



Multiculturalism in Secondary Schools: Managing Conflicting Demands

Report on a Pilot Project

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Introduction

This report presents the key findings from a pilot research project conducted jointly by the Working Lives Research Institute and Southall Black Sisters between 1st July 2006 and 1st January 2007. The Commission for Racial Equality funded the project under its 'Getting Results Funding Programme 2006/07'.

The overall purpose of the project was to improve the knowledge, skills and abilities of secondary school teachers in one London borough in promoting and managing multiculturalism.

The Context

Multiculturalism with some variations has been the dominant approach towards race relations in the UK. It emphasises tolerance and respect for diversity, but it is in fact a vast and contentious discourse and an even more hotly contested practice. Until the London bombings, there was a general acceptance in official thinking at least, that Britain is a multicultural society in which different cultures and religions co-exist peacefully.¹ Following the London bombings and civil unrest in the northern cities of England, that peace was considered to have been shattered and multiculturalism as a concept and practice came under intense scrutiny leading many to question its viability in the maintenance of good race relations.²

This introduction to the report explores some of the factors that define the political landscape within which this action research project is situated. It also draws together a number of key concepts that are used throughout the report namely: anti racism, multiculturalism, secularism and fundamentalism.

¹ See for example Extracts from a speech by Robin Cook (Foreign Secretary) to the Social Market Foundation in London reported in The Guardian April 19 2001.

² Trevor Phillips for example states that multiculturalism is an 'outdated' concept whilst David Goodhart asks whether 'diversity is compatible with solidarity' in 'What now for multiculturalism' published in Connections (CRE) Winter 2004/5.

Anti Racism and Multiculturalism

The British state's approach to race relations in the UK since the 1960s has been characterised by two liberal strands of thinking— multiculturalism and anti racism.³ Both were reactions to previous models of assimilation which assumed that good race relations could be achieved if minority communities divested themselves of their difference and melted into the cultural fabric of the wider society.

According to the academic Charles Taylor multiculturalism has its basis in the understanding that historically certain cultures have been imposed and some have been more highly regarded than others with damaging consequences for oppressed communities. He points to the work of Franz Fanon as testimony to the argument that the production of negative representations of ethnic minority peoples, communities, their cultures and traditions is an integral part of the reproduction of racism and xenophobia. This is an insidious process that has the effect of reducing people's own feelings of self worth, lowering their aspirations and indirectly gaining their collusion in the reproduction of hierarchical systems of power based on notions of race and ethnicity.⁴

Although Taylor is concerned with the philosophical construction of self, identity and the relationship between self and the wider society, it is possible to delineate from his discussion a position that considers the need to recognise all cultures, languages, religions and histories as an essential part of challenging racism and xenophobia within society.

Racism and xenophobia⁵ can be defined in the following way. **Racism** is a social relationship like class and gender that embodies the power relations of both domination and subordination. **Xenophobia** is defined as a prejudice against and dislike of foreigners. The difference between racism and xenophobia is that while

³ Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval Davies *Racialised Boundaries (Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-racist Struggle* Routledge 1992.

⁴ Taylor, C (1994) 'The Politics of Recognition' in Gutmann, A (eds)

⁵ this definition has been borrowed from 'Working Against Racism: A Guide for Trade Unionists' by Professor Mary Davis, Roger McKenzie and Wilf Sullivan (TUC/WLRI joint publication February 2006)

power relations are implicit in the former this is not necessarily the case with the latter.⁶

In the UK, from the 1950s onwards, following the migration of people from the Caribbean, Africa and the Indian Sub-Continent in particular, experiences of racism, discrimination and racial violence and abuse led to many anti-racist struggles and racial uprisings. This in turn has led the state to respond in a variety of ways, ostensibly to maintain ‘good race relations’.

Anti-racist struggles waged by many African-Caribbean and South Asian communities from the 1970s onwards involved an understanding of racism as prejudice plus power⁷. This was an immensely important understanding of racism since it was based not on individual prejudices or mere tolerance for other cultures but on an analysis of colonialism and post colonialism and how power and privilege is structurally embedded in social relations leading to substantive inequality and social divisions.⁸ Anti-racist mobilisations in Britain occurred around the term ‘Black’ which borrowed from the US experience where it first arose in the 1960s. It was perceived by a significant number of migrants to be a unifying political category signifying a new political consciousness and organisation against racism. The term ‘Black’ was itself contentious and many Asians in particular objected to the use of the term. Many social commentators also noted that black as a signifier of racism was not adequate since other signifiers of racism, language, culture and religion were excluded or glossed over.

⁶ Racism can take four forms:

Direct – is when someone is treated less favourably on the ground of race, colour, ethnic or national origin. This includes racist incidents, racial abuse and harassment.

Indirect – relates more to criteria or practices that have negative and unequal consequences for one or more racial or ethnic group(s)

Structural - Actions and structures are racist, if their effect is to exclude disproportionately members of subordinate ethnic groups (e.g. because of residence requirements, geographical location, etc), even if there is no racist intentionality.

Institutional – *‘The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racial stereotyping which disadvantage black ethnic people’*⁶

⁷ See for example *RAT and the degradation of Black Struggle* A. Sivanandan in *Race and Class* IRR 1985.

⁸A. Sivanandan 1985.

'The dichotomous categories of 'Black' and 'White' homogenize the objects of racism, as well as its perpetrators, reducing racism to just what White people do to Black people because they are black'⁹.

Nevertheless many also acknowledged that the unifying category of the term black was important in political struggles because it could be used positively to signify inclusion of all those who suffered from racial disadvantage and to signify unity of common purpose.¹⁰

From an analysis of colonialism and racism, black struggles included demands for the recognition of institutional racism which was perceived to be the underlying cause of discrimination in immigration and nationality law, policing, housing, education and employment. Institutional racism as a concept was not acknowledged by the British State until an unprecedented campaign following the tragic death of Stephen Lawrence in April 1993, forced a public inquiry into the racial murder.¹¹

Social theorists have at various times argued that multiculturalism involves an acknowledgement of distinct cultural identities, group identities and rights to guard against cultural hegemony, but at the same time it also involves the need to distinguish between valid cultural demands and those that undermine individual fundamental rights and principles of western liberal democracy.¹² Whilst Taylor and others advocated a strong liberal model of multiculturalism as part of the challenge to racism, the British state's approach to multiculturalism was to see it as an end in itself – to recognise and tolerate difference only rather than to see it a necessary component in the challenge against institutional racism. In the process multiculturalism was divested of all that was progressive about the concept.¹³

⁹ Anthias and Yuval-Davies 1992.

¹⁰ Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992.

¹¹ Macpherson, Sir, William (1999) *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry* (Macpherson Report). London: HMSO.

¹² See for instance Taylor, C (1994) 'The Politics of Recognition' in Gutmann, A (ed); or Kymlicka, W (1996) 'Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights' or Parekh, B (2005)

'Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory'

¹³ A. Sivanandan 1985.

'In practice in Britain, the racial discrimination that prevailed in employment, housing, social services and so on, did not make for equal opportunity, and mutual tolerance was undermined by a populist media and opportunist politicians, for whom anti-immigration policies were vote winners. All that was left was cultural diversity. But cultural diversity or cultural expression came not from government edict, but from the joint fight against racial discrimination – on the factory floor and in local communities – by Asians, African-Caribbeans and Whites, creating unity in diversity. ...it was that understanding of multiculturalism that, in the early 70s encouraged schools to teach children to respect each other's cultures and religions and celebrate each other's festivals. But those very successes were instrumental in making multiculturalism government policy, and thereby institutionalising it. In the process, multiculturalism was stripped of its anti-racist roots and remit. It ceased to be an outcome of the struggle for equality emanating from below, and became instead government policy imposed from above'.¹⁴

The concept of multiculturalism degenerated into perceptions of Britain's migrant population as separate ethnic and cultural enclaves and that meeting their cultural and religious needs was sufficient in addressing the problem of racial inequality. This is nowhere more evident than in the way in which debates on the education of minority children developed.

Multi cultural education placed emphasis not on racism but on the need to 'respect' different ethnic cultures. Minority communities were being defined solely by their culture and religion. Inquiries such as the Swann Report in 1985¹⁵ did at least attempt to refer to both minority and majority children participating in shaping society as a whole within commonly accepted values and argued for the need for ethnic minorities to be helped to maintain their distinct ethnic identities within this common framework. However this was translated into the practice of helping minorities to preserve their cultural and religious identities. The celebration of different religious festivals was the nearest many children got to an understanding of the many minority

¹⁴ A. Sivanandan *Britain's shame: from multiculturalism to nativism* Speech delivered at IRR conference 'Racism, Liberty and the War on Terror' in London in 16 September 2006

¹⁵ Swann, Lord (1985) *Education for All: Final report of the committee of inquiry into the education of children from ethnic minority groups*. London: HMSO.

cultural and social background.¹⁶ There were attempts by bodies such as the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) to push a more radical anti-racist strategy which emphasised discrimination and disadvantage of black people including racial violence and underachievement and exclusion rates amongst African Caribbean boys in particular, but in practice, this approach often lapsed into a ‘moral anti-racism’ which excluded whites from strategies developed to counter racism.¹⁷

The multicultural approach that was prevalent in education was also accepted as a tool of national policy across a range of issues at the local and national levels.¹⁸ However it had lost its radical edge and lapsed into a form of identity politics which actually drew upon and gave political life to very conservative ethnicist and religious identities. This development coincided with the entry of more and more black people into the race relations industry both within and outside the State (leading to the expansion of the voluntary sector and the establishment of race units and race relations councils.) By the 1980s, local authorities such as the Greater London Council (GLC) funded minority groups not from the need to address structural inequality but from the need to reflect cultural or religious diversity irrespective of whether such groups had any commitment to social justice or equality.¹⁹

Whilst there was much criticism of the multicultural approach and the degradation of the anti racist struggle, black feminists in their struggles for self determination, offered their own critique of multiculturalism and that form of anti-racism which glossed over other divisions within minority communities based on unequal gender and class relations. Even the most liberal concept of multiculturalism as propounded by Taylor and others did not address the fact that notions of ‘community’ and ‘liberal democracy’ with its checks and balances (primarily in the guise of a fair and just legislative system) did not give or protect the rights of the more marginalised sub groups such as women. By situating themselves within the anti-racist struggles, many black feminists were calling for a more progressive definition of multiculturalism and anti-racism which neither shied away from addressing institutional racism or other

¹⁶ Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992

¹⁷ See for example *Murder in the playground. The Burnage Report* Macdonald et al Longsight Press 1989.

¹⁸ Gita Sahgal and Nira Yuval-Davis ‘Refusing Holy Orders’ Virago Press 1992

¹⁹ Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992

forms of disadvantage. In a now well established critique of multiculturalism in particular, black and other feminists argued for the need to analyse various forms of oppression through a framework which interrogates the intersection of race, gender and class power.

The feminist critique of multiculturalism

The experience of multiculturalism for ethnic minority women has highlighted an important contradiction between various models of multiculturalism and the issue of women's rights.

Yasmin Ali (1992)²⁰ points out that multiculturalism in Britain trades on a particular characterisation of communities determined by the interaction of the state with so called 'community leaders'. According to Ali:

*'Multiculturalism drew less upon assumptions about citizenship in a democratic state than upon the experience of colonial administration in the age of decolonisation. The multiculturalist state could, for example, liaise directly with an unelected community leadership rather than face the uncertainties of democratic coalition –building'*²¹

The result is that minority communities are portrayed as monolithic and ahistorical entities whose various and often conflicting needs are considered to be represented by community leaders, many of whom as Ali has pointed out have little or no interest in social justice or women's rights. In this process social divisions and hierarchies within communities are ignored and political processes ensuring accountability and addressing disadvantage, including racism, are circumvented. Ali argues that multiculturalism tends to view minority communities primarily as *'targets of social policy, rather than as actors in the democratic system'*. Acting as mediators between the state and minority communities, other commentators such as Sahgal note that 'community leaders' cultivate a relationship with the state which attempts to invalidate the right of women's organisations to advocate on their behalf against all

²⁰ Ali, Y (1992) 'Muslim Women and the Politics of Ethnicity and Culture in Northern England' in Sahgal, G and Yuval Davis, N 'Refusing Holy Orders'

²¹ Sahgal and Yuval Davis 1992

forms of oppression including domestic violence and abuse ‘on the grounds that such groups are ‘destroying the culture and traditions of the community’²²

Black feminist activists have argued that multicultural policies have had a profoundly detrimental impact on women’s rights. Indeed the practice of multiculturalism has led to the adoption of a cultural relativist approach by the state welfare services and the legal system. In an effort to appear ‘culturally sensitive’ and ‘tolerant of diversity’, such state institutions often ignore the rights of the more marginalised groups and individuals within minority communities. Nowhere has this been more apparent than in the response that is routinely given to minority women and children escaping violence and abuse from their partners or families.

