

RAISE project case studies – Slough

Views, Voices and Visibility

Reflections on the processes involved in realising the achievement of Muslim pupils of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage

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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

"I'm interested because I am from Pakistan myself and I want to see an improvement in our children's learning. That's it."

This study charts the journey of one LEA—Slough—towards a more realised understanding of some of the issues relating to the achievement of Muslim pupils of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage. It is a reflection on the role of an LEA in supporting the education of pupils of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage. Throughout the study, the voices of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage teachers, educational support staff, governors and community educationalists are heard, as educational professionals, as parents of children in local schools and as individuals within ethnic and faith communities. Without their participation, this study would not have been possible.

The aim is to illuminate some of the key issues for authorities in realising the achievement of Muslim pupils of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage. The stories of some of the significant strands of action undertaken by the LEA are told, and their progress is held up to the light and examined by members of the local Pakistani and Kashmiri educational communities. Through semi-structured interviews, the perceptions of members of the local Pakistani and Kashmiri educational community were sampled as they comment on the successes, pitfalls and what more there is to do. It is hoped that their perceptions can help inform educationalists in Slough and beyond.

Context

Slough is a medium sized, multi-ethnic, multi-faith town on the outskirts of Greater London. It has a long and continuing history of migration and settlement and a recent council publication celebrating Refugee Week proudly declared:

"In the 1930s it was people from Wales, in the 1940s, people from Eastern Europe, West Indians in the 1950s and people from the Indian

sub-continent in the 1960s. In recent years, Kosovo, Somalia and Afghanistan are just some of the countries that people have been forced to leave and have settled in Slough as a place of safety."

Of the 119,067 residents, 12 per cent are of Pakistani heritage, five per cent are Black or Black British, 14 per cent Indian heritage and 63 per cent White. Twenty per cent of the residents were born outside the European Union. Thirteen per cent of the population are Muslims, nine per cent Sikhs, four per cent Hindus and 53 per cent Christians. The town was described by OFSTED in these terms:

Its most notable characteristic is the multi-skilled, ethnically and socially diverse population that has a wide range of expectations and aspirations for education. Economic factors indicate that the extensive business community makes Slough a relatively prosperous borough, but many Slough residents work outside the town in low-paid employment. Seventy per cent of those employed in Slough are not local residents. Other social measures related to poor housing conditions, low levels of adult education and below average earnings confirm that sections of the town's population have considerable needs. (OFSTED 2000)

The town's school population is significantly more diverse, reflecting differing birth rates and the age profile of the population. 21 per cent of pupils are of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage: 3 per cent Mirpuri, 4 per cent Pakistani and 14 per cent from other Pakistani backgrounds. 16 per cent are of Indian heritage, 6 per cent Black or Black British, 6 per cent of mixed heritage and 46 per cent White (mostly White British). Around 70 languages are spoken in schools, the majority languages being English, Urdu, Panjabi and Mirpuri. 39 per cent of pupils have English as an additional language. 21 per cent are Muslims, 9 per cent Sikhs, 4 per cent Hindus and 39 per cent Christians (including 14 per cent Roman Catholics).

The town's education provision is small but interesting. There are just 47 schools and early years centres but these include infants, juniors and primaries, as well as selective and non-selective secondary schools. There are foundation and community schools in both phases and ten Christian denominational schools. Plans to convert two local schools to create Muslim and Sikh primary schools recently passed the first stage of approval from the DfES.

Schools in the town are ethnically diverse in comparison with national averages reflecting a relatively 'integrated' pattern of settlement. Although the majority of Pakistani and Kashmiri families live in three or four wards, these wards are not homogenous in terms of race, ethnicity, class, or religion. Settlement patterns combined with the existence of a relatively large number of Roman Catholic schools and the impact of the selective system has however led to considerable variability in the ethnic make up of schools. Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage pupils are the majority population in nine primary phase schools and three secondary schools, all of which are non-selective and one of which is for girls only.

As an urban, densely populated, commercial area with a number of indicators of disadvantage, Slough sat somewhat uneasily alongside the leafier areas of Berkshire until 1998 when as a new unitary authority it took over responsibility for the education of its young people. As 'a truly local authority' its vision for education and other services was articulated in its key priorities of Equality of Opportunity, Social Justice, Economic Development, Community Development and Healthy Environment.

Uncovering the issue

"Children from different community groups show significant differences in exam achievements, a discrepancy which must be tackled" was how the pattern of educational disadvantage facing young people in the town was described in the unitary council's first publication. Although Berkshire had documented patterns of differential achievement from the mid 1980s onwards, a recognition of ethnicity as a factor in the likelihood of success or otherwise at school was not commonplace. Data were not widely available by discrete ethnic groupings and by school and area, adding to a feeling of distance between consistent local and national findings and practices in schools and services. Whilst schools and individuals recognised differential achievement at a micro level it did not form part of a larger picture of educational disadvantage and inequality.

