

Faith Schools and Community Cohesion

Observations on Community Consultations

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Foreword

In September 2006, Runnymede began a new research project called, simply, Faith Schools and Community Cohesion. The aim of the project was to engage a wide range of stakeholders in conversations - what we came to call 'learning dialogues' - about how a school system that includes faith schools successfully prepares young people for living in a multicultural society.

In particular, through the research and multiple stages of consultation and data collection, we wanted to address three main questions: How do or can faith schools contribute to community cohesion and good race relations? What barriers or challenges do faith schools face in this regard? What, if any, impact do faith schools have upon ethnic segregation?

This 16-month project, which will draw to a close with a final report in early 2008, aims to contribute credible data - some quantitative, but mainly qualitative - detailing a wide range of lived experience along with considered views on the opportunities offered and challenges posed by faith schools in fostering community cohesion and promoting good race and inter-faith relations.

For what is a relatively short project, this is a tall order that has required a range of methods to be applied in order to get to these 'lived experiences' and 'considered views'. These have included:

A RUNNYMEDE TRUST INTERIM REPORT NOVEMBER 2007



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The Runnymede Trust would like to thank the Esmeé Fairbairn Foundation for their support for our Faith Schools and Community Cohesion project.

- a formal consultation paper requesting written responses issued to the public in March 2007;
- interviews with a selection of the written consultation respondents;
- one-day community consultation workshops; and,
- school-based workshops, which involved an in-depth survey consultation with parents and teachers, focus groups with parents, one-to-one interviews with headteachers and focus groups with young people.

In all, over 250 individuals from 6 different areas of the country have contributed their experiences and views to the project so far.

This interim report by Professor Audrey Osler focuses on the one-day community consultation workshops. Over the summer months of 2007 six community consultation workshops were held — in Brent and Harrow, Newham and Hackney, Liverpool, Leicester, Blackburn, and Southampton. A wide range of participants took part, including Local Authority Cohesion officers, SACRE members, headteachers (faith and community schools), members of faith networks, regeneration community organizations, youth bodies, Youth Parliament representatives and others.

In this paper, Professor Osler, acting as the project rapporteur, draws our attention to a range of broad themes that emerged in the community consultation workshops. She then takes us through each of the six geographical areas highlighting particular issues as they were experienced locally and articulated through the workshop activities. The paper concludes with the author drawing together the threads and pointing us - the reader and the project - towards conclusions for further consideration in relation to the other project data collected before and after these community consultation workshops were conducted.

In the current public discourse where much of the discussion on faith schools takes simplistic positions — faith schools are good or faith schools are bad — one of the most important contributions this report makes is to highlight the true complexity of the situation and how different types of schools are responding in different ways to very different local contexts. As the first piece of analysis of project data, though focused on only one element of the data collected, this publication is shared with our readers and project participants to encourage further dialogue, reflection and debate.

Michelynn Laflèche
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November 2007





1. Introduction

From September 2007, all maintained schools in England have an obligation, under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, to promote community cohesion. During June and July 2007 the Runnymede Trust conducted a series of consultations with key stakeholders across the country to understand the contexts, challenges and concerns facing local communities in relation to community cohesion. These community consultations were undertaken within the wider framework of Runnymede's Faith Schools and Community Cohesion project, and they reflect on a spectrum of emerging themes that will inform the final report, due in 2008.

The consultation exercise was designed to inform our understanding of the differing contexts in which faith schools and non faith schools are required to fulfill the duty to promote community cohesion, thereby supporting policymaking in this area at school, local authority, and national levels. In particular, we wished to explore the strengths and limitations of different schools, both faith and non-faith, in fulfilling their new legal duty and to identify opportunities and challenges which schools in different locations face.

The author, working as project rapporteur alongside Runnymede Trust staff members, was a participant observer in meetings with stakeholders in six locations across England. Two of these were in London - in Newham and Hackney (inner boroughs) and Harrow and Brent (outer boroughs); the other four were organized in contrasting cities across England - Blackburn, Liverpool (both in the Northwest), Leicester (East Midlands), and Southampton (South).¹ Typically these were one-day meetings² planned by Runnymede in collaboration with local organizations.

This report offers observations on themes that have emerged during the consultation and presents them independently of the major report, for current discussion and in the expectation that they may provide an extra dimension to the work in progress.

This paper is structured so that the next section, Section 2, addresses the consultation design and identifies who was consulted. Section 3 briefly outlines the key questions we sought to explore. Section 4 raises issues for consideration when interpreting the data. Sections 5 and 6 discuss the findings of the consultation, focusing on cross-cutting themes in Section 5 and presenting each of the area profiles in Section 6. Section 7 briefly considers the implications of our findings for policy development relating to faith schooling and community cohesion.

2. Consultation Design

Each full-day meeting was organized in a workshop format designed to promote maximum participation and exchange of ideas. On each occasion the day was introduced by a Runnymede staff member and by local organizers; and, where appropriate, by local elected members. Four consultation meetings were held on the premises of a faith or community group and two were hosted in local authority centres.

Introductions were structured so as to allow participants to meet others on a one-to-one basis and to learn something of each other's personal and professional experiences of diversity, experiences of initiatives to promote community cohesion, possible involvement in faith schooling, and active engagement in issues of social and racial justice with and on behalf of young people.

These were followed by a series of small-group discussions, ranging around the themes of school choice, living with diversity, multiple identities and belonging, equality and inclusion, and social responsibility (for details of these themes see Section 3). The small-group discussions adopted the 'café conversation' model, which allows participants to interact at a 'café table' and then move on to meet others at different tables.

In the second part of the day, participants were invited to work in groups to develop a local community cohesion project of their choice, targeted at young people in and/or beyond school. The aim of this exercise was to identify specific local community cohesion, inter-faith and racial justice issues and to address these in a creative but practical way.