For instance social services and education authorities have, in practice, followed a non-interventionist line in terms of ethnic minority families on the grounds of ‘cultural sensitivity’. Multicultural practice relies upon very narrow assumptions about the needs of ethnic minority women and encourages a tendency to conflate racial and religious needs. Internal contestations of power within communities are ignored.²³ Although, this approach was challenged fairly successfully by black feminists during the recent debates on forced marriage, this has since been reversed by the State’s attempts to give centrality to all religions in the regeneration of civil society. This is discussed below in the section on Fundamentalism.

In the debates on forced marriage in 1999 and 2000 held by the Home Office Working Group on forced marriage, the then Home Office Minister, Mike O’Brien, acknowledged that ‘multiculturalism cannot be an excuse for moral blindness’. Echoing the concerns of groups like Southall Black Sisters, he advocated a ‘mature multicultural’ approach which demands that violence against women and other oppressive restrictions on women needed to be understood as abuses and violations of women’s fundamental human rights, irrespective of the cultural or religious contexts in which they occur.²⁴

²² See for example SBS 1990 and Sahgal 1992

²³ See SBS 1990 and Gupta *From homebreakers to Jailbreakers* ZED Books 2003

²⁴ Siddiqui *It was written in her kismet: forced marriage in From homebreakers to jailbreakers* Gupta 2003.

Unfortunately, instead of promoting ‘mature multiculturalism’ and building on the concept, according to black feminist groups like Southall Black Sisters, the government has since taken several steps backwards. As a result, SBS has found itself in the ironic position of defending multiculturalism as criticism of multiculturalism has intensified following 9/11 and 7/7 in particular. The focus of the State instead has been on acknowledging and increasing the role of religion in civil society. As the need to find Muslim allies for the ‘war on terror’ has intensified, the government searches for a largely male religious leadership with which to engage in a dialogue, in an attempt to co-opt their public support for the war.²⁵ Multiculturalism is therefore alive and well but it has taken a new twist.

Religious fundamentalism

By the late 1980s, the multicultural settlement between state and minority communities coincided with the decline of progressive, anti-racist and feminist secular politics. The vacuum that was created, gave rise to the growth of religious fundamentalism in all religions in the UK, which also reflected a worldwide phenomenon.²⁶

The term fundamentalism refers here to the definition articulated by Yuval -Davis as specifically modern movements which require ‘*strict adherence to the text and claim their version of religion to be the only true one and feel threatened by pluralist systems of thought, and so justify the use of political means to impose it on all members of their religion*’.²⁷

Following the Rushdie affair, fundamentalism was portrayed as a Muslim problem-giving rise to media images of Muslims as ‘backward’ ‘medieval’ and ‘barbaric’. However, as academics such as Yuval- Davies, Chetan Bhatt and others have pointed

²⁵ Gita Sahgal *Two Cheers for Multiculturalism in Warning Signs of Fundamentalisms*. Ayesha Imam, Jenny Morgan and Nira Yuval-Davis. WLUML publication December 2004

²⁶ Many feminists have commented that the forms of multiculturalism and anti-racism that was in operation in the UK laid the foundations for the growth of religious fundamentalism in the country. See for example Imam, Morgan and Yuval Davis 2004.

²⁷ Yuval-Davis, N (1992) ‘Fundamentalism, Multiculturalism and Women in Britain’ in Donald, J and Rattansi, A (eds) ‘Race, Culture and Difference’ (Sage Publications limited)

out, religious fundamentalism cuts across religions and nations and takes different forms within different historical and political contexts²⁸

In Britain, in response to the rise in anti-Muslim racism together with the rise of fundamentalism in all religions, groups such as Women Against Fundamentalism comprising of feminists from all religious and ethnic backgrounds formed. At the heart of their analysis of religious fundamentalism and racism, was the role of the British State and the privileged position that Christianity occupies in the State. But above all, they sought to challenge the central objective of all fundamentalist movements - the control of women.

*'...at the heart of all fundamentalist agendas is the control of women's minds and bodies. All religious fundamentalists support the patriarchal family as a central agent of such control. They view women as embodying the morals and traditional values of the family and the whole community.'*²⁹

The 'Rushdie Affair' crystallised and brought to the forefront of public debate the Christian nature of the British State and of constructions of 'Englishness'. WAF for example contextualised the demands made by Muslim and other religious leaders for state funding for minority faith schools, especially for girls, within the growing influence of Christian evangelical movements in official education in the UK and the West generally. This was perhaps most evident in the debates around funding for faith schools. For example the Education Reform Act (1988)³⁰ required all state schools to have a daily Christian act of worship and this together with the existence of many

²⁸ see Sahgal and Yuval Davies 1992 and Bhatt, C (1996) 'Liberation and Purity'

²⁹ Women Against Fundamentalism (WAF) Newsletter no 1. 1990

³⁰ See The Education Reform Act 1988 which amended a clause on compulsory worship contained in the 1944 Act by introducing the imposition of religious assemblies in all state schools. This was a last minute amendment introduced by Baroness Blatch who was herself responding to the Association of Christian Teachers. The Act established that there must be a daily act of 'predominantly Christian' worship in all schools and that religious education must be 'in the main' Christian. Head teachers, however, do have discretion on the conduct of assemblies within this framework.

The Act also allowed local education authorities (LEAs) to set up local Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) which is made up of local religious representatives (but not non-religious representatives.) SACRES are responsible for advising them LEAs on matters connected with Religious Education and worship. The Act allow for schools to apply to their local authority's SACRE for exemption from the "broadly Christian" requirement for some or all of their pupils. This is called a "determination". However, alternative worship must be provided for those pupils who are withdrawn, although parents still have the right to have their children excused from this worship.

state funded Catholic and Jewish schools led to a growing confidence amongst minority religious leaders to flex their muscles. The demands for separate Muslim schools seemed at first to be reasonable but feminist groups like SBS and WAF feared that they would be used to foster racial segregation, police female sexuality and reinforce religiously defined roles of women as future (dutiful) wives and mothers.³¹ This fear was also recognised by many parents of Sikh origin in Southall who successfully challenged attempts by Sikh fundamentalists to take over state schools in their area (See below).

Although Muslim fundamentalists are the most vociferous, other minority religious fundamentalist and authoritarian religious groups have been quietly organising. Taking a leaf out of Muslim fundamentalist organisation, they too have mobilised against any form of dissent from the dominant religious orthodoxies, especially against feminist and other secular progressive activities within their communities. Although they have received far less public attention, demands for separate faith schools, extension of blasphemy laws to cover other religions and personal (community) laws to govern marriage and children matters, have been increasing. In the process, it has made transparent the development amongst minority communities of essentialist notions of religion as a framework for highlighting inequalities and demanding recognition.³²

Secularism

The practice of multiculturalism has encouraged the state to conflate issues around racial inequality and culture identities with religion and religious identity as defined by fundamentalist and conservative religious leaderships. This has had the effect of limiting secular spaces in which dissent and the voices of marginalized sections of the 'community' can be raised.³³

In the UK, debates on secularism have been inextricably linked to the debates on religion and religious fundamentalism. Within these debates secularism is a hotly

³¹ Clara Connolly *Washing our Linen: one year of Women Against Fundamentalism* WAF Newsletter No 1. 1990

³² Yuval-Davis, N (1992) 'Fundamentalism, Multiculturalism and Women in Britain' in Donald, J and Rattansi, A (eds) 'Race, Culture and Difference' (Sage Publications limited)

³³ Ali 1992, Bhatt 1996

contested concept which is variously understood. Many have identified secularism with western enlightenment but also western cultural imperialism, Eurocentric beliefs and racism leading commentators such as Tariq Modood to warn against ‘secular intolerance’ from those who wish to seek a separation between the Church and State. He is highly suspicious of the term which in his view is advocated in order to denigrate minority religions and deny them equal participation in public life. He argues instead for a multi-faith British State in which all religions have the opportunity to shape public culture within limits, although those limits are not explained.³⁴ Others view secularism as a militant or ‘fundamentalist’ form of atheism that is inherently anti-religion. This is a commonly held view within minority communities and in the wider society.

In contrast to these two positions, groups like WAF recognise that the concept is linked to western enlightenment and complex historical processes including colonialism and racism. The group defines secularism as a separation between the public and private spheres in which religion is regarded as a matter of personal belief that should not be institutionalised within state structures. According to this view, the Church should be dis-established so that Christianity does not become the defining characteristic of British identity. This position does not oppose religion per se but regards the encroachment of religion in public spaces as highly problematic for the rights of sub groups within communities including women who are excluded from the political process. All the major religions regard the private sphere as the proper place for women and this has resulted in their exclusion from full citizenship rights. WAF is therefore concerned primarily with the political use of religion to further either State goals or so called ‘community’ agendas that restrict freedoms and do not address social injustice. Secularism on its own is not sufficient to guarantee freedoms and rights but it is an important foundation when allied with other principles of democracy.³⁵

³⁴ Tariq Modood *Beware of a secular intolerance* WAF Journal no 6 1995

³⁵ Connolly 1995

*'WAF's demands for secular state is not made because we assume that, in itself, it is the guarantor of pluralism and equality. Rather we believe that it is one pre-condition, among many others, of a pluralist and egalitarian future'*³⁶

Faith communities

In the last decade New Labour has created opportunities to debate and define social policy on a range of issues such as poverty, violence against women and institutional racism, albeit often in a limited way. However, New Labour has also embarked on a contradictory set of social policy trends, legislation and guidance that provide a very difficult context for the implementation of a 'mature multiculturalism' in many areas of civil society including schools. Indeed, there has been a discernable drift within social policy and service delivery away from multiculturalism to 'multi-faithism'.³⁷

In the multi-faith approach, minority communities are recognised first and foremost with reference to religious identity. They are increasingly redrawn as 'faith communities' which have been specifically identified by the state as important sources of social capital. There is increasing recognition that the networks, experiences and resources of the 'faith communities' are invaluable and therefore full opportunity must be given to such communities to ensure that they participate fully in society.³⁸ This development also fits neatly into a wider neo conservative agenda in which the privatisation of what were once considered to be vital state functions, such as schooling and welfare provision, is deemed essential.

The approach therefore encourages the substitution of the demand for equality with the demand for greater recognition of diversity and 'religious literacy'. That is, the need to understand diverse theological values as espoused by religious leaders, but not recognition of the various liberal religious or cultural traditions within a community.

³⁶ Connolly 1995

³⁷ See for example the Home Office Report: *Working Together: Co-operation between Government and Faith Communities*. February 2004.

³⁸ 'Faith as social capital' in Findings, March 2006. This is a summary of a major study by sociologists on the contribution that can be made by 'faith communities' as 'social capital'. It is an example of the high level of academic activity that is now devoted to improving the participation of faith based groups in civil regeneration.

Notions of citizenship and models of citizenship based on respect for individual human rights are replaced by notions of social cohesion and integration involving adherence to 'core British values'. Adherence to core values does not however result in the loss of cultural or religious identity. In fact, the faith-based approach encourages segregation along religious lines as long as it does not lead to public disorder.

The increasing promotion of 'faith communities' provides the space for the politics of identity based on religion to flourish. The language of racism has been utilised to great effect in the maintenance of religious values and identity. But the work of groups like SBS show that only some faith based demands are borne out of experiences of alienation and exclusion due to racism; others are borne out of the perceived need to maintain religious identity, such as demands for separate religious based schools³⁹, dress codes in secular state schools, personal laws (especially family law governing matters including marriage, divorce, custody of children and inheritance), legal protection against religious discrimination or incitement to religious hatred.⁴⁰

The result is that the various religious leaderships within minority communities are placed at the centre of urban regeneration programmes. They are drawn into policy considerations which strengthen their hand considerably and bring within their domain areas which hitherto have been addressed by progressive secular anti-racist and feminist groups, including issues such as domestic violence, child protection, educational under-achievement and the rights of black and minority offenders in the criminal justice system.