The new authority set about finding who gets what with particular zeal and reported early in January that:

Pakistani pupils comprise a significant part of the Slough school pupil population at 21.6 per cent. The proportion of Pakistani pupils is growing faster than other ethnic groupings based on birth data. Pakistani pupils comprised 19.3 per cent of all Primary pupils, 24.5 per cent of all secondary pupils and 28.6 per cent of all special school pupils according to the 1998 Form 7. There is a significant under-representation of Pakistani pupils in the Secondary Grammar Schools... Provisional analysis of the 1998 GCSE results by ethnicity showed Pakistani pupils underachieving by significant margins... It is clear that Pakistani underachievement needs to be addressed.

This concluding statement did not augur well. Whilst a longer analysis of the achievement of minority pupils in the town was framed within a setting of increasing educational disadvantage, the version of events presented for wider publication linguistically appeared to shift responsibility away from the structures and systems causing disadvantage and onto the students and their families.

At the time of the report, a range of views was expressed concerning the usefulness of identification of Pakistani and Kashmiri pupils as educationally disadvantaged or 'underachieving'. One was a denial that race and ethnicity could contribute to educational disadvantage. The focus was seen as improving educational achievement for all pupils: this in itself would be sufficient to raise the achievement of Pakistani and Kashmiri pupils without the need for 'divisive' initiatives which could create community tensions.

This 'colour blind' approach featured most prominently in the thinking of the school effectiveness division.

Within the equality division, a different concern was raised. Would identification lead to the reinforcement of negative stereotypes – the 'lowered expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies of failure' described by Gillborn and Mirza? The danger of this was vividly illustrated in the comments of a local White head of department who, sometime after an LEA briefing on the issue of ethnicity and achievement, remarked that it was unsurprising that his school results were so poor because he had heard that 'Pakistani girls had no chance' of doing well in his subject.

A third view, expressed most clearly in community responses, was that a focus on a single group of pupils distracted attention from the fundamental issue of racist disadvantage in education and was thus 'narrowing and diminishing'. Well attended public meetings heard pleas for the LEA to give more consideration to the needs of all ethnic minorities, including: the need for language support; the need to prevent pupils with EAL being mis-diagnosed as having SEN; the need to consider 'the whole child'; the importance of recognising the diversity of religions and cultures; the need to support community languages; and the need for continuing dialogue with parents and communities. Even more explicitly, it was requested that a proposed community education initiative should not be directed exclusively towards the Pakistani community but should be for all ethnic minorities. A focus on Pakistani communities was clearly viewed with deep suspicion.

Predictably, some media responses to the report held local communities accountable for 'failure':

English must come first, says vicar

Community leaders must ensure Asian youngsters are fluent in English or watch them continue to fail at school, a leading churchman has warned. Langley vicar... said he was not surprised by research which revealed children, especially in the Pakistani community were under-achieving in school... (He) said efforts to improve standards at school had to be supported in the home and community... 'I can imagine a poor child sitting in a classroom listening carefully to the lesson but only understanding half of what has been said. Parents from ethnic minorities will naturally want their children to learn their mother tongue. But at the same time they must learn English. Muslim parents will, of course, send their children to the mosque to learn Arabic so that they can recite the Koran. But at the same time they must learn English.' (*Slough Observer*, 19.01.99)

Planning for Change

In contrast to community concerns that 'the whole child' was in danger of being marginalised by a focus on differential achievement, the evidence uncovered during the initial data analysis appeared to galvanise the education establishment. Just as evidence concerning disadvantage was becoming common knowledge within the local educational establishment, the new LEA was required to submit a plethora of educational plans and

projects outlining its educational vision. These included the first Educational Development Plan, the Ethnic Minority Achievement Plan and the Education Action Zone Action Plan. Within all these plans and developments, the issue of Pakistani achievement was given a significant place, albeit in a slightly coded way. The uneasy compromise can be detected in the final wording of plans and projects which emphasised inclusivity and mutability - 'To develop an inclusive education strategy that enables all children, especially those of ethnic minority background, to fully access the National Curriculum and raise the attainment of identified under-performing groups' or 'To raise the achievement of all pupils, especially those of nationally and locally identified groups in danger of underachieving'. All these plans contained a tranche of measures aimed at redressing disadvantage. Although many of these projects were interrelated, for the purposes of this case study they can be grouped into four main categories:

- monitoring, tracking and target setting
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- addressing EAL and multilingualism
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- school based action projects
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- professional development regarding equality and Islamophobia

Monitoring, tracking and target setting

The setting of targets to improve the achievement of Pakistani and Kashmiri pupils was initially problematic as is explained in this extract from the authority 1998 EMAG Action Plan:

The LEA targets 1999—2002... are the results of the target setting exercise undertaken by the LEA and schools over the Summer and early Autumn terms 1998 for all pupils. No targets were set specifically for pupils by ethnicity. The targets by ethnic minorities... were arrived at by merely adding in the ethnicity of each child for which targets had already been set. The resultant targets analysed by ethnicity by schools and the LEA have revealed a number of issues of some concern. It is recognised that these targets are not challenging in terms of the analysis of under-achievement by ethnicity carried out as a result of producing this action plan.

