over a year before the two schools formally merged, with the proposed remit to:

- advise the Schools Reorganisation Steering Group on educational, social and religious issues affecting ethnic minority pupils in the community

- monitor the progress of the schools in developing and implementing a consistent race equality policy

- communicate to the ethnic minority community the work being done in this area and maintain the confidence of ethnic minority pupils and parents

Since then it has met once every half term, with teacher, governor and parent governor representatives from the three local secondary schools, as well as representatives from the LEA, the council, the youth service, South Yorkshire Police and the Rotherham Race Equality Council. The group has acted as a forum for discussing and introducing important issues, and as a sounding board.

One of the most illuminating sessions was the feedback from pupils at School X who belong to an Asian young women's group and an Asian young men's group which meet once a week at lunchtime to discuss matters of interest or concern, and to plan excursions out of school time. With the central detached project manager of the youth service, they had been talking about the closure/merger. Feedback given from both groups was almost the same:

- Most young people didn't feel as though they had much information around the closure.

- They felt that the pupils, who were to be affected by the change should have the opportunity to mix with School Y pupils who will also be affected.

- There were lots of concerns about racism, fights and teachers' possible lack of understanding of Asian culture.

- School X pupils also have a slight inferiority complex; this is due to their perceptions of School Y having a higher standard of education.

- Another major concern was about leaving their friends and whether there would still be an Asian boys' group and an Asian girls' group.

Both groups were told that their concerns had been raised and would be taken seriously. There are plans to continue both groups, and to start a new one for girls of English and Pakistani origin to get to know each other.

Liaising with local Asian youth service workers and groups

A link has also been made with an Asian youth worker who runs a project offering study support sessions at weekends for pupils in the catchment area. Al Muneera is supported by Rotherham Voluntary Action and funded from the

Children's Fund. So far, resources and ideas have been exchanged and it is intended to maintain contact and make the most of this opportunity.

Establishing and strengthening links with local mosques

Another opportunity arose when the sons of the new imam at one of the local mosques started attending School X. He has welcomed the idea of sharing information from school with those attending at Jum'ah (Friday prayers) and has agreed to display posters advertising forthcoming events at school. It is hoped that this will set a precedent for similar arrangements with other local mosques. A parent governor fully supports the idea:

> They could say, 'This is what the kids have been doing. Would you like to come down to discuss so-and-so or would you like to come and watch so-and-so?' That link's got to be there. It's very important for the mosque and school.

Translation and interpretation

The practice is not yet established of providing an Urdu translation with the English version of letters sent home from school. Indeed, some parents do not need or benefit from it at all, especially if the information being translated is written in quite complicated English (for example, the values survey). Here are some of their comments:

> When they're writing letters in Urdu, many sentences just translated into Urdu not writing proper Urdu.

> If you're targeting the Asian community, maybe in that language, or you could focus on that community, it will help the community, so that they know the school is doing this for our community as well. For the time being, a lot of people can read Urdu, but not Shakespearian Urdu, you know. If it's difficult, people get letters, they don't bother reading them, it's so difficult. Use everyday English and tell the translators to keep it simple.

> Children can explain it. Sometimes there are some words I don't understand.

> I don't think it's going to make much difference to the majority of the Asians because most of the younger ones, they can't read Urdu… If something is very important, what about big posters… and signs in school in all different languages, just to show...?

> We should ask if they want it translated. I could read it (Urdu) but I couldn't understand it. I prefer them in English.

The 'merged' school has nine staff of Asian origin who speak Mirpuri-Punjabi, Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi. However, they will not always be available without prior notice, so there is a need for agreed, recognised guidelines and procedures for interpreting at meetings with pupils' relatives. Staff should not be put in a potentially difficult—or even false—position.

Survey of the hopes and expectations of Year 6 pupils

Sixty Year 6 pupils at three 'feeder' primary schools were invited to complete a questionnaire to share information about themselves and their feelings about moving to the new school. Two of the schools have a significant percentage of ethnic minority pupils, while the third has a smaller but growing number. There were equal numbers of girls and boys and about a third of the pupils were of Pakistani heritage.