The influence of all manner of religious groups in shaping social policy, particularly in relation to education in particular, is now clearly evident. A number of reports for instance highlight the mobilisation of parents by religious organisations in order to encourage parental withdrawal from school assemblies and RE. Others are influencing the teaching of a number of subjects within schools.

³⁹ At the time of writing this report, the authors were aware of a number of faith based state funded schools were in the process of being set up.

⁴⁰ Gupta 2003

For instance, in a document circulated to the Department for Education and Skill, Muslim community leaders have recommended that provision should be allowed in the teaching of Islam to Muslim children who are withdrawn from statutory worship and RE.⁴¹ Clearly the message here is that it is entirely legitimate for children to be segregated so that they are not exposed to each other's beliefs and values. It is argued that the focus instead should be on pupil's learning about their own faith.

This kind of lobbying is not limited to Muslim groups. The academic Parita Mukta revealed that Hindu fundamentalists⁴² in the UK have attempted to gain legitimacy by putting out materials on religious education in order to influence the school curriculum and multiculturalism generally. A leaflet entitled '*Explaining Hindu Dharma: A Guide for Teachers*' was published without any awareness on the part of publishers or teachers of the anti-Muslim and communalist or separatist politics of its background. The text propounds the notion that India belongs to Hindus only. Implicit in this is the denial of history and the rich hybrid culture that has evolved. It also contains conservative notions of women and sexuality. Parita Mukta warns that:

*'If due care is not taken, the RE world may well find itself implicated in the production and dissemination of knowledge by vested groups who form part of the new religious movements and who have a lamentable record on human rights'*⁴³

Recently, The Guardian newspaper exposed the attempts made by Christian Fundamentalists to influence the teaching of science in secondary schools. The paper states that dozens of schools are using creationist teaching materials such as the DVDs put out by the 'Truth in Science' group of Christian fundamentalists to support the science curriculum. Although condemned by the government as not appropriate in the

⁴¹ Muslims on Education: A Position Paper by The Association of Muslim Social Scientist and Forum Against Islamophobia, and FED 2000 (For Education and Development) The Muslim College.

⁴² The promotion of Hinduism and the 'Hindu' identity has been led by Hindus who have links with right wing Hindu nationalists in India. The very same group who were instrumental in the genocide that took place against Muslims in Gujarat in February 2002 and who have been in the forefront of a new wave of pogroms against Muslims since 1992. The agenda of right wing Hindus in India is to assert Hindu majority rule by political and violent means. Hindu organisations in the UK have supported the nationalist and fundamentalist agenda directly and indirectly by providing services and funding to the movement

⁴³ Parita Mukta 'New Hinduism: Teaching Intolerance, Practicing Aggression'. Journal of PCIRE Autumn 1997

teaching of science, it has nevertheless been used by some teachers to provide an alternative to Darwinism. One science teacher justified its use by stating that:

‘ Just because it takes a negative look at Darwinism doesn’t mean it is not science. I think to critique Darwinism is quite appropriate’⁴⁴

Whilst the government has been prepared to make clear that the ‘Truth in Science’ materials should not be used in science lessons, there is no acknowledgement of the fact that its own policies and initiatives in fostering ‘faith communities’ is giving religious groups greater access to schools which in turn allows them to promote a particular version of their beliefs.

Anecdotal evidence from groups like SBS also suggests that fundamentalists and religionists are beginning to encroach on Asian feminist projects such as women’s refuges and in doing so, are subverting feminist principles by placing emphasis on culturally sensitive services.

This project

We wish to make clear at the outset, that this report is not an attack on multiculturalism. We believe that multiculturalism, and particularly the notion of ‘mature multiculturalism’ has a vital role to play in attempting to address intolerance and racism.

This pilot project was borne out of a feminist concern that the traditional approach to multiculturalism can conflict with other aims and objectives of education as well as fundamental principles encompassed for example in international human rights conventions on the rights of the child.⁴⁵ This concern was developed out of the grassroots experiences of one of the partners, Southall Black Sisters.

Southall Black Sisters has a long history of working within secondary schools and further education colleges. It has undertaken developmental work to support local

⁴⁴ Guardian 27 November 2006.

⁴⁵ See for example UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child 1959 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989.

teachers in addressing a range of difficult issues such as racism, communal tensions and divisions within and between minority communities as well as forced marriage, violence against women and general issues affecting the rights of minority women and girls.⁴⁶

This action research project sought to address the following questions:

1. What is the experience of secondary school teachers in the Metroborough in tackling multiculturalism?
2. How are demands from a range of actors - including students, parents, governing board members and workplace organisations such as teaching unions – for policies and practices that recognise diversity, in terms of race, ethnicity, culture and religion, balanced with other equality practices, particularly around gender equality?
3. To what extent do policies and practices on multiculturalism and those ensuring other equalities such as gender equality conflict and how is this conflict mediated?
4. What guidance are teachers drawing upon in order to respond to the various competing demands and what are the principles that underline their practice?

The following section considers how we went about addressing these questions.

⁴⁶ See SBS 1990 and Gupta 2003

Research Objectives and Method

This small-scale project set out to ascertain the experience of multiculturalism in three state schools in one London borough. It is an action research project since it involved workshops with teachers in participating schools to discuss research issues and concluded with a training workshop which aimed to better equip teachers and other school staff in managing multiculturalism without compromising the rights of all children to have a full education.

As already explained in the Introduction to this report, there were particular concerns that gave rise to this project and as a result a number of research questions were identified that we sought to address. This section will outline the objectives and the outputs that we set for the project and discuss the method that we employed in order to complete the research.

The objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To document the concerns of teachers in the borough;
2. To provide a space for teachers from the participating schools in order to exchange information and share examples of good practice in managing multiculturalism;
3. To highlight concerns that arise when conflict occurs when jointly pursuing policies around diversity, in terms of race, religion and culture, and educational goals around inclusion and equality of opportunity;
4. To develop strategies for the resolution of any problems identified and to make recommendations for good practice.

In order to achieve these objectives, the project set out to achieve the following outputs:

- To obtain the participation of 3 out of 13 schools in one London borough;
- To interview 5 key respondents within the schools and the borough;
- To conduct an initial workshop involving three teachers from each of the three participating schools for the purposes of exchanging information and experience about issues and concerns;

- To produce an interim report with recommendations;
- To conduct a follow up training workshop involving the same teachers to set out key findings and explore principles and good practice;
- To produce a final report.

This report is based upon an analysis of fieldwork data collected from a total of 16 participants and additional secondary data from written policies and guidelines. This was a small-scale study, only one third of the size that we originally intended, and although the findings cannot be generalised, we believe that a number of the issues raised by the participants point to wider concerns for educational institutions in Britain. The research findings have to be read against the backdrop of a cosmopolitan and ethnically mixed borough with a strong history of feminist, anti racist and secular activism within its minority communities. We therefore, believe that the concerns raised within this report are an indication of what could be taking place in other boroughs and regions within England rather than an aberration to be dismissed.

The Metroborough

The partners in this research project selected the borough on the basis that it was an ethnically diverse borough with a long history of feminist, anti racist and secular activism. Moreover, both partners in this project already had established contacts within the borough, which could assist in meeting the tight timescale of the project and were familiar with its diverse population.

The project gained the involvement of three state funded secondary schools in one London borough referred to as the 'Metroborough'. The three schools are referred to as School X, School Y and School Z.

In order to ensure the full and open participation of the three schools and the individual teachers, the project agreed to anonymise references to the borough, to the schools and to individual participants. It was agreed that in all written and verbal dissemination of the findings, the borough be referred to as the 'Metroborough' and each school be referred to as School X, Y or Z.

According to the Office of National Statistics information on Census 2001, the 'Metroborough' comprises a very diverse population with over 40 per cent of the borough's residents from ethnic minority communities. Although the borough still has a majority white British population (around 58 per cent), the numbers of Mixed, Asian, Chinese and Other Ethnic residents are far higher in comparison to other London boroughs and to the rest of England and Wales. Indeed the borough is home to a well-established South Asian community and a more recent East African population of Somali, Eritrean and Ethiopian backgrounds. Asians comprise 24.45 per cent of the borough's population, 16.53 per cent of Asians in the borough are of Indian origin.

Also, the local authority estimates that 12,000 of the overall population are refugees. Around 7,000 of the borough's refugees live in one ward within the borough, which is also identified as one of the poorest wards in the country

Although, levels of employment are slightly higher than the national average, the 'Metroborough' is still listed as falling within the top 100 most deprived boroughs in the country. Various sources appear to indicate that wealth is unevenly distributed within the borough. For instance, one ward within the borough was listed in 2000 as falling within the top 7 per cent of the most deprived areas in England and has higher unemployment levels than the rest of the borough.

In response to the 2001 Census on religious affiliation, although half the population of the borough stated that it is Christian, the borough also has a significant Hindu (7.77%), Muslim (10.31%) and Sikh (8.51%) population. It is also important to note that in the 2001 Census, over one fifth (20.75%) of residents that responded have either not stated their religion or stated that they have 'no religion'. This was an important point for many teachers at the workshop discussions and the implications of this are discussed throughout the report.

The borough has a comprehensive race equality scheme, which covers education services. In its most recent three-year race equality scheme⁴⁷ the borough states that it

⁴⁷ The Metroborough's Three Year Race Equality Scheme – Dec 2005- May 2008

has taken several initiatives and implemented strategies to tackle a range of issues with regards to ethnic minority pupils. These include

- Addressing the levels of under-achievement and the exclusion of black pupils;
- The diversification of school meals to reflect the dietary needs of the more recent minority communities (in order to increase the take up of free school meals amongst ethnic minority pupils who are entitled to them);

And

- To keep up to date with the latest understandings and cultural needs of the borough's newly arriving communities.

The Scheme also states that there will be an increased level of working with partners to ensure that the Education department and schools meet the statutory requirements on recording, reporting and addressing racist incidents. It also notes the absence of comprehensive monitoring of school admissions as well as the need to develop and analyse the ethnic composition of school admissions.

The borough has a multicultural observance calendar noting religious and cultural events and individual schools are involved in various activities to promote diversity and equality.

The participating schools

All schools in the borough were sent an invitation to participate in the project. This letter explained that we would be willing to meet Heads of schools that were interested in the project in order to address any questions and to explain what was involved in participating in the project. Moreover, the letter included an offer of £750 to each of three schools that agreed to participate in the study. Both the partners agreed to this 'beneficiary payment' at the outset on the basis of two concerns: firstly that we wished to show some awareness and recognition of the limitation upon school resources and teachers' time and secondly, on the basis that a quick response from schools because of the very tight timescale of the project might require some incentive. The three schools that eventually participated in the project are the ones that responded to us earliest. Importantly, we had to do very little ringing around to

encourage take up from the schools and another two schools expressed an interest in the project but were unable to respond within the required timescale.

In fact we were pleased that the three schools provided comparable and divergent features. Despite their unique histories and student compositions, we managed to identify some particularities but also many shared experiences in policy and practice on the issue of multiculturalism.

School X

The total student population is 900. An estimated 63% of these are White (55% White British and another 8% European), 14% are Asian, 10% Black (5% Caribbean and 5% African, predominantly Somalian), 8% are of Mixed Heritage and 5% fall into the 'Other' category. In terms of gender, 53% are boys and 47% are girls. The Head of School X puts this down to the existence of two nearby girls' schools, one within the borough and one in the neighbouring borough.

In terms of religion, the Head of School X estimates that a significant proportion of the population are Christian, small numbers are Muslims and Hindus and a very small number Sikhs, but there are also a proportion where parents saw themselves as having 'no religion' or as atheists. The significance of non-believers or students and parents that do not associate with any particular religion is reflected in the discussion within the Main Findings of this report.

School Y

The total school student population is 1633. The student population is predominantly Asian (around two thirds) particularly of Indian and Pakistani origin and Somali, but also has around 10 per cent white students and some African Caribbean students. The Head of School Y estimates that there are slightly more boys than girls at the school. In terms of the religious backgrounds of the students, the Head notes the historical predominance of Sikh students who at one point comprised around 60 per cent of the student population. However, this has changed over time and she notes that the numbers of Muslim students of Pakistani and Somali origin had increased

significantly, possibly constituting around 80 per cent of the student population at the time of the research.