This initial target setting exercise and analysis of subsequent results revealed that schools' predictions of achievements for pupils of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage were significantly less accurate than predictions of the progress of other groups. Over the period of the next four years, schools predicted that the percentage of pupils of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage achieving good GCSE grades would rise overall by no more than seven per cent, and five and fourteen per cent in the primary sector, predictions which were easily surpassed by 2000.

The authority therefore placed great emphasis on supporting schools with effective data analysis and target setting by ethnicity. This won praise from OFSTED in LEA and school reports and was seen as a significant contributory factor in improving attainment of Pakistani and Kashmiri pupils.

The LEA provides a highly regarded service to its schools. The provision of a comprehensive range of data, with a detailed LEA analysis, is a strength of the LEA. All schools receive a helpful analysis of their performance data. This includes comparisons with other schools in Slough and draws upon pupil-level data and value-added data. Pupil performance is analysed fully by gender and according to the ethnic heritage of pupils. For secondary schools, it is also analysed according to the type of school.

Schools make good use of these data, which received high praise in every school visited during the inspection. They use the data to target teaching resources, to identify pupils in need of support and to evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies to raise standards. (OFSTED 2000)

Data continued to grow in volume and sophistication, and to include additional factors such as eligibility to free school meals, pupil mobility, religion and special educational needs. Significantly what was not included in the data set was the progress and level of bilingual pupils' acquisition of English. This was due to the failure of national government to provide a national EAL scale that would have enabled results for Pakistani and Kashmiri EAL learners to be informed by information concerning English fluency.

Addressing EAL and multilingualism

Many local Pakistani and Kashmiri young people are learners of English as an additional language and so unsurprisingly language issues dominated much of the discourse around achievement, within both communities and schools. The authority saw EAL issues as of major importance for pupils of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage—not the acquisition of basic fluency but competent use of academic English. The LEA gave a significant focus to adopting an Australian EAL training course for all serving teachers: it concentrated on second stage language acquisition, that is helping learners of EAL to become fluent academic users of English. This was partly in response to the data that showed pupils of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage pupils to be performing less well in writing in the later years of primary schools and in maths and science in secondary schools: these levels of attainment could be explained by pupils' lack of familiarity with academic discourse in specific subject areas.

Community commentators also highlighted the primary importance of language support but stressed support for EAL and community languages and the importance of the religious, ethnic and cultural background of the 'whole child'.

Attendance on the 'ESL in the Mainstream' training course was strongly supported for all mainstream teachers within the EAZ, which included all of the schools where Pakistani and Kashmiri youngsters formed the majority population. In addition, the authority invested in improving the outcomes of teaching community languages in schools and complementary schools, through the appointment of a specialist adviser to organise training, grant allocation and support for schools.

School-based action projects: building partnerships

The development of school based specific support or projects began in earnest after the devolution of EMAG funding schools in 1999. This was broadly welcomed by the educational establishment as giving schools greater autonomy in the use of additional funding to combat local underachievement and create solutions to issues established through audit. Schools were required to account for projects and project progress through completing EMA action plans: this prompted them to address the progress of 'underachieving' groups directly. A typical project was tackling the underachievement of girls of Pakistani heritage in science. In this partnership project, the aim was to 'cater for individual pupils and to develop pupils' understanding of and motivation towards science'. The project was supported by central LEA staffing and pupil groups were offered in-class and additional support. Lesson plans were developed that emphasised techniques and activities supportive of later stage English language acquisition. Pupils' attitudes to science were sampled. It emerged that the students had had little contact with adults from the Pakistani community involved in the wide range of science-related occupations. An event was organised where Pakistani adults involved in the science field addressed students and parents. A video was also made illustrating the contribution of Black women to science.

The period also saw the expansion of family education initiatives or parental links programmes. A typical secondary programme saw the appointment of a family links professional who worked with targeted students to: provide behaviour support; enable students to develop self management skills; form and maintain links with the community; offer ongoing education to parents; and visit students and parents in their homes to set targets for improvements in school.

Paradoxically, the decentralisation of funding that allowed the development of partnership projects at school level to take place was also the arena in which a bitter struggle for voice and vision occurred. An LEA plan to 'establish a community education initiative which involved parents and pupils of ethnic minority groups and clusters of schools working together to promote achievement and to raise pupil attainment' intended to remedy this was the subject of great contention locally and never came to fruition. Community objections to this initiative centred on the suspicion that such a project would be 'a tool for schools to provide cosmetic service with no real commitment or intention to implement true equality policies' as 'schools do not like the ethnic minority communities exercising their rights'.