The response of all pupils interviewed to the prospect of starting year 7 was overwhelmingly positive. They had already met many different members of staff from School X and School Y, and had high expectations of the new school:

- It's going to be good and exciting.
- It's going to be a massive and enjoying school.
- I think it is a good idea. We will get to know more people.
- It's something to look forward to.

There were two questions connected with identity: How would you describe yourself? How would you describe your friends? In answering the identity questions, only one white boy referred to religion, though without specifying which. In contrast, one Pakistani boy and three Pakistani girls from School 1 described themselves as Muslim, while one Pakistani boy, two Pakistani girls and one dual heritage Yemeni/British girl from School 2 also said they were Muslim. Of the Pakistani children at School 3, only one girl mentioned religion—without specifying which.

Nationality was referred to slightly more often. At School 1, two white boys and one British girl thought of themselves as English, and two Pakistani boys and two Pakistani girls said they were Pakistani. At School 2, three British boys and five British girls described themselves as English, none of the Pakistani pupils used the term Pakistani, nor did any of the pupils at School 3.

Skin colour was only referred to by one white boy, one Pakistani girl (describing herself as brown) and one dual heritage (Yemeni/British) girl, whose self-portrait is detailed and confident:

> Brown hair, white skin, I'm Muslim, quarter Yemeni, kind, funny, very imaginative and loads of fun.

Religion, nationality and skin colour seem less important to these pupils when describing their friends. They are more concerned with shared interests, personality, age, height, and hair or eye colour. Others described themselves and their friends in terms of other physical characteristics such as height, hair or eye colour, age and personality.

There were two questions linked to aspirations:

- What you want to do when you leave school?

- What are your parents' hopes for you?

The responses show that pupils are concerned to do well at school in the short term and that most are considering a very wide range of possible future occupations. Their description of their parents' hopes suggests they have a wider focus, from achievement and behaviour at school to relationships and lifelong happiness. Football featured frequently on boys' lists (and one girl's). Cricket was an ambition for two of the Pakistani boys and one parent at School 1 but was nowhere near as prominent as some stereotypes suggest. Only six non-committal 'don't knows' seems remarkable in a survey of eleven year olds.

Questions about the importance of teachers and helpers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds elicited some interesting responses. Pupils at School 1 and School 3 had mostly positive views:

> If they (pupils) can't understand English…
>
> So that pupils from a different country can learn, too.
>
> So that if someone comes to school who speaks another language, they can talk to them.
>
> I would like a Scotland helper.
>
> Yes, so that we can learn different languages.
>
> Yes, because when I don't understand…
>
> It will be nice to meet them.

There were negative attitudes from two pupils at School 1:

> I might not know what they were saying.
>
> We're only supposed to speak English.

In contrast, nearly all the pupils at School 2 actively welcomed the idea of other languages in school as something that would benefit them:

> Yes, because we can learn other languages.
>
> If you go to a country what doesn't speak English, it will help you.
>
> Yes, because we can learn how to speak their language.
>
> Yes, because you'll be able to feel happy and you need somebody who understands… if you go somewhere, you'll be able to talk their languages and I think it would be fun.
>
> Yes, for people who are from a different country and they can teach you their languages.

One reason may be that this school has recently admitted a number of asylum-seekers from several different countries that have settled in quickly and happily.

These sixty pupils are a fraction of the total number of Year 7 entering the school in September (380+) but it is to be hoped that their enthusiasm and positive attitudes will be reflected in the wider school population. Many of them have relatives and friends who already attend or have attended School X and, as they will be on that site for the first year at least, it is perhaps not surprising that they are so confident.

The 'move' from Year 9 at School X to Year 10 in the new school (Site Y)

Twenty-seven Year 9 pupils from Pakistani backgrounds will move to the School Y site to start their GCSE courses in a mixed cohort of approximately 360 School X and School Y pupils. Six of these pupils—three boys and three girls—agreed to be interviewed about themselves and their feelings on the merger. Follow-up interviews were then carried out with their parents (in one case, with an elder sister). Pupils were chosen to represent a cross-section of abilities, attitudes and personalities. Their SATs results (which arrived after most of the interviews) show a clustering around 'below average' levels of attainment.