It was not the intention that these projects should necessarily be realized (so the projects which participants proposed were not subject to the normal constraints of budgets and resources), but that the process of discussion and planning should enable everyone to engage in thoughtful debate about questions of community cohesion with co-participants who have diverse experiences of education, inter-faith engagement, professional expertise and perspectives on faith schooling. Importantly, this session allowed participants to look in more depth at the issues facing local communities and promoted further debate about the meanings of community cohesion both within schooling and in the wider context of local young people's lives.

In addition, participants were given the opportunity to contribute to a 'conversation wall' where they could post supplementary comments and reflections,

1. The cities were selected to reflect a range of lived experiences of ethnic and religious diversity and of schooling, with different cities offering different choices in terms of faith-based and non-faith-based schooling within the public sector; different proportions of students attending faith and non-faith schools; some locations had only long-established Christian schools alongside non-faith alternatives within the state sector; other locations had newer minority faith schools already established or about to gain voluntary-aided status.

2. The exception was Southampton, where a half-day meeting took place with stakeholders working in schools and voluntary organizations and a second evening consultation was held with members of an established inter-faith forum held in a local mosque.



anonymously if they wished. These were left open throughout the day. There were four questions to provoke their thinking:

- What inspires young people to be responsible for developing cohesive communities?
- What everyday practices (activities, events) create community cohesion for young people?
- How can we best engage the participation of young people from all ethnic and faith backgrounds in initiatives to promote cohesion?
- What kinds of partnerships would support community cohesion initiatives in schools?

The composition of the stakeholder group attending the consultation varied according to the location. In each location, invitations were sent to a wide variety of local stakeholders: including school principals and teachers in faith and non-faith based schools; teacher unions; parents' associations; police representatives; local authority staff, including those with specific responsibilities for equalities, the education of specific ethnic and religious communities, and community cohesion; religious institutions and associations; elected representatives; voluntary organizations, particularly those working with children, young people and parents; members of the local SACRE,³ colleges and institutions of higher education; humanist and secular organizations.

Our intention was to involve as wide a range as possible of those individuals and groups who had a specific professional responsibility and/or community-based interest in matters of community cohesion and to develop the dialogue between such groups. In practice, the composition of the stakeholder groups varied considerably between the different locations. So, for example, in one locality there were significant numbers from a local university, whereas in other localities higher education institutions were absent. Generally speaking, a range of participants from the local authority attended, but in two localities no local authority personnel were present, despite repeated invitations and encouragement to participate.

These consultations, held at the end of the school year, did not include the children and young people who are the subject of community cohesion policies and initiatives. For organizational reasons, a parallel series of consultations was conducted with young people in the localities in September and October 2007, and this data is being analysed at the time of writing.

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3. Every local authority is required by law to have a SACRE or Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education. It originates in the Education Act 1944, but the Education Reform Act 1988 and the Education Act 1996 strengthened its place. The responsibilities of the SACRE are: to provide advice to the local authority (LA) on all aspects of its provision for RE in its schools (this does not include Voluntary Aided Schools); to decide whether the LA Agreed Syllabus for RE needs to be reviewed and to require the LA to do so; to provide advice to the LA on collective worship in its schools (this does not include Voluntary Aided or Voluntary Controlled schools); to consider any requests from school principals to hold collective worship that is not of a broadly Christian character; and to advise on matters relating to training for teachers in RE and collective worship.

4. See Osler and Starkey (1998) and Alderson (1999).

5. See Carter and Osler (2000); Osler (2000); Osler and Osler (2002); and Rudduck and Flutter (2004).

Cohesion project team recognizes young people's right, under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, Article 12, to be consulted about decisions that affect them.⁴ We also are aware of research that confirms how policies and practices which relate to young people and schooling are more likely to be effective when they are consulted.⁵ The data from the learners will be incorporated into the final project report.



3. Key Consultation Questions

The central focus of this consultation exercise was as follows:

- How can a school system in this locality/city that includes faith schools prepare young people for living successfully in a multi-ethnic and multi-faith society? What are the challenges that schools in this locality face?

The aim was to explore how community cohesion might be promoted both within faith schools but also within the wider local community and between the members of faith schools and non faith-based schools.

The project wished to understand the lived experiences of cohesion and of ethnic segregation, separation and isolation. The areas identified for particular consideration were:

School choice

Do learners and parents have a genuine choice between faith and non-faith schooling? Is this the case for all groups? Are there points of tension (for example, in the provision of new schools)? How fair and inclusive are the admission policies within these schools?

Living with diversity

How well do schools in this area, including faith schools, currently prepare young people for living together with people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds? Are there ways in which they go beyond providing knowledge of diversity to equipping young people with the skills for living together?

Promoting multiple identities and a shared sense of belonging

What do schools (including faith schools) in this area do to reflect the multiple identities of local students (e.g. gender, ethnicity, faith, sexuality)? How do they cultivate a sense of commonality between young people of different ethnic and faith identities?

Equality and inclusion

How do schools (including faith schools) in this area respond to the educational needs of different communities? Are there any communities or people



from particular ethnic/faith backgrounds who are alienated, excluded or disadvantaged in their accessing of educational services?

Social responsibility

How well do schools (including faith schools) respond to and address disadvantage and exclusion within the community of the school and the neighbourhood?

4. Interpreting the Data

The scope of the consultations was, as can be seen, ambitious. The emphasis of discussions in each of the six locations differed not only according to the specific local context but also in respect of the professional and personal experiences of those attending the consultation exercise. It is important to remember these key points when interpreting the findings of this study.