Professional development regarding equality and Islamophobia

One of the successes of the education authority was to ensure that local schools had access to good quality guidance in terms of identifying and dealing with racism, including Islamophobia. Early in 1998, a well-respected figure was commissioned to author a local equality manual through working closely with a group of local headteachers and LEA officers to ensure that guidance reflected local issues and opinions. Each section of the handbook included awareness-raising readings and questions for self-review, including some concerning the development of Muslim identities and the challenge of Islamophobia. This helped the educational community to react quickly to the wave of Islamophobic media coverage that engulfed the town in the aftermath of September 11th, described here by *The Guardian*:

Slough found itself in the papers over the next few days. There were reports of a disturbance involving 30 people around a stall in the town's high street following an argument about Islam's role in the attacks; Lofti Raissi, the Algerian who faces extradition to the US for his role in training the September 11 hijackers, lived locally and is said to have attended a Slough mosque; the Mail on Sunday carried a column condemning pupils at a "Berkshire school" - actually a Slough secondary - for celebrating the attacks, although the events described never happened; and a Slough man, Zahir Khan, was named in the Daily Mail as a key figure in the Al-Muhajiroun Islamist group. (*The Guardian* 25.10.01)

Of all the reporting, the most potentially damaging for the well-being of Slough's community was a report that pupils in a local school celebrated the events of September 11th, which provided the *Daily Telegraph* with the opportunity to print the following:

The librarian, who has worked at the comprehensive school for two years, said: "About 95 per cent of the 560 pupils are of Muslim origin." Most originate from three villages in the disputed Mirpur region of Kashmir on India's border with Pakistan. Large numbers have settled in the school's catchment area. 'It is like a parallel universe. They have created a Kashmiri ghetto, and the children are not allowed to adopt any western values or customs. Some of the children are a real worry. We have pupils who will come up to you and smile sweetly and say something in Urdu. Later you discover that they have called you a bitch. But most of them are decent kids and so are their families. Yet whereas Indian children are encouraged at school, the Pakistanis are not. They watch only Pakistani programmes on cable or satellite. Their mothers never learn to speak English. The girls are treated as second class and all are sent home to marry their first cousins in pre-arranged weddings. They receive no support in their studies. If we interfere we are called racists. Yet they hate Sikhs with a vengeance, they hate Hindus and Afro-Caribbeans, and they don't much like us either. They will go Sikh-bashing at the weekend. When I have offered advice to a Muslim girl who came to me and said, 'Please miss, I don't want to get married', I am not supposed to offer her any help. I am not meant to say, 'You are in Britain. This is a free country. You don't have to do anything against your will.'

The librarian said that although parents actively resisted any assimilation—packing children off to Kashmir if they showed signs of becoming westernised—she did not believe that the scenes she witnessed in the classroom were inspired in the home. 'Most are not sophisticated enough for that. Other forces are at work, maybe through their Muslim youth leaders and out on the streets. We recently had Islamic literature circulating that was deeply offensive. Islam is being peddled to these kids. They are told to hate the West, and America in particular. These children are victims, growing up in a country they are forbidden to become a part of and encouraged to despise the people they live amongst'. (*Daily Telegraph* 13.09.01)

Swift action was taken by schools and the LEA after the events of September 11th, again recounted here by *The Guardian*:

Although the Department for Education and Skills has not yet published its promised guidance to schools on dealing with the current crisis, Slough's headteachers reacted more quickly. They had met within a week of September 11, and stayed in regular contact, sharing information about the mood within their respective schools. The local newspapers were briefed about the risks of inadvertently exacerbating existing tensions within schools. Slough Borough Council issued exhaustive guidelines on coping with the situation.

The guidance covered a range of likely scenarios for schools: what to do if parents protest that Islam is taught in religious education classes (refer them to Slough's agreed syllabus for the subject); debating the wider ramifications of the subject ("It is vitally important that schools find opportunities, within their wider approach to anti-racism, to enable pupils to understand that fundamentalism, fanaticism and terrorism can and do exist within all religions, and the difference between those concepts"); how to deal with political leafleting outside the school (call the police); how to deal with racial attacks precipitated by the events ("support should be offered to both the recipients and the perpetrators"). (*The Guardian* 25.10.01)

Communities, councillors and the local police all reacted quickly and positively to the hostile media coverage and a number of potentially disastrous incidents motivated by the far right were narrowly averted including a plan to defile a local mosque. Although an increase in racially motivated assaults was reported, these remained at an individual rather than community level.

Evaluation

During the period of this study, the achievement profile of pupils of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage underwent considerable change. The key changes to the profile are illustrated here.

All figures are in percentages.	Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage pupils	White pupils	LEA average
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1998

≥ 5 A*—C GCSE	32	42	43
≥ L4 English at KS2	52	-	65
≥ L4 maths at KS2	43	-	53

2001

≥ 5 A*—C GCSE	45	53	52
≥ L4 English at KS2	70	-	74
≥ L4 maths at KS2	64	-	72

2003

≥ 5 A*—C GCSE	42	53	52
≥ L4 English at KS2	60	-	73
≥ L4 maths at KS2	63	-	71

In 1998, just 32 per cent of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage pupils gained five or more A*—C GCSE passes, almost 11 percentage points below the LEA average and 10 percentage points below their White peers. Similarly, only 52 per cent of Pakistani heritage 11-year-olds achieved Level 4 or above in English and 43 per cent in maths. As the LEA averages are 65 per cent and 53 per cent per cent respectively, Pakistani pupils were 13 and 10 percentage points below LEA averages. Only 28 per cent of Pakistani secondary pupils were in selective schools compared to 43 per cent of all LEA pupils. It was this situation that the LEA hoped to address.