School Z

The school had no one dominant ethnic group. It has a total of 1,400 students, out of which about 1,000 to 1050 are in the 11 to 16 age range and about 350 in the Sixth Form. Broadly speaking, those students are 20% white, 20% black, African or Caribbean, 20% Indian, 20% Pakistani, 20% Arabic. The school also has some Japanese, Bangladeshi and Portuguese students. In terms of religious breakdown, the students are predominantly Muslim or Christian with a few Hindu and Sikh students. This school is an all girls' school. The significance of this is reflected within the discussion in the Main Findings section of this report.

The Fieldwork

The fieldwork consisted of five in depth face to face interviews with Key Respondents and two group discussions involving a total of 11 teachers from across the 3 participating schools. The interview schedules for the key respondent interviews and the guide for the first 'focus group' workshop are attached in the appendices of this report.

We conducted face- to-face interviews with 5 Key Respondents: the Heads of the three participating schools; the borough's teaching trade union representative and an officer from the local authority. We decided that in order to be consistent we would include the perspective of each of the Heads from each of the three participating schools. We also approached the trade union representative from the regional branch of teaching union because we wanted to get a sense of how far workplace organisations are providing guidance for teachers on these issues and the extent to which the issues are being tackled at a workplace level. As a representative of teachers across the borough, we hoped that he could provide borough wide information about how teachers are responding to multiculturalism and how they viewed this in the context of wider concerns relating to their employment. In addition to this we wanted to gain a perspective from the local authority. However, we found

that this interview was limited because the respondent was only able to give us limited time and was as interested in the findings of the research itself.

The 11 teachers that participated in the workshops became involved through varying processes. One school, School X, stated clearly at the outset that it would decide which teachers would participate in the study because it wanted to ensure it included a combination of teachers with influence, referred to as 'change makers', and new staff in need of training. At the other two schools the participants were self-selecting. Both Schools Y and Z notified all staff of the project and individual teachers then put themselves forward. For both of these schools, 4 rather than 3 teachers participated. For School Z, 4 teachers attended the first event but only 2 of these were able to return to the second stage workshop because of workload pressures. For School Y, 4 teachers participated across both the workshops, 2 of them attended both workshops. The same three teachers from School X participated in both the workshops.

The teachers that participated in the two workshops reflected different levels of seniority, teaching experience and specialisms. Also one of the participants in the workshops was a trade union branch representative and another two were responsible for co-ordinating PSHE or Health and Social Care which proved to be important elements within the discussion on managing competing demands. In terms of the gender and ethnic breakdown of participants, 3 of the Key Respondent interviewees were men and two were women. Three were white and two were Black (Asian or African Caribbean). Of the 11 teachers that participated across the two workshops, three were men and eight were women, four were Black (Asian or African Caribbean) and seven were white.

Main Findings

This section of the report discusses the main findings that emerged from the project including good practice examples, organised into three main sub sections: definitions used by the schools; multiculturalism in practice and gender equality. These encapsulate the range of issues that arose from interviews and focus groups discussions with Heads and teachers about managing multiculturalism. In the course of the interviews and discussions, three broad underlying trends emerged which can be summarised as follows: the collapse of anti-racism and multiculturalism into multi-faithism; confusion over the relationship between secularism and religion and the undermining of the rights of ethnic minority girls as a result of the ‘over-accommodation’ of multicultural, particularly religious demands.

When considering the findings below, it is important to bear in mind that we expressly asked all the participants to focus their attention on the tensions or conflicts that arose in managing multiculturalism. The findings of the report may appear bleak at times but that is partly because the focus of the project was on identifying and resolving conflictual areas. Wherever possible we have attempted to highlight good practices that were also evident within the schools.

In addition, it is necessary to place our findings within the context of a range of duties and priorities for teachers. By and large, due to the immense pressure on schools to deliver the national curriculum and meet targets aimed mainly at academic achievement, issues around multiculturalism were often addressed on an ad hoc or pragmatic basis. Few schools had the time to give in depth attention to questions of multiculturalism, racial and other equalities. Significantly at the completion of the project, many teachers identified the need for more support through training and networking arrangements with other teachers in the borough, to build confidence and share information and good practice. In many ways, the absence of guidance and support on these issues reflects a wider problem where priorities in educational achievement override other concerns, many of which also have a direct bearing on educational achievement policy. Paradoxically, our findings also show that the opposite is also true. Issues of multiculturalism also distracted from ensuring that there was equality of opportunity to the best education that the schools had to offer.

These contradictions are not just reflections of local problems but arise in the view of one of our key respondents, a teaching union representative, as a result of contradictory government policies which on the one hand notes the role of schools in promoting racial equality and on the other, reduces funding for these issues and instead emphasises the importance of league tables and academic achievement levels:

'...the ticked box approach to learning; if it can't be weighed and measured, it's not therefore valuable... ... that sort of prioritisation of concentrated effort by the government has meant two things. It's meant, A, that everybody is meant to be regarded as an individual, and that therefore one's identity as belonging to some kind of community, whether it is gender, disability, ethnicity, is presumed to be secondary to the individual that is striving to get that extra grade in Maths, that is striving to do better in English, and so on...it's also had a financial impact as well, such that quite a lot of the funding, which was once earmarked for equal opportunities support work, either at school level or local authority level, has just, again, been subsumed within the sort of general pot of money that schools are meant to be getting...'

According to the trade union representative, in the current approach to learning, pupils are regarded only as individuals and the process of learning is 'commodified' since emphasis is on learning outputs only. This approach denies or minimises the identity of the pupil in relation to the community to which he or she belongs and therefore denies or minimises group experiences of racism and structural inequality. However, it is important to also recognise that in managing multiculturalism teachers also make a number of assumptions about 'community' and that they ascribe 'community' values to an individual which may or may not accord with how the individual perceives his or her identity.

Secularism, multiculturalism and anti-racism – as defined by the schools

Anti-racism and multiculturalism

In the discussions on anti-racism and multiculturalism, many respondents talked about the two concepts as if they were interchangeable. This is not surprising given the fact that since the late 1980s anti-racist struggles have been largely reduced to matters to do with cultural accommodation and this was reflected most clearly in education and other local authority policies⁴⁸. This approach had more or less continued until around December 2002 when civil unrest in the northern cities of England led to many national debates about the relevance of multiculturalism.

In our study we found little evidence of an understanding of the development of the concepts of anti-racism and multiculturalism and their relationship with each other. Moreover, we found that discussions about multiculturalism more often than not, slid into discussions about religious identity and the prioritisation of faith diversity (Multi-faithism rather than multiculturalism).

The greatest clarity about tackling substantive issues of racial inequality came from the Head of School Z for whom the differential achievement levels of different groups of students and particularly the underperformance of African – Caribbean boys was fundamental to his vision of both racial equality and multiculturalism. He was addressing their underachievement through the School Improvement Plan. He was clear about separating out substantive issues of racial equality from multicultural celebrations of different religious festivals and expressed concern for the fact that equality in respect of educational achievement was not given greater priority when addressing multiculturalism in schools.

The other two schools appeared to view racial equality schemes as being primarily about promoting respect and valuing inclusion of diverse backgrounds. Whilst these are necessary components of racial equality policies, few formulated specific strategies or specific targets and goals in addressing substantive racial equality issues or addressed problems that arise when race and gender equality goals clash.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992.

Ironically however, despite discussions focussing largely on religious matters, when participants at the first workshop were asked about recommendations, many argued for the need to tackle under achievement, for greater resources for English as an Additional language (EAL) and better structures of support for parents.

When asked about anti-racism, the Head from School Z stated that the pupils at her school were shielded from hostility. She saw her school as a haven against external racism.

The Head emphasised how the focus on inclusion means that her pupils are often shielded from the more ugly aspects of racism experienced in the outside world. Students do not experience racial tensions, partly because they are thrown into a mixed environment from an early age and learn to accept and get along with each other. This point was well illustrated by an example of the shock of racism experienced by her Muslim girls (some wearing hijabs) on a day trip to France. Thus she stated:

'Students are often affected by what goes on outside and after the July bombings, one of our Muslim girls started wearing a beret type thing to school, instead of a headscarf, because her mother thought it would make her less noticeable outside. I think often girls don't realise that it is quite a sheltered community in a way...some of the girls going to France...and the fact that they came across overt racism that they were very unused to and quite shocked by it...or puzzled, I suppose as much as anything else. And that brought a few things home that they hadn't really thought about before, because we are so fortunate in that we've had very few racial incidents within the school. We just work hard on including people'

This study produced many examples of anti-racism or indeed multiculturalism being collapsed into questions of the need to guard religious identity and especially against causing offence, so that the two became indistinguishable. For instance in one school, there was considerable concern that a couple of boys had placed a piece of pork in the bag of a Muslim pupil in circumstances where at least one of the students involved did not understand the full implications of his actions. Yet this warranted exclusion for

five days. This is discussed in more detail in the section on the practice of multiculturalism below. They are not alone or unique in this respect.

Despite the current vilification of the concept of multiculturalism from a number of quarters, both the Heads and teachers at the workshop discussions still viewed the concept as immensely valuable and useful in ensuring tolerance and respect for diversity within the school environment. All respondents talked about a firm and robust commitment to multiculturalism in which everyone's background is included or respected. All respondents from the schools clearly stated that their overall aim is to ensure that pupils perceive themselves to be part of the school community in which overt racism or prejudice is absent or challenged.

When asked about how they defined multiculturalism, many participants' referred to the recognition of and respect for different histories and cultures.

'I think, you know, multiculturalism is about being aware of the variety of cultures that are represented in the school community and ensuring that all those groups, because they are represented in the community, are represented in the life and work of the community... ...the jigsaw that makes up that whole of the community and making sure that every bit of the jigsaw knows that it is vitally important because, if they're not there, the jigsaw isn't whole' (Head of School Y)

'I suppose the key word is respect, isn't it? ... the key word is about respecting the histories and the knowledge that any student brings to the learning situation... ... it's essentially about respecting every cultural experience, every contributory talent and factor that students can bring to the learning process' (Teaching union representative)

The Heads and teachers of the three participating schools identified their multicultural ethos as the most positive aspect of their schools. As a result, several participants voiced concerns about the current attack on multiculturalism. For instance, the local teaching union representative stated:

'I won't support, the, you know, the presumption that multiculturalism is perhaps to blame for some social ills or for some social deficits, I find quite astonishing. You

know, my general view, which I think is echoed, and is largely based on my local experience, in (Metroborough), is that with some horrible and notable exceptions, that the UK is an incredibly tolerant, positive culture for people of different cultural back grounds to come into'

Indeed there were a number of positive examples of teachers and students from a range of backgrounds working with each other at a number of different levels. Students, teachers and other members of staff mixed with others naturally, supporting each other's beliefs and experiences or being sensitive to them, learning how to negotiate their way around each others' identities for themselves. A relaxed multicultural atmosphere was often achieved through a conscious emphasis on the part of all head teachers to the notion of inclusion and a focus on promoting discussions about similarities across differences.

'(There) is the racial equality policy at the moment, which states that within our school, there is an atmosphere that ensures each person's worth and different dignity is recognised and so on, and I think that's what we try and do is look at various individuals and value what they bring to the school' (School Z)

Two out of three schools noted external recognition for the level of racial harmony within their schools. One head teacher proudly pointed out that students at her school had informed Ofsted inspectors that racial harmony was the most positive aspect of the school environment:

'One thing they said was very special about the school was the racial harmony. I mean I was delighted by that comment... ...the question (that was put to the student) was what is the most special thing about this school if you were describing it to people outside... ...the answer to that question was the racial harmony... ... and the reason, coming back, was like there was a sort of fusion amongst the races that you couldn't really, you know, people didn't accept that the difference was important. Not that there wasn't a difference but, you know, the depth of the fusion' (School Y)

Another Head gave an example of how the multicultural nature of her school was perceived by those outside the school community. She proudly referred to an incident

which led an outside visitor to commend the school for the way in which a diverse range of students were involved in preparing and presenting an assembly about Rosh Hashanah:

'We had a visitor from the 'Metroborough' Arts today to present a certificate...he came in to present that, but he was here for the Rosh Hashanah assembly and he was very, very complimentary about it, about the mix of girls taking part in it and the way it was received and the girls rush in for special assemblies because they enjoy them and I think they like seeing their friends and classmates perform and present, but also they are very respectful in those assemblies and they will sit and listen and clap and so on, and that is a very, very nice atmosphere...The Rosh Hashanah assembly ...we brought it together by talking about the similarities in the languages...words like mother and father and mum and dad and so on, so there's a similarity of common languages ...that I think is what we work on very, very strongly and do that so people can realise that our commonalities are much stronger' (School Z)

What is remarkable about an approach which emphasises inclusion within a multicultural context is not only that a real sense of community emerges from an environment of diverse backgrounds, which cannot be replicated in a single monolithic religious or ethnic environment, but that explorations of commonalities are allowed to emerge organically, as in the above case, which led to an exploration of similarities in histories, values and language. The Head of School Z attempted to emphasise commonalities across difference by addressing legislation (imposing Christian assemblies⁴⁹) in a creative way that reflects the school community in order to enable a diverse range of students to present a Rosh Hashanah assembly. This ensured that genuine respect and unity emerged. It is a good illustration of how secular schools can be the main guarantors of tolerance and respect for diversity in all its various religious and non-religious shades.