Another challenge lies in the meaning of the term 'community cohesion'. Interpretations of the term appear to be complex, changing and contested. One of the earlier official definitions is:

A shared sense of belonging based on common goals and core social values, respect for difference (ethnic, cultural and religious), and acceptance of the reciprocal rights and obligations of community members working together for the common good. (Home Office, 2001a)

Policies that aim to strengthen a sense of belonging, but which fail to address deprivation, racism and inequality, are likely to be met with scepticism at best. At worst they may further alienate those they seek to include. This is acknowledged by the government-appointed Commission on Integration and Cohesion (COIC), which observes:

Integration and cohesion policies cannot be a substitute for national policies to reduce deprivation and provide people with more opportunities: tackling inequality is an absolute precondition for integration and cohesion. (COIC, 2007: 21)

Guidance to schools on how they can meet their legal duty to promote community cohesion, published in July 2007, states:

*By community cohesion, we mean working towards a society in which there is a **common vision and sense of belonging** by all communities; a society in which the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued; a society in which similar **life opportunities** are available to all; and a society in which strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and in the wider community.⁶ (DCSE, 2007, original emphasis)*

A range of factors, including local circumstances and the ways in which different local authorities and non-governmental organizations have interpreted official documents and given particular emphasis to specific elements within them, will have had an impact on those consulted, and influenced their understandings of government policy in this area.

While there are clearly some specific local factors, which are recorded below under the local profiles, these profiles should be read only as snapshots of each area made in June/July 2007, not as definitive studies. In other words, we should remember that local identities and affinities, as well as local concerns, are changing and changeable and that those present cannot be said to represent the whole community or even significant interests within it.

While some local factors, such as employment opportunities and economic development, may be part of medium term trends within a city or neighbourhood, these contextual factors can change rapidly and have a direct impact on individuals, on communities and on community cohesion.

Some changes may be felt across the country, albeit in different ways. For example, migration from Eastern Europe was mentioned in all six locations. This was not foreseen as a factor likely to have an impact on community cohesion at the time of the Cantle report.⁷ It is an important issue nationally but is likely to be experienced differently in different areas, depending on pre-existing demographics; current understandings and experiences of diversity; numbers of migrants and the local job market; and responses by local institutions, including schools, to the newcomers.

In our globalized world, the impact of international events is also likely to be felt by a range of groups and individuals at local level. So, for example, the attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States and more particularly the London terrorist bombings on 7 July 2005 have led to increased public debate across Britain on citizenship, national identity and belonging.⁸ These events and their aftermath, including the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, have shifted the focus of political and media discourse and were seen by a number of the individuals at our consultation meetings to have impacted, directly or indirectly, on their local community. A number of participants in the consultation process, across all six locations, made reference to these events; to ways in which they believe government policy on community cohesion is influenced by international developments; and how Muslim communities have come under the media spotlight.

6. This is based on the words of Alan Johnson, former Secretary of State for Education and Skills, speaking in Parliament on 2 November 2006. Based on the Government and the Local Government Association's definition first published in Guidance on Community Cohesion (LGA, 2002) and resulting from the Cantle Report in 2001.

7. Home Office (2001b).

8. See Osler (2007, unpublished paper) for an account of recent political discourse on citizenship, multiculturalism and 'British values', and the potential impact of this discourse on schooling and, in particular, on the citizenship and history curricula.



5. Emergent Themes

This section features emergent themes from across the six localities in which the Runnymede team conducted their community consultations.

Interpreting community cohesion

From September 2007, all state schools are required, under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, to promote community cohesion. This duty is in addition to an existing duty under the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 (RRAA) to promote racial equality and combat racism.⁹ One of the most striking points arising from the consultation was the different ways in which local people interpreted the government's community cohesion agenda.

In the four London boroughs, participants in the consultation tended to accept this agenda, seeing the legal requirement on schools to promote community cohesion as something which merely reinforced what they accepted as good practice. This was more the case in Harrow and Brent than in Hackney and Newham, where the concept and the government thinking behind the concept (integration/promotion of so-called 'British values') were questioned by some participants.

By contrast, in the other locations across Britain, there was a strong element of distrust and suspicion around the broad community cohesion agenda, which was expressed by both education professionals and community workers. For example, in Leicester, a participant observed that community cohesion was yet another requirement on schools which didn't bring with it any additional resources, and that just because Leicester has a national (and indeed international) reputation for good community relations this did not mean the task was undemanding. Similar reservations were expressed in Southampton. In Liverpool some concern was voiced that 'community cohesion' was in fact a move away from the very real problems of racism, disadvantage and structural inequalities.

In Blackburn, the government's motives in focusing on community cohesion were similarly questioned. It was suggested by one participant, working for a Christian religious institution on an inter-faith programme, that an official focus on community cohesion was an indirect way of placing additional pressure on Muslim communities, who were already regarded by both government and by other sections of the community with some suspicion. This was a sentiment echoed elsewhere. By extension, the legal duty of all state schools to promote community cohesion could be seen as a tool for exerting direct government control over Islamic schools in the state sector.

Inter-faith dialogue and its boundaries

In all six locations, we found organizations and groups that were engaged in inter-faith and inter-community

dialogue. Dialogue between faith groups and those who do not identify themselves as members of any faith group or who align themselves with secular or humanist traditions is less well developed. Some inter-faith organizations are beginning to address this issue while others do not see it as a priority, since the immediate task is to develop inter-faith dialogue. Nevertheless, there seems to be growing recognition that inter-faith dialogue which is not extended to those individuals outside the faith traditions is likely to be of limited value in realizing community cohesion.

A growth in demand for faith schools

It was argued across the country that policies which expanded the number of faith schools did not necessarily always reflect a demand for faith schooling but might actually generate a demand. It was broadly recognized, both by those who advocate publicly funded faith schooling and by those who believe that public funds should not be invested in faith schools, that extending support to a range of faith communities is equitable, even when there is a division of opinion on whether it is desirable.