By 2001 there appeared much to celebrate. Results were rising overall and rates of improvement for Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage pupils were above national averages. Differentials in attainment had been reduced to single figures at the end of primary and secondary education. 45 per cent of Pakistani heritage pupils gained five or more A*—C GCSE passes, only 7 percentage points below the LEA average and 8 percentage points below their White peers. Similarly 70 per cent of Pakistani heritage 11-year-olds achieved Level 4 or above in English and 64 per cent in maths, compared with borough averages of 74 per cent and 72 per cent, narrowing differential attainment to 4 and 8 percentage points. At this point it seemed almost possible that the achievement of Muslim pupils could be realised.

Within the next two years, however, results showed the gap widening once more as the results of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage pupils fell. 42 per cent of Pakistani heritage pupils gained five or more A*—C GCSE passes, 9 percentage points below the LEA average and 11 percentage points below their White peers. Only 60 per cent of Pakistani heritage 11-year-olds achieved Level 4 or above in English and 63 per cent in maths, compared with LEA averages of 73 per cent and 71 per cent. Differentials in attainment between Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage pupils and the LEA and White pupil averages were back in double figures.

No causal link is claimed between these changes and the activities of schools and the LEA, nor the impact of the aftermath of September 11th. It can be argued that the use of data from standardized 'high stakes' testing is problematic: there is a need to focus on learning as well as performance if we are to avoid a 'product' view of education that, by its nature, reinforces coercive power relationships between dominant and subordinated communities and institutions. Similarly, the perceptions of individual members of the Kashmiri and Pakistani educational community do not by themselves 'prove' anything. However, taking our focus as learning and the 'whole child', it is important to give as much weight to the collaborative process and the views of the participants as to the 'product'.

Monitoring, tracking and target setting: promise, prediction or self fulfilling prophecy?

"It can make such a difference, one teacher, one pupil, no doubt. And it's always harder to get things moving on a bigger scale. It's always a lot harder, a lot tougher, because pupils are individuals at the end of the day and that's another problem, we don't treat pupils as individuals." (*Advisory teacher*)

Interviewees were positive about highlighting the issue of educational disadvantage facing Pakistani and Kashmiri pupils directly and separately, identifying it as one of the most helpful aspects of LEA activity:

"Raising the profile and bringing it to the fore with teachers and drawing it to their attention that there are differences in achievement between ethnic groups so just raising the issue in the first place and getting people to acknowledge there is a problem, there are issues and therefore for something to be done about it. I also think it makes people from the Pakistani community want to be more involved and take responsibility. Because in the past I think they felt quite alienated from the system, quite separate from the system. So it's kind of extending the hand and saying this is what's happening in our community, we feel that we need to get involved and do something about it. So it almost brings people in, to have an understanding." (*Advisory teacher*)

Interestingly, given the high profile of target setting on local and national educational agendas, discussion of the positive impact of target setting as a process was almost completely absent from the interviewees discourse. What did emerge in interviewees' talk, however, was a description of actions that looked suspiciously like 'teaching to the test' but were overlaid by gender and ethnic considerations:

"They used the SATs results. They highlighted the target group and then used the support to focus on Pakistani boys. EMAG staff that work in my class have been taking out those boys and doing extra work. So that's all really helped." (*Teacher*)

The many examples of this in interviewees' talk appear to confirm research that high stakes testing can dramatically constrict instruction and reinforce

the 'banking concept' in education, which views pupils as having a fixed capacity for learning:

"And there comes a point when we say, 'The child is able to do, according to his abilities, this much. That is enough.'" (*Support teacher*)

Certainly this period saw an increase in streaming and setting, and the extension of the practice into infant schools. Research suggests that a focus on product also appears to support a cultural pathology which problematises certain groups or communities. From interviewees' discourse there emerges some evidence of respondents adopting a 'cultural pathology', which particularly problematises Kashmiri pupils and their families.

"With very limited exposure, they don't actually know what is expected of the child. If the father is doing a night duty, he's too tired to take an interest in the child. The woman is doing all the household work or has small children so she doesn't know what is expected, with the result that the child is left to his own devices to do whatever he can or just forget about the homework. There is no consolidation of the work done in the class." (*Support teacher*)

As interviewees struggled to come to terms with helping pupils meet the demands of 'high stakes' testing, they can appear frustrated with parents' common sense understanding of pupils' progress.