The Head of School X on the other hand, in stark contrast, expressed concerns about how multiculturalism was interpreted within the school context. He bemoaned the fact

⁴⁹ See The Education Reform Act 1988

that often multiculturalism was understood in a very restricted, clichéd sense, as the celebration of ‘*saris, steel bands and samosas*’. He argued for understandings of multiculturalism to move beyond these stereotypes towards a more meaningful understanding arising from the teaching of a range of histories, cultures and struggles against racism:

‘I think it can be problematic because there is danger that it can be reduced to you know, a very tokenistic way of viewing cultures and understanding cultures without actually going deeper into you know, the heritages of those cultures, the histories of those cultures and particularly, the histories of those cultures in relation to the West but to Britain in particular because the histories are connected’ (School X)

He highlighted this point by explaining that it would not be appropriate to assume that by simply celebrating Diwali for instance, a diverse and complex range of South Asian cultures, traditions and histories have been represented. Rather, he argued for schools to ensure that alternative perspectives on a range of subjects were represented at every level, within every subject and activity within the school.

For the Head of School X, implementing multiculturalism involved a focus on the material differences between communities borne out of their historical relationships to each other, and that issues such as the under achievement of particular groups are addressed within that understanding. He advocated an inspiring and radical vision of education in which multiculturalism is allied to the notion of freedom and social justice:

‘It’s a very strong belief that education is the greatest form of emancipation for any group and so... I mean I’m guided by those kinds of principles myself, that you know, having had histories of either enslavement or subjugation or imperialist forces and so on. You know, having had experiences of, full of reasons, being discriminated against and so on. I guess I have a stronger sense of, in that sense, justice and opportunity. As I say, I mean I’m in the business of education because education to me means more than the subjects that we deliver. It’s creating freethinking, critical-thinking amongst the young people so that you know, at the end of the day, the piece of paper, which says these are the number of GCSE’s, to me is slightly secondary. Although necessary

for you know, progression and so on but I consider somebody who can, who's able to critically look at issues as they arise, critically look at what the media is telling them then we will have succeeded with those children. We will have educated them (School X)

Secularism

This study found little recognition of the fact that minority communities are as heterogeneous as the wider society with many varied believing and non-believing traditions. This is not surprising since many of the respondents' perceptions accord with general perceptions in the wider society in which minority communities are increasingly recognised only in terms of religious identity. Few respondents were aware that some areas of the borough had seen struggles by Asian parents to prevent state schools from being taken over by religious fundamentalists. The teaching union representative for instance recollected the secular history of the largely South Asian community and in particular the clear opposition of many parents to the establishment of faith based schools in their area:

'I mean education is still extremely revered by the, you know, the vast majority of the community, and in the case of the campaign in 1991 to prevent School A and School B from opting out, and becoming what at the time the then Tory government were talking about as grant maintained schools. It was utterly heartening to find that the vast majority of parents were not prepared to go along with the leaders of the campaign who were trying to get the schools to opt out. Because they recognised that the leaders of the campaign were essentially you know, what I would characterise as Fundamentalists, the Sikhs, probably Khalistan ideology, and the vast majority of [Metroborough ward] parents did not want to see replicated in schools in [Metroborough ward] some of the communalist aspects of the life, which they had left behind, or wanted to leave behind. So I found that, you know, immensely reassuring, and of course we were successful in preventing those schools going into the control of those elements in the community'

The same participant also acknowledged that the growing influence of Christianity in schools was a major challenge to secularism in schools. He stated:

'I would say, for example, that some of the most serious challenges for secularism come from established Christianity, and, if you like, the dominant religious groups in Britain. A current example of that is there's a group of fundamentalist Christians who believe in creationism in opposition to a scientific theory of evolution. They've called themselves Trust in Science, and last week they sent out 5,000 DVDs to high school Science Departments around the country...providing what they claim to be audio-visual materials, which, on the surface are meant to contribute to a discussion about science, and in particular evolution, but are in fact propaganda for a religious based theory of the origin of humankind. And those kinds of developments I think are very serious'

However, when it came to the influence of minority religions in schools, he was more circumspect:

'The balance between race and religion is always a difficult one to get right. What I think, what I think multiculturalism is, in many ways, in terms of educational provision and educational theory, born out of a form of secularism, which is that one makes no particular adherence to any particular religion and is respectful of them all, without favour'

Interestingly this view of secularism does not explicitly make clear whether there ought to be an accommodation of religion at any level. He appears to be referring to secularism as respect for and representation of a plurality of faiths within the school environment itself.

The study found that there were varying definitions and levels of commitment to the term 'secularism' within the participating schools. Two out of three Heads felt that the secular characteristic of their school presented the best opportunity to achieve their educational vision and goals and preserve multiculturalism. However, even amongst the two, the definition of secularism and how this translated into practice diverged.

The Head of School Z described the secular nature of her school as its '*greatest resource*'. She argued that the school's non-faith environment, in which all ethnic

backgrounds mixed and none were privileged, enabled multiculturalism to thrive. Her interpretation of ‘secularism’ was best highlighted by her opposition to parents who used religious reasons for gaining entry to the single sex school. She explained that many parents from more religious or conservative backgrounds were attempting to place their daughters at the school on the grounds of religious observance or religious needs rather than educational purposes. She was therefore more vigilant than most to ensure that the admissions criteria were strictly followed:

‘... now, indeed, it’s done centrally at the local authority, so that we don’t even get to see who’s applied. So following that, then there may well be appeals, and some of those appeals are accompanied by letters that say, you know, for religious reasons, we want our daughter to come here... ...but we’re not, we’re not a faith school, so people wanting to come here because of their particular faith isn’t really something that we would take into account’

In fact the Head of School Z provided a clear reminder of the need to establish single sex schools for girls because they were empowering spaces for women which ‘prepare them for the outside world’, as opposed to contained spaces to shield young women from the outside world. In her view, the purpose of a girls’ school is to provide a level playing field rather than to police their sexuality or limit their potential to be productive adults. She also gave an example of how in the past some Muslim parents at the school had attempted to turn it into a Muslim school for girls. Clearly, such attempts appeared to have nothing to do with racism or even religious discrimination, but everything to do with preserving religious identity by controlling their educational environment. The fact that in this instance and the one described by the teaching union representative above, such attempts did not succeed suggests that there is no consensus within minority communities that religious schools are their priority when it comes to education or that girls must be limited to certain types of educational environments.

Moreover, it was in the context of the discussion of School Z’s admissions policy that the Head drew a clear distinction between her (secular) school and faith schools:

'...we are a non faith school and one of its huge strengths is the fact that we are so very mixed and girls can learn about each other's faiths and backgrounds, and that's what we should be preparing girls for in this society. And girl's education is something that's important for the well being of the girls across the board, not just for any one particular group of girls...the bottom line is that when they leave school, they will need all those qualities to be able to succeed in the outside world where there's still not a level playing field. And we need to do as much as we can to boost them and give them the qualifications they need to take an active role outside'

Notwithstanding her stout defence of secularism, in practice, other aspects of the school's multicultural practices raised questions about the relationship between secularism and multiculturalism. When examined more closely, the often easy accommodation of faith at the school in respect of minority communities lent itself to operating more as 'multi faith' than secular.

A more robust position on secularism within the education context was provided by the Head of School X who defined secularism in the following way:

'it's an absence of, kind of, overt religious practice, within the school context is what I would mean by secularism, overt religious practice not belief or faith'

This Head stated that the school accommodated the wearing of the hijab as part of the school uniform and provided temporary prayer space during Ramadan and any other religious period if demanded. However, he drew a distinction between secular and religious spaces by stating that the creation of a permanent prayer space or room within the school would institutionalise religious practice, which would then be problematic in respect of unity and conflict with educational goals. This is discussed in more detail alongside other views in the section on prayer rooms below.

This position is to be contrasted sharply with the very negative view of secularism held by the Head of School Y who preferred to regard her school as 'multi-faith' rather than as secular. She suggested that, in practice, 'secularism' had sought to deny people's interest in and commitment to their religious beliefs. Secularism, she stated, was effectively *'a cloak for the imposition of non-belief'*. She argued that whilst religion is a personal matter, it is hugely emotive precisely because it is *'deeply*

personal'. In her view, therefore, to avoid recognition of religion and religious identity would be a mistake:

'...when people say things like all religions are personal matters and stuff and not to do with anybody else, I think that sometimes comes through as a reason for, for not wanting to necessarily perhaps stick up for what you do believe in. That, that's where the negative concept, I think, is coming from. So it's not that I'm saying that religion couldn't or shouldn't be a personal matter but it's, it is hugely personal and I mean whatever religion you are, you've got, you know, as many different takes on it probably as you've got people... ... if you say it's personal and nobody needs to know, therefore it's much more acceptable to have absolutely no belief in religion at all. Do you see what I mean? That's the next step on'.

However, this Head recognised and strongly advocated schools as important sites for open debate on these matters:

'...and I do think that openness and transparency and, and honesty about what we do believe in, or don't believe, is critical in schools such as making sure that the issues of the day are addressed...'

It is important to note that the two Heads who expressed a robust commitment to secularism also expressed some concerns about being careful not to deny or negate religious identity altogether. On the other hand, the one Head who was more accommodating of religious values also expressed concerns about ensuring that space was created within schools for discussion and dissent to take place without fear. Yet all the Heads used the concept of inclusion to very good effect in trying to negate the divisive tendencies of religion when it is institutionalised.

Clearly, the question is one of striking the right balance between achieving educational goals which include equality of opportunity for all with respect for diversity which includes religious identity. Our concern is that in attempting to strike that balance, especially in the context of the current understanding of multiculturalism, intentionally or unintentionally, religion is allowed to encroach more and more on secular schools and education. The role of religion in schools is

causing alarm but part of the problem is that whilst critics are ready to condemn the impact of Christianity in schools, few dare to take on the religious sensibilities of the minority communities. This is exemplified in the way in which much of the understanding and practice of multiculturalism as seen in examples in this entire section is about recognising and accommodating diversity mainly in relation to faith or religion.

Multiculturalism in Practice

Black History Month and the Limits of Multiculturalism

All the schools highlighted 'Black History Month' as a potentially rich vein to explore in the promotion of multiculturalism in schools. The schools were particularly proud and pleased with the way in which 'Black History Month' was firmly embedded within their schools, not just in one subject but also across many different subjects. This was noted as a very positive development.

There was a substantial debate about the importance of Black History Month. A number of key points emerged in this regard.

Schools tended to draw a clear line between Black History Month and other minority cultures and histories.

'[Black history Month] quite often it's to do with looking at black people and their particular achievements, famous black people, or politicians, or inventors, artists over the years reminding the rest of them the rest of the school of some of these people. So it's historic but it's also quite current. So this week has been about African art'

Whilst most schools saw Black History Month as a very good development, they also raised concerns. It was felt that the concept was conceived in a largely restricted way, limited to the celebration of the achievements of African –Caribbean leaders or artists and writers. Other minority histories only get a small mention during Black History

months if at all. By and large non-African and Caribbean minorities are confined to 'displaying' their 'heritage' through a religious framework in assemblies and presentations of food and dress.