The interview schedules contain some of the questions in the Year 6 survey, as well as others relating to particular issues of concern to these older pupils and their parents. Often, the conversation moved away from the original question because the interviewee had a point to make, or an experience to relate.

The recurrent answer to the first question—on relatives who attended or attend School X—shows not only that there are strong family ties with the school, but also a real affection and sense of loyalty:

I've had family come here from previous generation, aunts and uncles. *(Shazad)*

Quite a few of my cousins, my mum used to go, and my uncles and aunties. *(Kiran)*

We've had a lot of connections with that (School X) 'cause we've all been to it ourselves and it's been there for years. *(Gulnaz's elder sister)*

I liked it (School X) and I didn't want it to close down. I would have preferred it to stay as it was. *(Kiran's mother)*

Preparing for Year 10

The most immediate concerns for the pupils were GCSE subject choices, and getting to know staff and pupils at School Y. They had all enjoyed the opportunity to attend the Choices Fayre, in a new, prestigious venue near the local shopping mall. They travelled on buses with pupils from School Y, during school time.

They're all right, the people there, I got on with them*. (Samina)*

Some of them talked to us nicely, some just walked away. I'm not worried about my options, but working with those (School Y) students, it's gonna be hard till we settle in. *(Shakeel)*

They are also aware that a bigger school can offer more choice:

Everyone's getting what they chose for their choices. Last year many pupils didn't get what they wanted. *(Shazad)*

Few ethnic minority parents went to the evening session: of those interviewed, only Shazad's mother was able to go:

It was very good. There weren't many Asians. I went with my sister-in-law. Maybe a different, closer place would be better, especially round this area. Maybe you could meet at a community centre, because in a school there's a lot of children and a lot of adults, and if you're not comfortable in yourself and you haven't got confidence, it's really hard, especially for Asian women.

Tanveer's father commented on the choice of venue, not just for the Choices Fayre, but for all parents' meetings:

Sometimes the mountain has to come to Muhammad. Sometimes, you have to go and meet the parents in one of the other schools, primary schools, near to where they live.

He thought that evening meetings, too far from home, were 'the biggest issue.'

Only Gulnaz's parents had been unable to attend the options interviews for pupils, parents and a senior teacher to formally decide each pupil's options. All the pupils and parents interviewed seemed happy with their choices and had clearly discussed them carefully.

An 'Aim Higher' week held on both sites allowed mixed groups of School X and School Y pupils to try a range of different activities in and out of school:

> We played games to get to know each other, that was good. We've been to college and university together as well. Helps us to get to know them better*. (Kiran)*

> The pupils there are really nice, they just took to being friends straight away… they're not as bad as people say… I thought there's gonna be criticism, they're gonna say stuff 'cause I'm an Asian and there aren't many Asians there. They're just so much like us and you don't expect 'em to be. I thought they'd be snobby, because I've heard lots of stories that they're always acting hard but they weren't, they were like us. (Shazad)

Shazad has had more chance than most pupils to get to know his peers at School Y, as he is one of eight student representatives on the joint School Council.

> They discuss everyone's views, like people from there (School X) had told me to ask about bullying or racism and I brought it up and it was all discussed, mentioned and sorted out. If there is any, it will be dealt with, because that school is a school for everyone and friendship and that's why they're joining the two schools together. Even though they go to that school, they had the same questions, and the same answers that they were looking for as we wanted.

Gulnaz has a more proactive approach to racism:

> If they be racist to me, I tell teachers about it. Then if they don't do anything I sort it out myself—backhand.

Her elder sister corroborates this:

> The kids are very racist there. Gulnaz has been in loads of fights, dinnertime, which you know or probably don't know about.

There is a clear warning for teachers here: if racism is not seen to be dealt with, pupils will not remain passive victims, they will 'sort it out themselves.'