However, as groups observe other faith communities achieving public funding for their schools, there is an awareness that this may lead to pressure on other groups, who have not previously campaigned for state support, to demand publicly funded faith-based schooling. It may leave some members of those communities, those who previously felt a secular system served their needs, wondering if faith schooling might be a means to reinforce either a faith-based or broader cultural identity through schooling. This, in turn, may lead to pressure on some parents from within these communities to support a call for a publicly funded school linked to the faith group.

Marginalized young people

While participants in the consultation recognize that young people as a group often lack a voice, it was felt across the country that new initiatives to promote community cohesion should address the needs of the most vulnerable young people who, it was argued, are ill-served by most schools, regardless of whether these schools are faith schools or not.

Not all people of faith are advocates of faith-based education

This may seem like an obvious point to make but it is, nevertheless, worth stating. Some advocates of faith-based education cite the numbers of a particular faith group in an area as evidence of demand for faith schools. Yet some parents believe that they can provide the elements of faith-based learning for their children and are strong advocates of multi-faith and multicultural schools, believing such schools will best equip their children for living together with others in a diverse society and that the disadvantages of faith-based schools outweigh their advantages. This viewpoint can be found across all faith groups.

9. It is worth noting that both schools and local authorities have been observed to exhibit low levels of compliance with the duty under the RRAA to promote race equality and combat racism in schools (CRE, 2003; Ofsted, 2005).



Teacher education and support

Across all six localities teacher education and support was identified as a key issue that needs to be addressed with some urgency if efforts to promote race equality and community cohesion are to be successful. It was argued that initial teacher education institutions should provide specific training to enable student teachers to respond to the particular needs of local populations and to understand the particular local contexts in which they work. It was emphasized that even when teachers have some training in addressing diversity, this does not always extend to addressing issues of faith.

Similarly, schools and teachers need support in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized young people, if real community cohesion is to be achieved.



6. Local Profiles

What follows is a brief profile of each of the specific locations, and how these locations influenced each consultation day. It begins with the two pairs of London boroughs and then reports on each of the four profiles from around England.

6.1 Brent and Harrow

This consultation day brought together two neighbouring Outer London boroughs: Harrow, which is portrayed as the most religiously diverse borough in London, and Brent, sometimes described as the most ethnically diverse. Perhaps the most telling comments came at the end of the day, when among the evaluative observations were a number which reflected this one: 'It was really good to bring the two boroughs together. I didn't realize we'd have so much in common!' Realizing that we can learn from our neighbours is itself an important element of community cohesion.

The day was particularly well attended by members of the two local authorities, working in a range of capacities with young people and schools. Other participants included elected members, representatives of inter-faith organizations, faith schools, a teachers' union, the Jewish Council for Racial Equality and other non-governmental organizations. The meeting took place at the premises of a Hindu organization in Harrow.

School choice

There appears to be a substantial demand for faith schools in both these boroughs, with a waiting list for an Islamic school in Brent and a high demand, particularly within the Irish community, for faith schooling and consequent pressure on places in Catholic schools. It was observed that some Muslim parents send their children to Christian schools because they judge these schools to have the best academic results; they are not necessarily selecting a religious

ethos. For many parents the central question in school choice is not faith but the quality of the education. For others, behaviour, faith and student achievement are seen as inter-related.

Although there has been a campaign among Hindus for a faith school, some Hindus do not support the idea, believing that communities will become polarized if they are not educated together. Since the Gujarati community across both boroughs is generally high achieving, demands for a faith-based school within the Hindu community are more likely to be related to questions of cultural and faith identity than to school standards.

Some concern was expressed that where the only school in an area was an evangelical Christian one that choice was narrowed and a religious ethos imposed on those students who attend it.

Where faith-based secondary schools are single sex, as in these boroughs, those opting for or finding themselves in a faith school do not have the option of co-education.

Living with diversity

Although, in Brent, Catholic schools have traditionally accepted children of other faiths and none, the impact of Polish migration was being felt. With the Catholic population having expanded as a result of this recent migration and Catholic schools giving priority to Catholic children, there was an immediate impact on the demographic make-up of the schools in question. These schools are seen to be becoming less diverse in their ethnic make-up and more homogeneous in their religious make-up.

Faith schooling may also have a class dimension. It was argued that in Northwest London, the Jewish schools are predominantly middle class. Some parents in this area select a Jewish school out of fear of anti-Semitism in other schools. For many such parents it was suggested that the primary concern is the emotional and social needs of their children, rather than an explicitly faith-based education.

Racism can take many forms and it was suggested that some of the negative reactions to faith-based education reflect anxiety about non-Christian schools. Participants suggested that it is anxiety about schools serving visible minorities, and particularly Muslim schools, which is fuelling the debate against faith-based education. This point was made strongly in this consultation meeting by several participants, who argued that a focus on terrorism and extremism by the media and officialdom meant that Muslim communities and Islamic schools were placed under the spotlight.

There was a range of opinions as to whether faith-based schools in these boroughs educate for diversity. Some faith-based schools have an outward-looking ethos but others do not educate their students about other faiths. It was also argued that, because of their different historical traditions, it is inappropriate to compare Christian schools with schools of other faiths. The former are more likely to be secure in their identity and to be open to students of other faiths. Faiths other



than Christianity have fewer school places overall; for this reason they are likely to wish to reserve these places for children and parents of their own faith community.

Promoting multiple identities and a shared sense of belonging

Participants felt this was the most challenging aspect of faith education. Since faith schooling is generally established with an explicit expectation of fostering faith identity, it was argued that other aspects of young people's experiences and allegiances were at risk of being neglected. It was strongly argued that faith schools promote exclusive either/or identities. Efforts to encourage schools, both faith schools and those without an explicitly faith-based orientation, to examine different aspects of young people's identities and to challenge bullying, discrimination and various forms of exclusion can be effectively promoted at local authority level. It was at this level that issues relating to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) identities are being addressed in Brent.