'For many years we've had a positive outlook on multiculturalism in terms of encouraging all sorts of activities. One of our main things was to have a big thing like a show assembly to celebrate different cultures, and not necessarily just festivals but obviously Eid, Diwali and Christmas and Easter. But we also had a Black History Month'

One respondent stated that there was a stigma attached to the term 'Black' which meant that the impact of Black History Month was nominal in terms of student's views and perceptions of other cultures and histories. He advocated further consideration of the aims and objectives of Black History Month so that it included other backgrounds and histories.

His views were echoed by other teachers and led to an interesting debate about whether other minorities identify with Black History Month. It was noted by one respondent that many Asian minorities for instance do not perceive themselves as black.

'This definition of black and non-black is a little bit contentious really, especially among kids...quite a number of Asian kids in the classroom find it difficult to call themselves black. They consider themselves a different colour like brown or something else. Because of the low esteem of some students, there is a stigma attached to black people. So if you are black you are inferior or something like that. And as a result of that, there are a number of kids who do not like to call themselves black. So it's a big area and it's a problem'

Despite the stigma attached to the term 'Black,' the respondent also stressed the need to instil an aspirational culture to improve underachievement amongst students and parents and in doing so hinted at the need to understand Black History Month in the context of racism and underachievement rather than in the context of a celebration of difference.

It was felt that 'Black History Month' could provide a space for an exploration of the history of other minorities which was not merely about the 'celebration of religious traditions' and which should be incorporated across all subjects. As one participant stated:

'If we are defining black as everything non-white, then maybe we should ...I don't know, have famous people in history and what they have achieved. Maybe just cover other areas as well, different backgrounds'

Teachers voiced concerns about how the National Curriculum emphasised the teaching of British history which undermined racial equality. Addressing this problem required creativity and vision on the part of the teachers themselves.

'Mainstreaming race equality and parity concerns into the overall curriculum is reliant on creativity and knowledge of individual teachers and scarce resources. But clearly you can teach multiculturalism throughout key stage 3 by the resources we use and way you interpret the curriculum... If you interpret it by the letter it could be seen as very white, upper class, male dominated history'

The implementation of 'Black History Month' together with the 'celebration' of other (mainly South Asian) cultures and religion, posed some of the toughest questions about the management of multiculturalism in schools. Notwithstanding efforts at creativity on the part of the schools in how black history is taught, the entire approach to diversity could be seen to lend itself to a process where African and Caribbean communities are largely perceived to be secular with rich traditions of political resistance in all areas of life whilst South Asians or other minority communities are defined mainly in terms of their religious values. South Asians are rarely ascribed secular and political values. One dangerous consequence of this is that it provides the space for the more dominant authoritarian religionists in Asian minority communities to influence learning in secondary schools. The responses are indicative of the slide that is occurring nationally and internationally from a politics based around notions of equality and human rights into a politics about recognition and difference.

From Multiculturalism to Multi-faithism

Throughout our discussions on multiculturalism, we found that there was an automatic drift from multiculturalism into multi-faithism. Discussions with teachers about the reality of the everyday practice of multiculturalism overwhelmingly focussed upon recognition of religious identities rather than language, cultural and political traditions or racial equality.

A paramount concern for most of the schools was to guard against offending religious sensibilities. For example, in one school, a boy who had placed a piece of pork in another student's bag was excluded from the school for five days, although it was recognised that he did not fully understand what he was doing. Such an extreme course of action appears to have been somewhat disproportionate to the actual 'offence' committed, but it is an example of how seriously the Head of the school regarded the need to safeguard religious identity. In her view:

'It was a very serious insult and therefore this was treated seriously as if they had hit somebody...I don't know if the person who did it understood the significance of what they were doing. I genuinely don't think they...they probably thought of it as the same as sort of level as if you put some meat into a vegetarian's bag...there were two youngsters involved and...they thought it was a bit of a laugh and they, you know, more of a prank. I think one of them was a little bit more um, unpleasant in his motivation' (School Y)

Many examples of the accommodation of religious beliefs were cited when asked about multicultural good practice, most of them centred on inclusive religious assemblies. Yet such accommodation also proved to be the most contentious when examining their impact upon other equality issues especially those relating to gender. This is discussed below.

Accommodating Religion

The accommodation of demands around religious identity and observance were often a contentious area for the participants, since it conflicted with issues of gender equality or sexuality. The problematic accommodation of religion must however be

viewed in conjunction with the equally problematic concept of ‘parental choice’. In our study we found that often ‘parental choice’ was exercised by parents as a way of closing down options for girls and therefore their educational horizon.

However, it must also be noted that not all participants recognised that there was a conflict between respecting differences and promoting equality. Indeed there was a slightly disconcerting lack of understanding of education as secular spaces that can and should be managed in such a way as to guarantee freedom of thought as well as respect for diversity. Our study showed that through exposure to different backgrounds and an organic negotiation of difference, pupils themselves managed to both respect difference and be critical of each other. But the lack of this understanding led to confusion amongst teachers as to the difference between state (secular) and faith based schools. One participant argued that the only difference between the two was that in a state school there was no proselytising:

‘I think if you are still maintaining a secular school because you are not actually teaching religion in terms of teaching it and converting children to it, and you can still provide a prayer room that’s available for all, not one religion but all religions...personally I don’t see a problem in providing a prayer room’

Our study revealed that religion is indeed shaping the context in which education is delivered. This section explores some of the manifold manifestations of religion within the schools as well as in the views and practices of participants and the implications of this for the education of girl children in particular.

Imposition of religious assemblies

In the UK, Christianity still enjoys a privileged position and this is also reflected in education through for example the imposition of Christian assemblies⁵⁰ Such imposition implies that Christianity is also the key characteristic of the UK and the State has tried to reinforce this view in a variety of ways but perhaps nowhere more so than in education. Despite the law however, few secondary schools adhere to the requirement for Christian worship, especially where they are ethnically mixed.

⁵⁰ See the Education Reform Act 1988.

All three schools in this study preferred to either ignore or minimise the imposition of Christian assemblies as an acknowledgement of the diverse cultural and religious backgrounds of the pupils at their schools. The teaching union representative noted that this was definitely a trend across the borough:

'The injunction for schools to provide mainly Christian acts of worship is frankly a joke. Very few schools, certainly in this area abide by that injunction'

Our study showed how schools relied both upon their creativity and common sense to get around this particularly unreflective piece of legislation. Indeed, as noted in the first section of this report, school assemblies and religious education classes were viewed by some participants as the best examples of multiculturalism in practice. All three schools incorporated a strong ethos of inclusion and attempted to turn assemblies into something positive which benefits all. According to all, inclusion is key to ensuring that pupils are not made to feel inferior because of their background. Assemblies were extended to other non-Christian religions and pupils from all backgrounds were expected to participate in the preparation, discussion and presentation of a wide range of religious and cultural assemblies. The Head of School Z stated that inclusion was vital to prevent any one religious group from dominating or claiming ownership of a particular religion:

'And then the choir sang a song, Shalom, which was chorus... I can't remember the rest of it. It was absolutely lovely and a complete mixture of girls in there, different races, different colours, different languages, different... all singing the same song together, and those who opted in. They could choose to be in the assembly and one of the wonderful things is that in the faith assemblies there will be girls from lots of different faiths taking part in that'

A major preoccupation for the Head is to ensure that cultural festivals, religious assemblies or any other activities do not become the terrain or property of any one particular group, which then has important implications for the issue of control over knowledge, representation and interpretation.

Inclusion for this Head has reaped other benefits. For instance, her approach had ensured that not a single pupil chose to opt out of assemblies during the time that she had been at the school. This is significant in highlighting the often conflicting aspirations and views between children and their parents and the difficulty of enshrining the rights of parents particularly over older children in matters to do with education.

The Head of School Z also emphasised assemblies as an important space for the sharing of common moral values that exist in all the faiths and cultures:

‘Well, I mean, you mentioned the assembly policy a little while ago on religious content and things, and it’s the bit that’s ticked in the back of our self evaluation form as one of the areas that we don’t believe and go along with Government guidelines because in a school like this, it is not appropriate to do assemblies with a broadly Christian nature. We have very moral assemblies where we share information about each other’s faith, backgrounds or whatever, where we talk about... a very powerful assembly last week I was in was on peace and the conflict in Darfur, conflicts around the world, so some quite difficult issues that need to be raised and need to be thought about, and you could argue that that came from a Christian perspective, but it was more of a moral perspective and being a good citizen perspective perhaps. So the Governors are supportive of the fact that we don’t do broadly Christian assemblies...’

Using assemblies to focus upon shared morals and tenets was reiterated in examples provided by the other schools and viewed as a central objective of school assemblies.

In our view, the wider moral framework which the Head of School Z hinted at is a secular culture which draws on different values across religions but at the same time breaks out of a strict religious confine to develop a vision that is more universal.

However set against this was the need to guard against religious indoctrination. For the Head of School Z this was potentially an area where tensions could develop:

‘I think the main thing is around the assembly issue. We have to make sure that it’s...there’s no aspect of indoctrination really and we have a sharing approach there’

In the furtherance of such clearly beneficial goals of multiculturalism, the Head also stated that she was in the process of developing contact via video link with a school in Devon, that is entirely mono-cultural and mono-religious, in order to promote the concept of the UK as a multicultural society. From time to time, she intended to share her school assemblies with the other school so that they could have an understanding of other cultures.

The idea of twinning schools and other cultural exchanges and contacts between schools was first promoted as a recommendation by the Cantle report⁵¹ into the events of 2001 in the northern cities of the UK, many of which are located and reflect Asian or white ghettos. However in response to the notion of twinning, some Muslims who perceive themselves as educationalists have warned against the process. It is clear from their arguments that they do not welcome any attempts that, in their view, might pose a threat to cultural or religious autonomy:

*'It should be recognised that mono-cultural schools are not necessarily insular and ignorant of other cultures. Culturally separate groups, communities and institutions do not have to be causes of social instability...some unease may be therefore felt at proposals for twinning or other forms of contact where they are imposed without the full agreement of all parties involved, including parents. Hence formulation of policy should be undertaken with reference to the views and opinions of those religious and cultural groups concerned, including Muslim, at the most local level'*⁵²

Such perspectives suggest a fear of exposure to other values and even to the sharing of values across divides to assert a common humanity. Nor are they limited to Muslim groups alone. Many authoritarian religious groups across all communities share such sentiments and the desire to reinforce insularity. To complicate matters, white parents also use religious arguments to reinforce racial apartheid. There have been many

⁵¹ Community Cohesion: a report of the independent review team, chaired by Ted Cantle. London Home Office 2001.

⁵² Muslims on Education: A Position Paper The Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMISS UK), Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR) and FED 2000 (For Education and Development) The Muslim College UK

instances where white parents have taken their children out of schools that are dominated by other ethnic groups.⁵³

We would also argue that whilst the attempt made by Head of School Z to break out of ghettoised communities by twinning schools is laudable, the approach does have its limitations. Restricting such links to only the sharing of religious assemblies reinforces the view that it is acceptable for schools to be mono-cultural and mono-religious even in areas with other minorities. Perhaps more importantly it contributes to the construction of minority communities as simply one-dimensional religious entities.

Another example of creative and discursive assemblies was sited by the Head of School Y who explained that post 9/11, several young Muslim women at her school came to her and requested permission to conduct their own assembly to counter one-dimensional and particularly negative constructions of Islam. One of the central features of the assembly was a discussion of Muslim women's dress. A range of young Muslim women stood before the rest of the school and demonstrated that women dressed themselves in a myriad of different ways, ranging from the very traditional to the modern, some conforming to what they felt was their religious duty and others not.

It is precisely those assemblies in which students not only seek to represent but also debate multiple interpretations of religions and cultures, that multiculturalism is likely to be at its most beneficial in countering both racism and dogmatism from within a religion.