Parents seem less concerned about racism, with the exception of Shakeel's father. He equates it with a lack of respect for other people:

> When they coming back, respect, everybody's safe. Now, shaking place...
>
> When my dad goes out, when I don't be at home, they just say racist things... they're only juniors, they're all under ten, they're doing it now, so small, what they gonna do...? *(Shakeel)*

His father talks movingly of his approach to settling in Rotherham:

> When I move in this area in 1980s, difficult life, we try to keep neighbours good, we don't care about anybody else, we kept on being good to them till they start being good to us, and that's what's kept us in this country.

His sentiments coincide with School Y's watchword 'Other People Matter', which will remain an integral part of the new school's ethos.

Identity

When asked how they would describe themselves, Shakeel said:

> My religion, where I'm from, what I'm like…

Tanveer nodded in agreement. The others were more explicit:

> I'm a British Asian. *(Gulnaz)*
>
> I think of myself as a British Asian Muslim. *(Kiran)*
>
> I'm a Muslim, I believe in Islam. *(Samina)*

Shazad, the most confident and talkative, gave the most complex answer:

> I don't think of myself as a Muslim and I don't think of myself as a Pakistani. My religion is Islam; my religion is not Pakistani, my religion is not Muslim. I may be a Muslim, but I don't think of myself as a Muslim. A person does not have to be involved, to have teachings of Islam. Islam is a religion for any person with any culture, you know, beliefs or—even a Christian—there are things in common between Christianity and Islam. I think of myself as a British Asian, that is what I think of myself.

Of the boys, Shakeel and Shazad still attend (different) mosque schools every evening after school but Tanveer no longer goes, and seemed rather dismissive:

> I've read it seven times.

His father regrets the lack of communication between the three areas of Muslim children's' lives:

> Home, school and mosque: they've all got links and that triangle needs to be kept together… When they go to mosque, or if they learn at home, whatever they read, or if they learn something, it's wasted, they don't get recognised for it academically, in qualifications. In the long run, whatever they learn should become part of the curriculum, whether it's Urdu, Arabic class, Qur'an or whatever, it should be taken into account and used as part of the exam. Otherwise it's a waste, they go there two-three hours but people don't think they learn anything but they do. They might not be doing well at school, might be under-achieving, but they do better up there, so that should be taken into account.

Shakeel and his father have similar concerns:

> All the teachers at mosque should know what happens in school, so they know better, like, how you're learning and in school the teachers should know. Because in here they make us do a test and they just put us in sets but they don't really know, they don't find out anything about us.

However, Shakeel seems unsure about the kind of reading that happens in his mosque school:

> In the mosque, when they read all that, you don't really read it.

Samina's father also thinks there should be more contact between school and the mosque:

> Need to be actually, because if school teacher were there, they can see what they do, how they pray in the mosque, it doesn't mean actually they sit and stand, put head on floor. But it's actually what word we're saying at that time, what praying in there. When you understand, you might think they're doing all right. Need to be explained in that way.

Samina herself has started going to the mosque school again to learn with the new imam:

> He's an excellent teacher, I were learning Qur'an off by heart, and I learned half of the last chapter. It's mainly a lot of Asian boys that learn Qur'an off by heart. My brother doesn't bother doing it now because he's got GCSEs.

She talks wistfully about the call to prayer she vividly remembers from a visit to Pakistan when she was eight or nine:

> … and at mosque, when they pray, so everyone knows it's time, that used to be really good. Wasim's really good at that, he used to do that.

Gulnaz has 'read it five times' and only goes to 'drop the little ones off' but Kiran continues to learn with her grandmother and seems to have more of a sense that this is a lifelong commitment:

> I read the translations as well and I think I'm getting there. There's a lot of things I don't have to do yet, because I'm too young. But it's good if I start.

She thinks for herself and questions some of her grandmother's attitudes:

> I've noticed with my grandma, she's very traditional with clothes. The clothes they wear in Pakistan, she likes that, but English clothes, she thinks they look too manly. She says it's for religious reasons, but I haven't seen it anywhere in the Qur'an that you have to wear, you can wear any clothes. I mean, all Muslims are not Asians, are they?