It was further suggested that public spaces need to be reclaimed, by and for young people, from the gang culture that tends to monopolize certain areas. Participants felt this would be a valuable project to address the needs of young people and promote greater community cohesion.

Equality and inclusion

A number of community (non faith-based) schools were arguably less confident in dealing with religion than with other aspects of equality, diversity and identity. It was suggested also that, in this part of London, most schools reflected a wide social spectrum. Since faith schools tend to draw from a wider catchment area than their non-faith counterparts, they are potentially less likely to have strong links and roots in the immediate neighbourhood.

It was suggested that all schools might do more to address questions of exclusion as a consequence of bullying, homophobia and racism. The needs of both asylum-seeker and Traveller children were often neglected. These areas were identified as priorities for teacher education and support.

Social responsibility

More cross-borough work was felt to be needed with young people; and cooperation between boroughs should occur in school holidays, since there are differences in the ways the two local authorities organize their school year. Such work needs to target the most marginalized young people who rarely leave their own neighbourhoods. These activities need to improve young people's capacity to participate and give them the skills to engage as citizens.

6.2 Newham and Hackney

Those who attended the consultation meeting in Hackney and Newham included elected representatives, a number of principals of faith schools, as well as local authority employees and community representatives. It was held in a local authority centre.

Both boroughs have relatively few faith schools and those (more affluent) parents wishing for a faith-based education are likely to move to neighbouring Outer London boroughs. The strong message that came from this meeting was that parents generally wanted good schools - the issue of faith schooling was seen as relatively low on the agenda.

On the other hand, there was a degree of unease about the government's community cohesion agenda, with some participants in Newham and Hackney interpreting it as an integrationist (meaning assimilationist) move on the part of the government.

School choice

It was suggested that the greatest differentials reflected in the exercise of school choice in this area of London are related to social class, rather than faith. The picture painted at this consultation meeting was of an extremely mobile population, with some indication that more affluent families tended to leave these boroughs to secure school choice. The implication is that economically disadvantaged parents in Newham and Hackney have little real school choice. New immigrants are the most likely to take up places in community (non-faith) schools and these populations are least likely to exercise any choice.

Those children attending the state-funded Jewish primary school in Hackney tend not to enter state secondary schools in the borough, opting either for publicly funded Jewish schools or academies in other areas or for the independent sector.

It was argued that those schools which developed their own admissions policies independently of the local authority actually worked to undermine community cohesion, producing unfair outcomes for some families. For example, Catholic schools' admissions policies which include the requirement to secure a reference from a priest were thought to be unfair, being far too subjective. More generally it was felt that faith schools were able to select more affluent families, and this is demonstrated by the differentials in those claiming free school meals: proportionally fewer children claim free meals in faith schools than in non-faith schools.

Living with diversity

It was felt that there needs to be more work on identifying commonalities in schools, particularly since a number of schools appeared to be largely segregated by ethnic group, with one Catholic school attracting a largely African-Caribbean population and other community schools having predominantly Asian school populations. This separation at school was believed to lead to distrust between students and communities.

A number of teachers and principals at the meeting used the occasion as an opportunity for networking with a view to partnership and twinning arrangements. Nevertheless, the policy and practice of twinning was criticized by some present as a weak way of addressing fundamental mistrust between young people of different ethnic groups.



It was suggested that more resources should be invested in working with the wider community, not just with young people, and in teacher education, which needs to be sensitive to the particular local issues. It was also suggested that more locally relevant teacher support might come about through professional networking opportunities.

Promoting multiple identities and a shared sense of belonging

It was strongly argued that any initiatives to promote multiple identities needed to address not just the multicultural nature of London or Britain but also have an international or global perspective.¹⁰ Cohesion was thought to be not just about religion and belief, but included other aspects of identity such as gender, sexuality and class background.

The goal of promoting a strong faith identity can sometimes be in tension with that of enabling community cohesion. For example, orthodox Jewish schools in the independent sector might argue that they are enabling community cohesion by providing the children who attend these schools with a strong sense of their own identity and consequent security. However, it is difficult for outsiders to move beyond formal relationships with ultra-orthodox Jews and their separation from others is seen as problematic, with some individuals from outside the community feeling suspicious of people about whom they know very little.¹¹

Equality and inclusion

One of the strongest messages from this meeting was concern expressed about opportunities for girls and young women, and how girls from local Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somali communities (among the most disadvantaged in these boroughs) might be empowered, develop greater self-esteem and be less subject to traditional influences within their communities, which were said to be having a negative impact on educational opportunities.

It was argued that genuine cohesion and the realization of equality and justice for all populations depended not on what might be understood to be superficial moves to demonstrate policies for cohesion, such as school twinning, but on the quality of relationships within schools.

Genuine inclusion means including young people in decision-making and taking seriously their understanding of issues and their life experiences. Care should be taken that young people are not used in a tokenistic way and that where they identify a concern (such as the focus in the Youth Parliament on 'racism must die') that this is followed through.

Again, it was argued that the biggest challenge in promoting equality and ensuring inclusion was in addressing the needs of new migrants and extending their life chances and employment opportunities.

6.3 Blackburn

The Blackburn consultation, held in Blackburn Cathedral, was attended by members of Christian, Muslim and Hindu organizations, local non-governmental organizations, the police and fire services, faith schools, a community cohesion programme based in the cathedral and members of a teachers' union. There were no elected members or officers of the local authority at the session.

School choice

Blackburn has a large proportion of faith schools, yet it was argued that in reality there is little school choice for working-class families. As in Newham and Hackney, it was reported that a key admissions selection criterion was a statement of support from a faith leader, something which was seen to be subjective. Since the demand for faith-school places is higher than the supply, it is effectively the faith schools which are selecting their students rather than the students or their parents who are exercising a choice.