However, an underlying problem is evident even within the good practice example cited above. The view that all beliefs and values are valid and equal in respect of their development is often an inherent part of multicultural policy and practice. Yet it has been a central plank in the disjunction between demands for gender equality by women from minority communities and the practice of multiculturalism. One school

⁵³ In January 1988 for example, a group of white parents from Dewsbury in West Yorkshire, with the help of the right wing Parental Alliance for Choice in Education (PACE) won a court case allowing them to withdraw their children from a state school where 85% of the pupils were Asian. (See *Refusing Holy Orders* edited by Gita Sahgal and Nira Yuval Davis. Virago Press 1992.

in the study presented its school policy on cultural understanding in the following way:

'We believe that the school benefits from a rich sense of community due to the range of different cultures that exist within the school and the acceptance and tolerance that people of all beliefs and cultures feel. This will instil an attitude that all religious and cultural beliefs are equal, hence resisting the notion that one belief or idea ranks above any other' (School Z: Policy For The Development of Cultural Understanding)

The above highlights a classic failure of the multicultural approach which positions all cultures equally without interrogating either the history of racism or struggles for social justice between and within communities. The Head of School Y remarked that whilst the girls in her school assembly presented different ways in which Muslim communities and societies are organised, they also said that polygamy although not practiced in Britain, was an accepted practice elsewhere in the world:

'I think they felt it (polygamy) wasn't acceptable in a country where it doesn't exist, you know. Even if it doesn't, it doesn't exist in the law of the land, you know, so, you know, they weren't... I don't think they wanted to unpack that in too much detail. I, I think there was, there was an acceptance in their mind that in some parts of the world life is very different. But... and it caused people to have different norms of behaviour because of the circumstances there'

A different view of multiculturalism might have led the school to ask questions about the legitimacy of polygamy or other such practices in all the communities in which it takes place, by pointing out that such practices are also deemed to be unacceptable to many including women from within the same culture and religion in which it exists.

Religious Education

Linked to the discussion about religious assemblies is the debate about the teaching of religious education. Two out of the three schools in this study taught a unit called Religious Education whilst a third had invented a slightly different version entitled 'Beliefs and Values'.

Religious Education is compulsory for all secondary state schools up to Key Stage 5 and although it does not form part of the National Curriculum it is nevertheless a part of the base of the National Curriculum. It states that agreed syllabuses should '*reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Britain are, in the main, Christian, while taking account of teachings and practices of the other religions presented in Great Britain*'

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The Heads of two of the participating schools were proud of the content of their RE lessons and stated that this space, like the school assemblies, often afforded them the most opportunity to reflect on a diversity of beliefs and views which had to be handled sensitively.

The Head of school Z stated that though parents have a right to withdraw their children from RE,⁵⁵ few if any did so. This may serve as a timely reminder to all those who assume that all minority communities are to be characterised by dogmatism. Many parents are tolerant if not secular in outlook but their voices are increasingly being drowned out by state and community leaders.

The opposite experience was however discussed by participants from School X who noted that parents who considered themselves to be non-believers withdrew their students from RE. This may partly be due to the fact that the school has a higher percentage of parents who identify as non-believers than the other schools. Interestingly, it is School X that most accurately reflects the borough's demographic characteristics in its student composition. According to the 2001 census, about 20 per cent of residents in the borough did not state their religion, viewed themselves as non-believers or categorised themselves as having 'no religion'.

⁵⁵ Guidance regarding the right of the parent to withdraw their child from religious education can be found in the Department for Education Circular 1/94 paragraphs 44-49. This relates to the 1988 and 1993 Education Acts. It gives guidance on the meaning of the terms 'worship' and 'Christian'. Worship is defined as honouring a divine being and predominantly Christian as giving special status to the person of Jesus Christ. The Circular also contains guidance on the right of withdrawal from collective worship and Religious Education. It allows parents to withdraw their children from collective worship and/or Religious Education either in part or completely. Parents do not have to give a reason for their withdrawal.

Significantly, the place of ‘no religion’ or atheism in schools was addressed mainly by School X. The Head of School X presented a clear commitment to the need to take account of non-believers:

‘It is important that we do recognise there are non-believers as well and not just portray religion as a generally accepted view by everybody, but it is, you know...I do think it is important that there are people who don’t believe’

Indeed School X made a conscious decision to rename their RE unit as a ‘Beliefs and Values’ unit which did not preclude the teaching of the agreed RE syllabus. The distinction was not merely academic. It was crucial to the school’s attempts to foster a culture of inquiry which starts from the premise that there are many different belief systems in which religion is but one.

‘What we are talking about is the beliefs and values that different faith groups have, you know, in relation to a range of things, you know, in terms of how they, how they perceive birth; what the, you know, what the practices might be during the birth, marriage and death and those sorts of things. So, it’s trying to understand the basic principles of the different faiths rather than teaching, if you see what I mean. I mean the distinction is quite clear... I think we have a duty to in the broader sense, to expose people to different ideas and ideologies and you know, ways of looking at the world’

The advantage of such an approach is that it enables rather than impedes a continued exposure to different ideas and ideologies without privileging the place of religion. This perspective is more fluid because it allows for an easy accommodation of different interpretations of beliefs and traditions both within and outside of a particular religion as opposed to ossified and distorted representations of religion.

However, all three schools noted that it was mainly Jehovah’s Witnesses that had at one time or another withdrawn their children from RE classes. This is an important point because this is a little discussed group which is not associated in the public

imagination with the term ‘fundamentalism’ but which nonetheless enforces some very authoritarian practices.

Whilst there was no evidence of outside religious fundamentalist influence in shaping the contents of RE that was taught in all three schools, it is important to note that there are attempts by religious organisations to influence the content of RE and even to mobilise parents to withdraw their children from RE and indeed any other educational activity such as school trips to places of worship linked to religions other than their own. The example of Hindu religionists seeking to influence the content of RE in the UK (mentioned in the Introduction above) is a case in point.

The knotty question of religion and culture

One of the most difficult issues for all participants was the question of the relationship between religion and culture. In the drive to accommodate religious diversity, what is clear is that a range of complex social, cultural, economic and political factors which shape people’s identities are being reduced to a single ‘pure’ or ‘authentic’ religious identity. This process is of course pushed by religious groups who regard schools as a tool for furthering their political agenda.

We were concerned to find that alongside the overriding fear of causing offence, many of the participants in this study were ensnared by the belief that religion and culture are two separate entities. They often accepted uncritically, demands based on the need to respect religious beliefs which were distinct from cultural practices. This demand has of course come from many community leaders and authoritarian and fundamentalist religious groups who have promoted the separation of religion and culture in order to re-invent religious identity for political purposes. Unfortunately, such a one - dimensional approach to minority communities has found its way into schools. The problem in demarcating religion and culture so rigidly is that real lived experience is denied. Moreover, it lends weight to the arguments made by some groups, including those dominated by younger people that certain practices reflect a declining and malfunctioning culture which has nothing to do with religion. They assert instead a literal return to the text. In effect this approach ring fences religion so that it becomes a ‘no-go’ area as far as dissent is concerned.

One example in particular highlighted the problem and consequences of such a position.

In School Z, a dance performed by a group of Kurdish girls at their Eid assembly was considered to be offensive by one Muslim parent who viewed dance as ‘un Islamic’. The Head of School Z was questioned by the parent who felt that it was wrong for such girls to be dancing in the presence of men instead of conforming to the injunction to be ‘modest’ in their behaviour.

The Head had to explain to the parent that the dancing was a ‘cultural’ expression and not religious and that it was taking place in a ‘safe and closed’ environment:

‘I did have a parent who came in to watch one of the assemblies last year and she was a bit concerned that some of the girls were doing a dance, because quite a lot of them have dances in assemblies, and she was quite concerned that the girls were doing a dance and there were men in the Hall, form tutors and so on, for instance, and she thought it was not appropriate and I said that it was a way of sharing with other people about their faith and background and people in all parts of the school community and so it was the family of the school, so it was very much an internal thing, and, of course, it is something optional that the students can opt into and I was pleased that she was able to come and see her daughter take part in it and, of course, it was wonderful and that was the end... she was satisfied’

The fact that the Head allowed the dancing to take place at all considering the potential for conflict is commendable. Nevertheless it is alarming that religion is beginning to impact on the freedom of self-expression of those who have the least power to assert their own versions of culture and religion. In a school environment, where inquiry and critical ability is key to a successful education, such a development is truly worrying. A head teacher with a less clear commitment to maintaining a secular school could equally have responded in a way which did not create space for such self-definition of identity on the part of students.

However, one of the Muslim teachers from the same school felt differently about the dancing. In her view, it was necessary to be clear about what constituted religion and what constituted culture. Dancing was not in her eyes a legitimate component of Eid celebrations, notwithstanding that many Muslims in a number of cultures have celebrated Eid through song and dance as much as through prayer. Moreover she was concerned not just about the sensibilities of the parents and the feelings of students but rather about the views of other members of staff.

'Yes it had to be cultural because some Muslims might get offended if you have a dance of some sort celebrating Eid. And sometimes I think it is not even from the pupils themselves because pupils want to have a dance because they want to celebrate what they do at home and once the girls get together, they want to have their dancing, they want to have their party that they do with their families. But other teachers or parents that hear a dance has taken place, even though their children are the ones that said we want a dance, we want to show the school what we do, you've got to be prepared to say no that shouldn't happen because this is not part of your religion...You have to be clear and say well actually girls there is a separation. We don't want to offend some Muslims so we will have to separate this so that you have religion to begin and at the end you say but this is culture, this is something different'

Quite apart from the fact that it is difficult to ascertain whose sensibilities carried most weight: those of the teaching staff; those of the students who wished to openly demonstrate what they know as an expression of their identity, religious, cultural or both; and/or those of other Muslim parents who were not raising concerns, in reality there is immense difficulty in separating religion from cultural practice when both have evolved together and are inextricably linked together and open to countless interpretations.

Perhaps unwittingly, this particular teacher was more preoccupied not with how the school can provide a forum for self-expression in line with wider philosophical and concrete aims of education, but with how religion or one interpretation of religion can be protected. Clearly this is an example of how, without clear guidance, teachers can themselves get caught up in a process of constructing certain religions and cultures in a specific way.

The Head of School X noted the fallacy behind attempts to argue that something is either religious or cultural. He argued that religion is invariably interpreted through culture and also impacts upon the definition of culture. He had a clearer idea of the consequences of attempts to justify religious practice by denying its cultural context and vice versa.

'I think of course there is going to be a tension, there's going to be a tension because in some instances cultural practices have developed as a result of religious belief and so in that sense then they may well be integral. As in all societies, people, either as groups or individuals make choices in terms of interpretation and so, for example, the whole issue of the Hijab and the Niqab, you know. I know I have a view and I personally, also believe that it is a culturally determined thing as opposed to a religious determination. It's a cultural interpretation of, you know...different groups and individuals will want to make their own interpretations and I also am aware that there are both, kind of, communal pressures and societal pressures on people to conform to a particular way of the interpretation'

The presentation of religion and culture as separate phenomena is that the relationship between the two as a living, dynamic, interpretative and evolving process is denied.

Perhaps the most important consequence of the accommodation of religion within the state schools is the lack of confidence on the part of students and staff to challenge aspects of cultures and beliefs that undermine independent thought. For instance one Muslim teacher in the first workshop stated that he only felt able to challenge students who did not wish to study a particular subject if he had knowledge of their religion.

'Students say evolution...we can't do that. If you know enough about it I suppose, if they say I can't do it because I'm Muslim I can say to him that's not true...a Jehovah's witness student's objections to evolution, I had no idea about that. I wouldn't know'

Some teachers also expressed concern about how there appears to be a growing trend of students who object to studying certain subjects or topics on religious grounds.

School Z stated that in media studies and in sociology pupils questioned the morality of homosexuality and lesbianism. In School Y, teachers told us that pupils in geography and science lessons did not accept the scientific basis for the theory of plate tectonics and did not believe in the theories of evolution.

Teachers from the various schools in the study responded to pupil's reluctance to be taught about evolution or homosexuality in a largely pragmatic way. One Head said that she told her pupils that they no choice but to study all the subjects as they formed part of the curriculum. She also added that they needed to be informed citizens even if they did not believe in the ideas. Another Head noted an urgent need to instil a critical culture of inquiry in schools.

This is very relevant to the proper understanding of multiculturalism in an educational context. Questions of what we do/don't know about minority societies and cultures should not be off limits. The need to move from a position of mere 'respect' for all religions to a more critical acceptance of them is crucial, if we are to preserve the best of multiculturalism without lapsing into an acceptance of the notion that all beliefs and values are valid even if they create inequality.

This was highlighted by many of the teachers themselves who in the second workshop expressed a desire not only for more networking amongst themselves to share ideas and good practice but also to have access to better resources and training to enable them to address the knotty question of religious and cultural identity and to manage multiculturalism better.