And the parents just think: 'Oh, our children can speak English and so they are doing very well'. They don't think that even just speaking is not good enough, that they should achieve more in different areas—reading and writing, things like that. (*Teacher*)

They feel 'OK, if my child is reading all right, then that's enough'. But that is not enough, because they are not aware of what's expected of them, not aware of the school expectations of the child. (*Support teacher*)

A focus on the use of performance data to improve achievement can be seen as putting pressure on teachers to demonstrate quantifiable progress: this may distract them from their enabling role with pupils, as well as their role in enabling communities to become engaged in the debate on 'what is the learning that we value and want to happen'.

The interviewees were not, however, passive acceptors of this process. Time and time again in their talk, interviewees from across the educational spectrum returned to the importance of understanding—or, more properly, accepting—the pupil as a complex individual within ethnic, faith and cultural communities: the appreciation of the whole child.

"You need to understand the child, the children. It's a different culture altogether, as well. I think one idea, understanding the child, understanding the culture, the background, the family values, their

ties, how important it is to them. That way when they come in to school, you've got that understanding, you can sort of relate to them."
(*Learning assistant*)

They frequently expressed views on the need to expand the system to take account of the whole child, not by lowering expectations but by re-conceptualising the curriculum and by widening participation:

"We need to change the SATs to allow EAL pupils to respond more appropriately."

"I've learned very recently about the art curriculum and how much more relevant you could make it. I know it's incredible and we need people to go out, go on secondments and learn about different things... OK, I'm the first to admit, having just stepped out of education for a year, how much I've learnt as a teacher. And how important it is to go out and then come back in. You can inject so much more new stuff that makes things relevant to kids."

"More in depth education about what the religion (Islam) really means. We need to combine things."

A significant barrier to change was seen as the negative stereotyping of pupils likely to be encouraged by the 'scientific' approach of target setting.

"I think there are attitudinal issues that affect achievement, relating to the attitude of teachers and the whole establishment and I think that underpins a lot of what is happening in schools. I would go so far as saying there are teachers in schools that teach children who have no belief in their abilities. There are teachers that do as well, I'm not generalising. But there are teachers who have a big role in the school and they have a lot of influence over these children and they don't have the belief in the children." (*Advisory teacher*)

"I've seen it when I've been observing other teachers, and they think 'Oh well, he's not going to know because his home language is different blah, blah, blah I'll ask him a simple question' and they kind of lower everything. And really he or she could do just as well and that's what I've been doing in my teaching. They're only going to give what you ask for, so if you encourage them, stretch them, they will, they do." (*Teacher*)

From interviewee talk, it appeared that these stereotypical attitudes and expectations were most likely to be successfully challenged through micro level interaction during school based projects, through a focus on EAL and multilingual support or through their own influence as successful Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage teachers.

"So when I came here the difference was just immediate. I thought 'So they really are, they really are underachieving' and I saw it with my own eyes. And I felt... at first I felt a little bit embarrassed, to be honest. I thought I wonder if I was like this when I was little. Then,

when I spoke to the children and got to know my colleagues a bit more, it was like we're all working towards one goal and we're going to work together and we're going to push them. And when I realised the sort of role I could play, I felt really quite special. I could push them. They could learn with me, I was like doing my job." *(Teacher)*

EAL and Multilingualism

I do think that if the LSAs or the teacher speaks the home language, that's a huge difference. The children automatically feel: 'Oh she knows, like she knows me, we've got that common ground'. *(Teacher)*

The LEA commissioned an independent research evaluation of the ESL in the Mainstream project. Following the training, the teachers who participated expressed the feeling that they had become particularly attuned to cultural awareness issues relating to EAL learners: this helped them communicate with the pupils much better.

While interviewees saw a significant role for language development, they did not see this as exclusively—or even primarily—a concern for EAL-specific support.

"There's more emphasis now on EAL learning, so that has... more research on it too. So more thought is being given to bilingualism. That has had a good effect basically for these children, because the children, the schools are now focussing on this thing." *(Teacher)*

Interviewees continually pointed out the need for more bilingual staff, because of the important role of the first language in EAL and bilingual development. They were even more emphatic, however, about the necessity of providing role models to challenge low expectations by White teachers. Further, they held a more generalised belief in the 'affirming' nature of the use of first language and the positive impact of its use by teacher role models.

"One of the difficulties in Slough—and certainly when I've been involved with educational colleagues—is that it is White middle class professionals. I mean, you go to any conference, you go to any training day, you see exactly what the make up of people is and I think there is a huge gap. There's very little recruitment or positive action towards recruitment of teachers from Black and minority ethnic communities. Certainly you have a lot of non-teaching assistants, but they, you know, there's a whole range of issues around them, where it's actually very difficult for them to actually develop and move up within organisations, the kind of support they get. There's a lot of bullying and harassment, certainly that I knew of." *(Family social worker)*

Support or challenge?