It was argued that Muslim and Christian faith schools in Blackburn have different approaches to the issue of faith, which can be explained in the standing of the two religions in the local community. Whereas Islam is a lived religion for a significant number of Blackburn residents, Christianity is a tradition for a large number of people, but an everyday faith for a much smaller number. This is reflected in the different ways in which Islamic and Christian schools are organized. Islamic schools are promoting the faith and offering students a lived expression of faith within the school. The Christian schools take a different approach, emphasizing their Christian ethos rather than promoting the faith in an explicit way.

At secondary level, these faith schools, which are effectively selecting their students, are also achieving the highest academic results. The publicly funded Islamic Tauheedul Girls' High School is considerably oversubscribed, with 140 applicants in 2007 for 60 places.

There are also considerable differences between faith schools, including Islamic schools in Blackburn. Whereas one Islamic school in the city follows the national curriculum and works to establish links with other state sector schools, a representative of a second Islamic school described his institution as 'secluded'. It attracts students from across the country, not just from Blackburn. The aim is to protect learners from influences judged to be un-Islamic by the school authorities, including elements of the curriculum. However, the parents who sent their children (both boys and girls) to this school would not consider allowing them to continue into further or higher education, perceiving them to be at risk from dangerous influences. In the course of the discussion, the school representative acknowledged that these children might be missing out on some opportunities and that,

10. I refer to such education, which addresses equality and prepares young people for living with diversity at local, national and global levels as education for cosmopolitan citizenship (see Osler and Vincent, 2002; Osler and Starkey, 2003, 2005).

11. It is important, I would argue, to situate concerns or 'suspensions' within a framework where anti-Semitism is acknowledged and discussed.



although children learn about other religions, the school may not contribute significantly to community cohesion. Nevertheless, supporting children in realizing their Muslim identities was judged to be the priority.

Middle-class and aspirant parents in Blackburn (both White and South Asian) are opting for the independent (non-faith) sector on the outskirts.

Living with diversity

Although those attending faith schools normally learn something of other faiths, it was generally agreed that faith schools, particularly those that focus on promoting a particular faith rather than those that emphasize a particular ethos (and are thus more likely to be diverse in their intake), are not necessarily well equipped to prepare their students for diversity. Efforts to promote twinning and other inter-school collaboration in sports were cited as ways in which bridges are being built.

Barriers to promoting community cohesion in Blackburn identified by participants included what they took to be a suspicion of faith schools by those working in the local authority. No-one from the local authority attended the consultation, which made it impossible to discuss this point. This absence was seen by many from the different faith groups as affirmation of this problem.

It was also acknowledged that projects to promote collaboration between schools with the goal of promoting community cohesion were limited by the fact that no resources had been specifically allocated to help realize this legal requirement. A local Catholic school had contacted the mosque to seek advice on working with a group of Muslim students, and this was cited as an example of successful collaboration between faith communities.

Equality, inclusion and belonging

One of the strongest challenges to educational initiatives to promote equality, inclusion and a sense of belonging among young people, identified by participants in Blackburn, was racism. Lack of local employment opportunities for upwardly mobile young people accentuated the problem. Another challenge identified by participants was the activity of far-right political parties in the town.

While it was recognized that the local authority did attempt to promote initiatives to realize gender and race equality, the question of faith, which is important locally, needed to be added into the equation.

A specific challenge which many Muslim children face is combining Arabic studies with their other academic commitments and interests. It was argued that if this subject were to be included in the regular curriculum of state schools it would free up much of the time spent in madrasas. This would help learners find more after-school time to engage in projects that support community cohesion and living together in diverse communities.

Finally, participants wanted to stress how segregation is related to a range of economic and social issues but generally operates along class lines rather than ethnic.

6.4 Leicester

In Leicester the consultation was held in a local authority education centre. It brought together an elected member; a number of people working for the local authority both in education and in related capacities, including a number in senior positions; teachers and principals from faith and non-faith-based schools; members of the British Humanist Association; interfaith organizations and other non-governmental organizations engaged in education; a member of a parents' organization; the Schools Support and Development Agency; and others with responsibility for youth and community services.

As in other places, participants questioned the thinking behind government initiatives to promote community cohesion. In some ways it was seen as a vague term, not necessarily connected to the everyday challenges that form part of people's lived experiences. Although Leicester is sometimes presented as a national (and indeed an international) model of a multicultural city, participants warned that this did not mean the city did not have to face real challenges in addressing equality and diversity.

School choice

Although Leicester has a number of Christian (Church of England and Catholic) primary schools, it had, at the time of the consultation exercise, only one Catholic secondary school. All other publicly funded secondary schools in the city were at that time non-faith-based. From September 2007 these schools are joined by an established Islamic school, which moves into the state sector, and a new Christian academy to be run by the Church of England. It is not yet clear what the impact of these schools on school choice might be.

In the primary sector, church schools are seen as providing the highest standards. Despite Leicester's national and international reputation as a successful multicultural city, the British National Party is active in the city and the surrounding county. Faith schools are often seen as a haven from racism and racist abuse. Faith schools have fewer children entitled to free school meals or with special educational needs than their non-faith counterparts.

It is mixed-heritage young people who are most frequently the reported victims of abuse. The city's primary schools are near the bottom of the national league tables in terms of students' academic attainment and African-Caribbean children are among those students for whom Leicester schools can be said to be underachieving.

Living with diversity

Perhaps surprisingly, given Leicester's ethnic make-up, it was reported that 80 percent of its schools classify as monocultural.¹² It was observed that, despite Leicester

12. National guidelines classify a school as monocultural when more than 80 percent of students are recorded as coming from one ethnic group.

being a multicultural city, some White young people in the wider catchment area of Leicester City schools have little if any experience of fellow students from Black and ethnic minority communities.

It was suggested by participants in the consultation exercise that teachers are uncomfortable with issues of faith and avoid teaching about this area of experience.