Shazad has a different explanation:

> A female should cover herself like she would hide a diamond. It's what our Prophet's (pbuh) mentioned, in books and that.

He describes his mosque teacher enthusiastically:

> He's got a degree in English… d'you know, he really believes that everyone's brothers and sisters, we're all from Adam and Eve...

His mother is similarly impressed:

> When he teaches them, he teaches them in Arabic and English. So they've got Arabic, they can read in Arabic, then in English, then the meaning of it so you know what you've read.

The provision of a multi-faith prayer room in the new school could go some way towards recognising the different expectations placed on Muslim pupils. Gulnaz's sister puts it thus:

> … it should be good, 'cause our kids these days they don't read what they're supposed to read. Some kids they don't have chance or time to read, so break should be good, when they can do a prayer.

It is clear, though, that a prayer room is not enough: there needs to be a greater awareness of and support for Muslim pupils' responsibilities at home, at the mosque and at school, to help them maintain the complicated balancing

act of growing up and keeping hold of their identity, whist leading parallel lives.

Role models / mentors

Although three of the pupils mention Asian teachers at school who they like, and who they would go to if they needed help, they are ambivalent about the importance of having staff from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds in school. Tanveer remarks:

> I'm not bothered, as long as they don't keep on staring at me when I'm walking past.

He acknowledges that he has a reputation with teachers and pupils for "annoying teachers—not all teachers, just some I don't like" but objects to being given "dirty looks". Yet his father believes it makes a big difference:

> It helps tremendously. If they see someone from their own background, their own culture, they probably look at them as a role model, something they belong to, it'll help them achieve more.

Gulnaz doesn't seem to think sharing the same background matters:

> I'm not really bothered if they're Asian or not. I just like her."

Shazad, on the other hand, thinks:

> It's important to have people from same background and same language because you can talk to 'em and they understand you.

His mother has mixed feelings:

> It is and it isn't. It is if there's people who can't speak the language properly, then obviously they need somebody who can communicate in their own language. But students, they should be using English, and it's their second language, some of them, and they've got to be able to compete out there. Nobody makes allowances for anyone. If you're going to get a decent job, you've got to be able to communicate and, if you can't communicate, that's a big barrier to start off with so… It is important for a parent but it's not important for children because at that stage, if they've been taught properly, they should be able to speak fluent English. With my children, they'll go to the person they feel safe and secure with. It doesn't matter if it's an English lady or an Asian lady, they'll speak to them in English so it don't make no difference.

However, earlier in the interview, she expressed her concern that teachers should understand pupils' backgrounds. Her own experience of primary school,

where she was the headteacher's 'right hand lady', regularly interpreting for teachers and parents, has obviously influenced her.

Kiran's mother, who went to school in Rotherham too, also believes in the importance of English:

> I made sure, because I had problems. When they're born, I teach them our language and then I teach them English, about six months before they go to nursery, so they know.

Her six-year-old son confirms this:

> She used to talk to my sisters and I used to listen.

But she too wants teachers to be able:

> to relate more to the child when they're having discussions, and the child can relate. If the teacher understands more, the child will understand more. Whereas if they're from a totally different background, it'll be more difficult to pick up, more difficult to understand.

Neither mother, both fluent and articulate bilinguals, considered the firm foundations in their first language to have resulted in their proficiency in English.

Samina's views are the most disconcertingly negative:

> Most Asian teachers they're not as good because of their, you know, how they act with other people. It might be a bit racist this but I don't like Asian people as much. I don't like how they act with other people. A lot of Asian people backbite and I don't really like that. Sometimes their English isn't as good as others, it can be complicated. In school, mainly, when Asians are talking when I'm around, they're always saying bad stuff about other people.

She obviously sees English as the most important language for her:

> I'm not really good at Punjabi, because at home I don't talk it that much. Mum replies in Punjabi, and I do understand it when other people talk, but I can't reply back, and with my Dad I always talk English.