"If the only good thing that I did was prove to a teacher that didn't expect the community to respond in a positive way, in a supportive way, if that's the only thing I did then at least I did that and that's very important. It's a small thing but it might have changed the long-term perception of a teacher. And that teacher is going to stay a teacher."
(*Advisory teacher*)

The growth in school-based Pakistani and Kashmiri projects accompanied the devolvement of EMA funding to school. An evaluation of the impact of EMA changes carried out locally in 2000 revealed that EMA could contribute positively to the reduction in differential attainment for Pakistani heritage pupils, but only when a number of favourable conditions were met. These included: support from educational hierarchy; a commitment to combating racism; and well qualified and supported bilingual EMA staff. School-based initiatives deemed to be particularly successful were varied. However, the common factor was clear planning of the initiatives and support, which followed a thoughtful process of analysis which, in turn, stemmed from consideration of, and discussion with, the 'recipients' of the support. A key issue was that successful schools appeared to fulfil their plans—even when faced by unexpected challenges, such as staff changes or the arrival of new pupils with support needs.

Working with parents had a high profile within school special projects. As discussed earlier, an educational focus on performance may encourage a deficit view of the support of Kashmiri and Pakistani parents and families. The particular issues of concern raised during the interviews included: levels of parental education and English; lack of support for school initiatives; lack of appreciation of the value of schooling; and lack of exposure to 'outside' influences.

On the other hand, when interviewees talked about their real lived experience, they displayed great confidence in the contribution of parents and were quite often clearly excited by the possibilities of their own projects.

"Because we've made that link, the parents feel more free to just walk in the morning and just pick up the books, pick up their children's work, come to me and stand and have a chat about normal everyday things. And now the boys have accepted it and they feel that 'Oh Mum's part of school now'. So there is that change of attitude. It's really slow but it's there." (*Teacher*)

The willingness of interviewees not to give up talking, encouraging and developing relationships with parents and communities—sometimes in inventive ways—were rewarded by widening participation in education.

"In terms of how we advertised the things that were going on, I literally stuck my head through doors and windows of cars to say 'Look!' It's a lot of effort but it had to be one on one because there is no trust." (*Advisory teacher*)

"If you can't get them (*Pakistani mentors*) in school, if you can't get them in Slough, go out of Slough. Take kids to places. Make more of an effort. Don't resign yourself to the fact that the Pakistani community just don't get involved with schools. Find out what the issues are."
(*Teacher*)

Many interviewees stressed their own role not simply as role models but also as mediators of the curriculum and empowerers of parents and communities.

"And maybe sometimes in school or in some establishments, they just think, 'Oh these children, they won't learn more even if we put effort in them'. So when the parents come, they can't push the establishment and the teachers, as they can't speak English. And they don't come forward to speak to the teachers, the head teachers or anybody because they feel very uptight. Because they can't explain the situation, they can't explain their concern. OK some schools they have like people who can interpret but others don't. So that's why. Like English people, whenever they have any concern... they know what to say, what to ask. They come. They make an appointment to come, they talk to the Head teacher, they talk to the teacher. But these parents, most of them, even parents' evening they don't come to, because they just think: 'Our children are OK, we can't ask for more'. And then they don't know how to ask for more... That's what I think and I've found lots of parents, when they come to like my class, or some other ethnic minority teacher who can speak, they will come, they will talk and discuss issues about their children." (*Teacher*)

Consistency and continuity of initiatives won praise from interviewees, even when first attempts were unsuccessful. This confirmed findings that effective schools characteristically based their plans on understanding and audit, and then followed them through—whatever challenges came in the way. Interviewees were critical of what they saw as 'short-termism':

"For the time being, it has been done well, resources have been put in and, once you've seen a bit of progress, you pull back. And that is where the issue has gone into the community and they are saying: 'Our kids are not doing very good so we need to have a separate, maybe Islamic school. Maybe a separate school for girls.' There is some disillusionment with schools. If the community is satisfied and happy with schools, they certainly they wouldn't be saying that."
(*Community languages teacher*)

"You take in this expert and you bring them in and you're not actually changing anything. You just bring them in for a short span of period and there's no continuity. There's nothing long term that's happening. It's just filling gaps that exist and then, you know, nothing happens afterwards. So a lot of the responses, a lot of the projects don't have, I think, a long term strain to them and I think that's very dangerous sometimes as well. Because you can often leave children... you know suddenly they had all these role models, and all of these things and

goodies were given to them and then I'm gone and no-one else is going to do that there." (*Secondary teacher*)

One of the major challenges to consistency is the institutional discrimination evident in the national funding provision for EMA, as well as the competing needs dilemma. This had a significant impact on the funding available to the LEA during the period of this study. Whilst funding and investment rose in real terms from 1999–2001, it fell during the following two years. Schools were required to support an increasing population of pupils with significant first stage language needs. Despite protestations in local debate, it is clear that meeting the 'emergency needs' of new-to-English pupils meant that less staffing and resources were available to counteract disadvantage experienced by Pakistani and Kashmiri pupils.