Leicester's age profile is different from the national one, with a larger proportion of young people. It was suggested that Leicester is, in fact, a somewhat fragmented city, which breaks down into numerous small neighbourhoods. Middle-class Asian families tend to move to the suburbs, whereas middle class and aspiring White families, it was observed, often move outside of the city altogether.

The potential of young people to contribute to community cohesion

Participants in Leicester felt that young people are most likely to contribute to a community cohesion initiative if they can see the benefits it will bring to themselves and to the local, national and global communities to which they belong. The notion that young people believe that what they do can make a difference is critical. Focusing on an issue like poverty, which does not apply to one single ethnic or faith group, is a useful starting point.

Young people are keen to develop their leadership skills and have a genuine desire to find out more about other young people. They appreciate their beliefs and ideas being respected and listened to by the wider community. They are also open to opportunities for new experiences, adventure and friendships.

6.5 Liverpool

The meeting in Liverpool took place in a community centre and was attended by representatives of community groups and by members of a local university. No members of the local authority, teachers or elected members were present, but there were organizations and individuals with direct experience of working both with schools and with parents.

School choice

Liverpool has the highest proportional representation of faith school (church school) places of any local authority in England. Faith schools were said to have better average results than non-faith schools and participants believed they were more likely to provide a better education, particularly for Black children.

It was said to be easier for girls to secure places in a faith school than boys, because of the disproportionate number of girls' places in these schools in the city. Despite this, some Somali and Sudanese parents who were not able to secure places for their daughters in single-sex schools preferred to keep them at home, and it was said that a number of these children simply disappeared from the view of the local authority.

Places in boys' Catholic schools are highly sought after as there are fewer of these.

It was said that parents have relatively limited school

choices because of catchment area admissions policies. Another factor affecting school places for those from visible minorities is levels of racial tension which exist in certain schools in predominantly White areas of the city. Participants saw a north-south divide in the city, explaining that the northern areas were often perceived as no-go areas for Black people. New migrants housed in the north often sought alternative homes and school places in the south as a result of racial harassment.

Parents wanting their children to learn Arabic or Chinese opted for supplementary Saturday schools. A new Polish supplementary school had recently been established by new migrants.

Living with diversity

St Francis School in Kensington is an inter-faith school which brings together students from Protestant and Catholic communities. King David School, a Jewish foundation, takes more than 50 percent of its pupils from non-Jewish backgrounds because the Jewish population of the city has declined.

It was claimed that a number of Anglican and Catholic schools did not teach successfully for diversity. It was argued that teachers in the city, who were described as under considerable pressure, needed more support in addressing issues of diversity and cohesion.

It was suggested that children in non-faith schools were likely to receive somewhat superficial teaching about diversity, learning about different festivals, but little more, and it was stated that Liverpool parents are increasingly choosing to withdraw their children from lessons which focus on world religions.

Although the mixed-heritage population of Liverpool is long established, children from such backgrounds were often treated as foreigners and newcomers, it was said.

There was little spontaneous discussion of sectarianism, but when the issue was raised by facilitators it was acknowledged as an on-going problem, though less acute than in the past.

Equality and inclusion

Faith schools were seen by some as a haven from racial harassment and bullying. Participants suggested that the needs of Liverpool Black British children, whose heritage was in the city, were not adequately discussed within the local authority, even though there is evidence of widespread and on-going underachievement. The participants reported high levels of Black exclusions, although these were said often to be informal rather than officially recorded.

There were also low levels of Black participation in formal politics and in the teaching profession in the city.

It was said that regeneration schemes and other initiatives were bringing in skills and expertise from outside the city, even though there was now a pool of expertise within the city. A number of people referred to the postcode lottery. One woman cited the example of her granddaughter, who gave the grandmother's address rather than her own, in order to secure a job. The granddaughter lives in a neighbourhood from which local employers are said to be reluctant to recruit.



6.6 Southampton

Two meetings were held in Southampton: an afternoon meeting at a centre for volunteer activities and an evening meeting of an inter-faith forum held in a local mosque.

The length of these meetings meant that the methodology adopted at the other venues had to be adapted to fit the relatively short time-span. In the afternoon a curtailed version of the café conversation was adopted. In the evening the rapporteur led a discussion, posing a series of questions to the members of the inter-faith forum, and focusing on those issues felt not to have been addressed in the earlier session.

Participants included members of the local authority; principals of a primary and secondary, both faith and non-faith schools; representatives of various faith-based organizations; an organization working with parents; a member of a local university; and members of the Southampton Council of Faiths.

The City Council has recently appointed the Oasis trust, an evangelical Christian organization, to run two new academies in Southampton. It is set to open in September 2008, on the closure of four existing schools. The bid was backed by the Southampton Council of Faiths following revisions that include a commitment to teach about world religions.

School choice

At the time of the consultation there were just two faith schools in the secondary sector: St Anne's, for girls and St George's, for boys. Both are Catholic schools and St Anne's is a particularly popular and successful institution, which has a record of success with students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

Parents are likely to seek out a school place at St Anne's for its record of academic success. There does not appear to be particular demand for faith schooling and it is perhaps worth noting that in the last census Southampton recorded an exceptionally high number of people representing themselves as 'jedi', possibly reflecting a disregard for faith matters within sections of the local community.

Living with diversity

While St Anne's is a diverse community with 25 languages spoken, particular minority communities are to be found in clusters in certain areas of the city. In this sense the school is more diverse than many of the neighbourhoods to which the students return in the evenings.

It was suggested that many Black and minority ethnic students would feel uncomfortable about going to predominantly White estates, but it was not clear among those present whether this was a fear based on real threats.

It was said that most teachers would rather not teach about faith, but that as Southampton becomes more diverse people who had previously not considered faith were showing an interest in questions of faith and in learning more about Christianity and its

impact on British culture.

The point was made that it is important to educate Muslim children about the impact that Islam has had on Western European culture.