Aspirations

Tanveer claims not to know what he wants to do when he leaves school, but he is interested in further and higher education. His father has high hopes for him, but there is a hint of doubt:

> My worries are, next two years, if he doesn't look deeply at himself, what he's doing, he's going to miss the opportunity of a lifetime. What helps probably, both him and me, is my daughter who's going through university. If she wasn't there, they might look to other side, they might have gone in takeaway.

Shakeel wants to be a professional cricketer, and says confidently:

> I think I can do it. There's no reason why I can't. I am one of the best players in South Yorkshire. That's what Mr 'A' says, and Mr 'B'!

His father smiles with quiet pride, which extends to all his children:

> They're making good life.

Shazad has thoughts of being a vet, a dentist or a lawyer, with vigorous support from his mother:

> I want him to go to university, achieve his goals and be happy in life. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy: you expect him to achieve and so he does. Sometimes they say to me, 'You expect us to be so perfect!' and I say 'You can, you can!'

Gulnaz has 'no idea' what she wants to do, and thinks her parents 'aren't bothered' although her sister says:

> Parents used to tell us, 'We didn't do that good at school and we hope you do' and we used to just laugh, thinking it's funny—but now we're older and wiser!

Whether Gulnaz will heed her older siblings' regrets and advice remains to be seen but at least her GCSE options (drama and PE) should allow her to shine at what she's good at:

> I'm a challenger. I've got attitude. I answer teachers back and talk when I shouldn't be!

Sabrina is in no doubt about her ambition:

> I want to carry on with maths when I go out of school. I want to become a Maths teacher.

However, she may have to fight for what she wants in school:

> I want to do statistics and I were going to be able to do that but then my behaviour got a bit on the wrong side. I want to be in a good set next year. That's what they're supposed to do...

She knows her parents will support her:

> They just want me to do really good and they go, 'Whatever you want to, do!' They'll always be behind me.

Kiran wants to study law, but says:

> My mum thinks I might change my mind.

Whatever she chooses, her mother will support her:

> I'd like her to do well in school and I'd prefer her to go to college and she is thinking of doing that, if all goes well.
>
> I was good at school and didn't want to get married at that age. Just 'cause that's happened to me it doesn't mean my daughter has to be the same. She can decide.

Kiran's mother gives her great deal more freedom than is usual for most other Muslim girls in this community, such as encouraging her to go on a week-long school trip to Belgium. She has endured much criticism from other Muslim parents but defends her position stoically:

> It's not a religious problem. It's a cultural problem. If you don't trust your child, if you don't give them that trust, and you keep hold of them and keep them tightly next to you, and say 'You can't do this and can't do that,' put restrictions on, they're more likely to go and do something that is going to affect you and disgrace you. Whereas if you let them make their own choices and you give them that freedom, … I think it's better in the long run.

In fact, Kiran is maintaining an even more difficult balancing act than her Muslim friends, precisely because of the extra freedom she is allowed, and her mother realises this:

> It's difficult for Kiran when she tells her friends, 'My mum says it's all right for me to do this' and they aren't allowed. She comes home and asks, 'Why is it bad?' and I tell her, 'You know who you are, how good you are...'

'You know who you are' could become another watchword for the school. In these interviews, pupils and parents have demonstrated that they do know who they are. If these insights and opinions are widely shared in the new school, everyone will have a sense of his or her own identity and also believe that 'other people matter'.

Conclusion

The merger of the two schools is a journey and is still at the beginning. As with any journey, plans and preparations have been made—some obvious and practical, others less obvious and more intuitive. Some may turn out to be unnecessary, others may have been overlooked or forgotten.

Staff are beginning to realise the need for a range of different support strategies to make the school curriculum, structure and environment as accessible as possible to all. Additional support often has a wider application than originally intended: for example, handrails on stairs can benefit everyone, not just those with physical disabilities. In the same way, resources and approaches to support language development can benefit all pupils, whatever their first language.

Sometimes it takes time to adjust to unfamiliar modifications (as demonstrated by both pupils' and staff's tendency to stumble over a newly–made ramp replacing a shallow step). Similarly, some forms of in-class support, home-school contact or extra-curricular provision may take a while to become part of everyday good practice. Small steps within school policies should provide initial guidance that avoids stereotypical generalisations, building on and developing existing procedures.