Opening eyes to the impact of Islamophobia

"You know if you label yourself a Pakistani, say I'm a Pakistani, they look at you differently. I mean I'm talking about Islamophobia. For some odd reason, Islamophobia is put together with Pakistanis. People relate them very closely and it's more Pakistani Islam than any other sort of community throughout the world... Islamophobia is affecting a lot of people and it's affecting a lot of educated people, as well. And generations that are coming are going to be affected by it if it doesn't get dealt with really quickly." (*Support assistant*)

There is deep suspicion within the wider communities that the relationship with the LEA is unequal and that the LEA is institutionally hostile to the development of powerful community informed practice. This suspicion initially emerged over the doomed community education initiative but is still continuing. During its inspection of the LEA, OFSTED chose to interpret this as a failure to communicate or, more properly, a failure of the LEA to convince the community of the rightness of its thinking.

The key challenge for the whole of Slough and particularly the education department, is to overcome the gaps in awareness and knowledge that exist for stakeholders in education in relation to some key policies, strategies and concerns about education and to secure greater mutual understanding. Officers recognise the need to give more time for parents and communities to explore the implications of the LEA's strategies for raising standards and improving the quality of education alongside the difficult decisions that accompany them. (OFSTED 2000)

In contrast, many within educational and local communities feel they are quite clear about what is happening and why.

Institutional racism is what's happening over the (Muslim) school. Nothing else. There are a lot of parents who want a good foundation in Islamic values for their children. Since September 11, there has been opposition to Muslim schools but I am tired of Islam being linked with fundamentalism. Muslim values are about family and looking after your family and your elders. (*Educationalist*)

Overall, the Pakistani community has gone past caring because so much has gone on around the world and there's been so much bad focus on Muslims that they're thinking 'It's just not worth trying to voice your opinions or express your ideas because it's just not going to happen'. They feel like there's just too much bad publicity, they're not going to be heard in the first place. (*Support assistant*)

Although the consequences of Islamophobia were admirably minimised during the aftermath of September 11th, this was through an emergency coalition of race equality bodies, community leaders, law enforcement agencies and schools and pupils themselves. It is not clear from this study whether the lessons of that time have resulted in long term action at a school or LEA level. Certainly many interviewees and commentators see a lack of action and understanding of the urgency of the issue.

I mean there are issues around Muslim communities in Britain now. This suicide bombing, 11th of September, the whole lot and there are issues around Islamophobia. And I think we need to be focusing. There's a big community in Slough and it is equally affected. And kids, especially, are affected by these things. I think schools and the authority particularly need to be aware of that and start taking steps now. Because wherever there is a Muslim majority and youngsters especially are really, you know, they are a target from outside forces, if you will. We are an authority on the fringes of London and I am aware of some of the influences. For example, during Ramadan you have some groups coming and getting, addressing these youngsters. I happened to be there and I said, 'No this is wrong' and they said no, no, no. So you've got these extreme groups who tempt our youngsters but if kids are disillusioned with schools, with teachers, with authority then they oughtn't to go to those things. I think we need to address that issue very urgently. (*Teacher*)

This new generation of kids are crucial to us now. If we want a harmonious future for Slough we have to invest in them. We are trying our best to make sure the kids that come out of our school are going to be the catalysts, the pebbles in the pond making ripples in Slough of moderation and modernisation. Kids feel and look a lot more frightened. They are very conscious of the fact that they are Muslims. (*Advisory teacher*)

Conclusion

So what then can be learned from this—sometimes painful—journey of one LEA towards greater understanding of the issues relating to the achievement of Pakistani and Azad Kashmiri pupils?

Educationalists need to accept that—for most parents, including Muslim parents—education is more than just schooling: education needs to encompass consideration and respect for the 'whole child', including language, culture and faith. The LEA role should be to provide the infrastructure that enables innovation and partnership to flourish at a

classroom, school and community level. Successful initiatives welcomed by the whole educational community include: the formulation of information and guidance; facilitating the work of Pakistani and Kashmiri staff with schools and communities; and the provision of 'space' for teachers, parents and other educational professionals that allows them to discuss and examine, in an informed way, the cultural, religious and community implications of classroom level work. In contrast, well meaning 'top down' interventions by the educational establishment can easily be misinterpreted and result in hostility, particularly when such initiatives are posited on an integrationist position.

Educational initiatives designed to promote achievement within schools must be formed with the full participation of pupils and communities themselves in a genuine partnership that will involve, in some senses, a change in the power relationships between professionals and parents and communities. A re-evaluation of the relationship between the 'doers' and the 'done to' is required. The conversion of a local school to an Islamic primary school could be viewed as one end of this continuum, whereby collaborative relations of power are established: the LEA providing the venue and monitoring the standards, and the faith community enabled to provide a space to support the negotiation of identity.

Evidence from interviews suggests that there are also other ways in which renegotiations of power can happen, through positive interactions at micro level, within classrooms, between parents, pupils and educators. The positive effect of these interactions can however be undermined by institutional discrimination in terms of curriculum, resourcing, assessment, staffing and ethos. Education professionals need to be supported to understand that a focus on product rather than process—by its very nature—discourages a critical examination of power structures and leads to systematic devaluing of 'other' linguistic, cultural, and religious capital. Islamophobia endangers the well-being of all communities: it can be detected not only through crude racism but also through the exercise of coercive power.