Members of the Southampton Council of Faiths suggested that children raised in a competitive world often assumed that faiths were in competition; the very existence of such a forum where members of different faiths were in dialogue was a valuable lesson in itself.

One interesting feature of the discussions in Southampton was the role of the SACRE. It was suggested that if it were to be inspected and given a higher status, it might be in a position to offer stronger leadership on matters of faith and education.

Promoting multiple identities and a shared sense of belonging

Members of the Southampton Council of Faiths acknowledged the need to promote children's multiple identities and to teach tolerance and challenge homophobia, racism and other discrimination. However, they acknowledged that this was not an area where they had engaged with local schools. Their role is currently limited to providing advice on religious education and to offering their services as visiting speakers.

Equality and inclusion

It was noted how there is relatively low participation by members of Black and minority ethnic communities in the public sphere in Southampton. This is reflected in public spaces such as museums, where it is difficult to find art from members of visible minority communities.

It was suggested that faith is one way of identifying commonalities and uniting people. Faith, it was suggested, could help break down a range of barriers, including class barriers. An example was offered of how a Church of England school contributed to dancing and music at a local mela. It was also suggested that faith could be harnessed as a positive force to boost students' attainment.

In Southampton it was acknowledged that equally important to inter-faith work was the need for people of faith and those who did not profess any faith to come together. One area in which this had worked was in promoting fair trade, a concern shared between faith groups and other secular organizations.

An inter-faith forum can play a key role in welcoming and supporting new migrants as, for many people, their early contact is with a faith organization. Members of the forum felt it needed to be acknowledged by the City Council and supported at this level. They noted that the City's welcome pack contained no reference to faith.

Social responsibility

Members of the interfaith forum stressed their responsibility for working with different communities. So, for example, the mosque has started to involve

non-Muslim schools in visits to this place of worship, and a Christian leader is involved in a project to challenge racism in the city through engagement with a football club.

7. Initial Observations and Linkages

From this consultation it is apparent that in all six localities people are engaging with changing local identities and affinities. Local concerns are also changing and changeable. Generally speaking, teachers lack support and appropriate training to address these changes. This is a particular difficulty when focusing on faith and community cohesion, since many professionals, not just teachers, feel uncomfortable handling questions of faith.

There appears to be an urgent need to support teachers and to provide both pre-service training and on-going professional development opportunities so that teachers are comfortable when addressing faith as an aspect of diversity. This professional development needs to include, but extend beyond, teaching about world religions.

A linked problem may be mutual mistrust, between local authority officers on the one hand and members of faith communities on the other, in some of the localities visited. In the three localities where no local elected member attended the consultation there was concern about the commitment of the local authority in meeting the needs of all sectors of the local community. It is important that both elected members and local authority officers listen to and engage with the concerns of local people, relating to community cohesion, faith and schooling.

Schools, both faith schools and non-faith schools, face a range of challenges in promoting community cohesion. Some of these are shared but some differ according to the particular features of the school. While some faith schools with relatively homogeneous school populations are faced with particular challenges in ensuring that young people acquire lived experiences of diversity, this problem is not confined to such schools and may also apply to non-faith schools with relatively homogeneous student populations.

Schools which are not aligned with a particular faith group face a different challenge, since many teachers are less than comfortable about incorporating faith into those programmes that seek to promote cohesion and diversity. This is an issue about which there needs to be greater professional debate.

Another area about which there might be greater communication between schools and the local authority on the one hand, and local communities on the other, is that of citizenship education. Although this segment of the school curriculum is seen by government as having

a key role to play in contributing to race equality and community cohesion, few of the community members we spoke to, particularly those engaged in faith organizations, made reference to the school curriculum beyond the role of religious education, or were familiar with citizenship education. The Ajegbo review (2007) recommends a new strand to the citizenship curriculum: 'identity and diversity: living together in the UK',¹³ and the successful development of work in this area would appear to require the engagement of local community concerns.

This consultation exercise has emphasized the diversity of experiences across the country, and the particularity of each locality's experiences. But it has identified contrasting experiences among those living side by side and also, importantly, some countrywide commonalities.

Evidence from this research requires us as educators to rethink the ways in which we engage with young people's identities and affinities, recognizing that community cohesion should not be seen as a fixed goal but as a set of processes in which young people (and others in the community) are engaged. It would appear that efforts to engage young people in local decision-making processes could enable them to work alongside others from different backgrounds and make a genuine contribution to community development and cohesion. Other well-designed arts-based and sports-based projects might serve a similar function.

There are numerous barriers to community cohesion, including racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and religious prejudice and discrimination. Yet research suggests that gender inequalities, homophobia and experiences of harassment and bullying at school can all serve to undermine cohesion within the community of the school.¹⁴ Participants in this consultation stressed how both individual school ethos and local school admissions policies then have an impact on the wider community and on efforts to promote cohesion.

It is also clear that other factors, such as economic prosperity and poverty, and policies on housing and on the integration of migrants, can also have a huge impact and can either support or effectively undermine educational initiatives on community cohesion.

Within local communities resources which might support schools in this task are evidently being offered by faith groups and secular organizations, but the relationships between such organizations and schools are not yet well enough developed for schools to fully benefit from local expertise.

Local expertise cannot replace the professional expertise of teachers, and the consultation has identified teaching for diversity, especially incorporating faith and religious diversity, as an urgent need. This support for teachers needs to be addressed by those developing policy at local and national levels. ■

13. For a critique of the Ajegbo report (DfES, 2007) and a discussion of its strengths and limitations in supporting race equality and community cohesion initiatives in schools, see Osler (2008).

14. See, for example, Crozier and Dimmock (1999); Smith et al. (1998); Walkerdine et al. (2001) and Osler and Vincent (2003).



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ISBN-13: 978-0-9548389-7-3
EAN: 9780954838973

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