Implementing and monitoring the schools' joint race equality policy is still of crucial concern. The need for whole-school discussion and training has been clearly stated and recognised by all school staff, governors and the ethnic minority forum.

Preparations that addressed the concerns expressed by pupils and parents include opportunities for Year 9 pupils to choose their GCSE options together, and to get to know each other better during the joint 'Aim Higher' week activities. The confident responses of Year 6 pupils from three feeder schools—formerly in School Y's catchment area—suggest that the liaison work done by teachers from both schools has made a positive impact.

This case study has given a voice to pupils—of Pakistani heritage in particular—and some of their parents, enabling them to talk about the role of education in their lives, both inside and outside school.

The interviews with the six Year 9 pupils reveal a strong sense of personal and social identity. They are individuals who belong to several different communities—home, mosque, school—and adapt to them, often without those communities being aware of the balancing act 'their' children are performing. Several parents advocate sharing information between these different communities so that children's experiences and skills can be recognised and built on in cohesive and holistic ways.

The wide range of aspirations held by both Year 6 and year 9 pupils and their parents indicates higher expectations of, and greater confidence in, the education system than might have been expected. The experience of older relatives, both positive and negative, may have affected these pupils' attitudes and given them examples to follow or avoid. The school is considering ways of maintaining links with former pupils who could act as role models for the next 'generation.'

As the journey continues, so will the research begun in this case study, which has provided an invaluable opportunity to share the thoughts and experiences of individuals faced by considerable change.

APPENDIX
Year 6 self aspirations and parental aspirations
(by school, gender and ethnicity)

SCHOOL 1

	Self aspirations	**Parental aspirations**
Pakistani boys	football player, cricket player, car mechanic (2), football/cricket player	nothing, good report and leave Year 6, do well in football or cricket team, that I become what I want to be
Pakistani girls	don't know (2), solicitor, teacher, helper in schools, beautician, work in Claire's Accessories	do well and keep a good record, they wish I achieve something in life and be successful, don't get excluded, to have a good education, do well in SATs
British boys	fireman, policeman, footballer (3), RSPCA, pilot, soldier, motorbiker, design computer programmes and games	pass exams, get a good job(4), better school, good education, good girlfriend, do well, go to uni & play footie, get a good life, be a good footballer
British girls	child psychologist, barrister, teacher, policewoman, nurse, artist, vet, vicar, hairdresser, don't know	go far in life, get a good career and a good boyfriend, get a good job after going to university, get the highest mark, do well in SATs
Zimbabwean girl	nurse	grow up and live longer, learn from their mistakes, not get in trouble with bad people, have a happy adulthood
Dual heritage girls	doctor, zoo-keeper or vet	doctor, have a nice time and enjoy school, work hard

SCHOOL 2

	Self aspirations	**Parental aspirations**
Pakistani boys	doctor, operating hearts, plumber/electrician, don't know	be good (3)
Pakistani girls	doctor, graphic designer	doctor or nurse, good luck, good and better job
British boys	car salesman, author, carpenter, zookeeper, pet salesman, footballer (2), navy/marines (2), builder/carpenter (2), don't know	the best, good, do well, good marks, good GCSE results, don't know, don't fight
British girls	nanny, work in a pub, college-uni-vet, RSPCA, teacher, policewoman, (2) look after old people, college-beautician or backstage dancer	do well, (2) get As &Bs, good education, (2) a lot, don't know
Zimbabwean girl	don't know	-
Dual heritage girl	I want to be a consultant on babies in a hospital and deliver them	for me to do my best and get the job I'm dreaming for

SCHOOL 3

	Self aspirations	**Parental aspirations**
Pakistani boys	motor bike and quads stunter, police or marine	okay, a good education
Pakistani girls	go to college then university, go to university and be a good footballer	that I will be good at work and be sorted at anything, to get good GCSEs and get a good job
Chinese girl	don't know	they tell me