The study also showed that the lack of confidence on the part of teachers has led to the widespread use of ethnic minority staff at a formal ('experts') and informal level, to represent a particular religious identity. Often members of minority staff are placed in charge of cultural or religious aspects of the school curriculum or school activity. Little or no account appears to be taken of the fact that such 'experts' often bring to the school their own values and beliefs. The corollary of this is that many other non-minority teachers feel unable to comment on any aspect of religion for fear of 'causing offence' or of being perceived to be 'ignorant'. The result is that when clashes between different principles occur, instead of referring to the principles

underpinning the educational legislative and policy framework, teachers find it easier to seek guidance from the so called ‘experts’.

Teachers within this study positioned themselves on this issue on either side of the ethnic divide. Whilst some, as described in the example about the Eid assembly at School Z, positioned themselves as ‘experts’ others felt ill equipped to comment at critical junctures. The Head from School Y noted that during the discussion of polygamy by the girls at her school, she felt unable to comment upon the practice.

‘But in a way they did what I’m doing now, which is perhaps distancing themselves from real knowledge of that. And I mean I’ve had to distance myself from the knowledge about it because I haven’t the experience and neither have they. They obviously have more knowledge than I’ve got but, in a sense, they would distance themselves because there’s a lack of direct knowledge as to why that was acceptable there’

Prayer Rooms

Prayer rooms initially emerged as a demand articulated by politicised Muslim students within universities and colleges of further education in the wake of ‘The Rushdie Affair’ in the 1990s. At that time, groups like Southall Black Sisters noted the ascendancy of religious identity and the corresponding rise of exclusive religious societies in further and higher education. Hindu, Sikh and Muslim societies replaced previous Asian societies within colleges and universities. These developments were directly linked to communal clashes and tensions between the different groups, usually over the control of women⁵⁶. SBS’ experiences showed that often the groups existed to police women’s behaviour and in particular their sexuality. Prayer rooms were part and parcel of the process of the assertion of militant religious identities.

The data in this study did not produce any clear information about how and when prayer rooms came to be established within secondary schools within the Metroborough. However, it appears that prayer rooms were either created as a response to requests by pupils or were pragmatic decisions to address absenteeism.

⁵⁶ See Sukhwant Dhaliwal ‘Orange is not the only colour: young women, religious identity and the Southall community’ in Gupta, (ed) ‘From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers’ Zed Books 2003

Some respondents talked of Muslim students who without permission were attending prayer sessions at a local mosque at lunch times during Ramadan, resulting in lateness or absence. One school stated that it took a decision to create a temporary space on the school premises during Ramadan to tackle health and safety concerns arising from such a situation.

Two of the three schools participating in the study viewed prayer rooms as an essential expression of their multicultural commitment. They felt obliged to meet the request for prayer rooms which came from both Muslim female and male students. School Z had established a permanent prayer room whilst School Y created a temporary space during the Muslim month of Ramadan, stating that it did not have the physical space to allocate to a permanent prayer room.

However, there were different perspectives amongst the school staff about the positive and negative consequences of creating prayer rooms. The local teaching union representative, for instance felt that religious indoctrination was more likely in colleges and universities than in a secondary school where the pupils did not have the same freedom to mobilise:

'I think the staff saw it as a...way of respecting religious observance. And whilst there probably were elements at work in terms of trying to advance what you might call fundamentalist thinking, I don't recall there being serious issues in my time at the school, and I don't know of issues being reported to me from other schools...the incursion of fundamentalist propaganda may have been more successful in a college than the school centre'

However, the Head of School Z was acutely aware of the possibility of prayer rooms becoming divisive. She stated that the school worked hard to ensure that it did not become the exclusive preserve of any one group following an incident involving an attempt by a group of Muslim girls to sequester the room for their own religious meetings. The Head took action by implementing a policy of inclusion in order to prevent segregation within the school community and to stop an atmosphere of intimidation and fear from being created. She referred to the issue as the problem of the 'Ramadan Circle':

'Well, in Ramadan they want to discuss amongst themselves but I'm... we'll be meeting with them today and letting them know that it won't take place because that would be a meeting just for Muslim girls and we don't have meetings that can exclude people. Everything that goes on in this school is inclusive and if they want to contribute to citizenship and so on, if they want to... if they want to contribute to debates around a wide range of different things, then we've got the debate club that they can go to and they're very welcome to come to that. If they want to talk about citizenship aspects, which is what they suggested to me, then they have opportunities... they can be prefects to encourage citizenship within the schools, there's a wide range of different things they can do. They can take part in the Envision Programme and something like that, but I'm very clear on the fact that there will not be group discussions that would just be for a particular faith'

In addition the Head stated that she was alert to tensions that had developed between girls from Sunni and Shia backgrounds and used the inclusion policy to prevent a division between 'good' and 'bad' Muslim girls:

'We had a situation where a group of girls wanted to celebrate Ramadan last year by having a prayer meeting, and it got slightly out of hand – these were sixth formers... And apparently there was a feeling that unless you did this, this and this, you weren't a good Muslim and girls were going home and complaining to their parents and saying I've been told I'm not a good Muslim... There were obviously lots of girls who are Muslim who, you know, a wide range of what they wear and how they see things but this one particular group, I think they were putting some kind of pressure on some of the other girls'

The Head's response was both democratic and innovative. Her focus was on ensuring that there was a democratic process by which even contentious issues could be discussed by the entire school community. She turned a potentially difficult situation on its head by encouraging critical debate on citizenship in a variety of ways.

For School Y a permanent prayer room space was not possible due to lack of space. However, there were no problems in ensuring that prayer space was available during

the Ramadan month. However, when teachers from School Y at the first workshop were asked why a permanent space was not available, one teacher questioned whether in a school strapped for resources, a prayer room ought to take priority over other educational needs. Alternatively a teacher from School X noted that prayer rooms were not in demand at their school and that she was not sure how the idea of a prayer room within their School X would be received by atheist parents.

For the Head of School X however, the issue of prayer rooms extended beyond the question of lack of space into a question of how this might institutionalise overt religious practices within the school setting and thereby undermine a strong commitment to secularism. In his view, pupils already had ample scope to practice their religion outside of school hours:

'My personal view is that, no, as far as possible we should, you know, we are, we should be secular in the school context as far as is possible. I mean the law makes it quite difficult, particularly through the provision of religious education. You know it's a compulsory subject and so in that sense you have to meet statutory requirements but no, my personal view and I will be happy to share that with the different groups, would be that, you know, that school should be seen as a secular place. Within every religion there is scope to be able to practice the faith, after the hours that are defined for schooling'

Despite having to act on the divisive consequences of having prayer rooms, the Head of School Z stated that she was not about to dismantle the school's prayer room. Perhaps this was because she felt that her inclusion policy mitigated against segregation. The reality, however, as has been pointed out by the Head of School X, is that the need for prayer rooms within the secondary school environment is no longer questioned. Indeed prayer rooms are institutionalised within many secondary schools in the same way that they are in other public institutions.

Dress Codes

Another immensely difficult area of discussion amongst the participating schools was the issue of dress codes for girls. The form of dress that Muslim girls in particular

wear has been pushed to the foreground by the rise of religion as the main badge of identity.

Female dress has always been a difficult issue because in all religions, it can and often does signify the socially subordinate position of women. In many religions, the often underlying injunction for women is to be 'modest' in dress and behaviour. This is usually taken to mean covering their hair and body. The demand for modesty is borne out of the need to avoid attracting and therefore corrupting the male gaze. However in different contexts, historically, women's dress is also dictated by cultural traditions and varies in accordance with the precise class and social positions of families. Religious fundamentalist movements however, use religion to re-invent or even invent cultural practices around dress codes to further their agenda to subjugate women.

Dress codes for women, is further complicated by the fact that it can also signify political resistance as is the case, for example, in Palestine where wearing the hijab⁵⁷ became a sign of loyalty to the struggle for freedom and liberation. Yet at the same time, it has also become a tool by which to control women's behaviour.⁵⁸

Few if any of the participants in this study had an awareness of such complexities surrounding dress codes, although some in the first discussion group did acknowledge that headscarves had become a '*fashion accessory*' and that there was '*tremendous variety in how the girls use it*'. Many respondents however, saw the demand for girls to dress in a particular way as an expression of community survival against racism and anti-Muslim racism in particular, resulting in very little interrogation of what the consequences might mean for girls in particular. Thus one participant stated:

'This problem of what to wear has come in the last few years, with a lot of problems some years back. I mean when your survival is threatened in some way, you try to

⁵⁷ A head scarf which culturally women wore in a variety of ways but which was institutionalised by Hamas during the intifada in the early 90s.

⁵⁸ In Palestine for instance the hijab became 'nationalised' and not wearing one was perceived as betrayal to the liberation cause. See for example Nahda Younis Shehada *The Rise of Fundamentalism and the Role of the 'State' in the Specific Political Context of Palestine in the Warning Signs of Fundamentalisms* edited by Ayesha Imam, Jenny Morgan and Nira Yuval-Davis. WLUML publications December 2004

address that in different ways. I think they are trying to address the problem indirectly rather than directly...just the feeling of survival being threatened'

All schools have shown flexibility in meeting the demands for Muslim girls to wear a particular form of dress including for PE. School Z, a single sex school that perceives itself to be a 'safe community', accommodated the requirement for Muslim girls to cover the body at all times, by also covering the windows of the gym!

'If they're outside or in the rain for PE, then they can wear leggings or track suit bottoms or something like that...If they're in the Hall doing gymnastics, or if they're in the gym doing gymnastics or something like that, then they wear shorts, but the windows are covered'

All the participating schools accommodated the wearing of the hijab as part of their dress code or school uniform. This was accepted as the norm and consequently no discussion of it took place. However, participants did raise questions about the jilbaab⁵⁹ and the nikab⁶⁰. Very different perspectives emerged.

One Head argued that she preferred to accommodate the demand by a student to wear the jilbaab to avoid turning it into a political 'issue'. However, another teacher from the same school, who herself wore the Jilbaab, disapproved of the decision, arguing instead for a strict enforcement of school uniform policy. Her colleagues also questioned the inconsistent approach of the school in allowing the wearing of the jilbaab but not other items of banned clothing.

Requests to wear the nikab on the other hand were seen as far more straightforward. They were banned for health and safety reasons for example the need to confirm the identity of all pupils on school premises at all times.

The Head of School Z recounted an incident involving a female student who had previously no problems in conforming to the school uniform policy, requesting permission to wear the jilbaab. She explained that she needed to maintain her

⁵⁹ An ankle length garment for women.

⁶⁰ A face veil covering the entire face but the eyes.

‘modesty’ and could not look at her previous male tutor or any other male in the school without wearing the veil. The Head asked her searching questions about the meaning of ‘modesty’ and whether that meant that she no longer respected her or other pupils and staff who did not cover their hair. The student could not answer the questions, leading the Head to suspect that she had been coached by people outside the school, although not her liberal parents who were also puzzled by her decision to wear the veil.

The student’s demand to wear the face veil also extended to a demand to have her forthcoming exams invigilated by a female invigilator. The Head resolved the issue in her characteristically pragmatic way:

‘I told her that she could wear her scarf to school, but as soon as she got here, she had to take it off and so on, and she said, could she have her exams be invigilated by women, and I said that her exams maybe invigilated by women, but that was something I wasn’t going to guarantee. It may well be that it would be a male teacher who would be in the classroom doing that and I couldn’t rearrange things for that, and that was part of the school uniform policy and that it was for health and safety reasons because we need to recognise who you are... And she said, well, I could show somebody who I was, and I said, in that case you might as well have your scarf off, you know’

Other than the above incident where the Head questioned the discourse around ‘modesty’, there was very little discussion amongst the participants of dress code demands being made by Muslim students.

Yet when demands for girls to cover up are scrutinised closely, they appear to stem not so much from the need to survive racism but from the desire to preserve cultural and religious identity through the bodies of women. Yet few consider what this means for gender equality.

The range of issues thrown up around demands to wear jilbaab and nikab were also raised in a dramatic fashion in the Shabina Begum⁶¹ case. Paradoxically, this 2002 case concerned a challenge to the politics of fundamentalism and multiculturalism in a secular, mixed, state high school. It concerned a young 14 year old Muslim girl, Shabina Begum, who wanted to wear the jilbab rather than a salwar kameez⁶² and head scarf, which conformed to the school's uniform policy.

In 2006, the House of Lords, the highest court in the UK, delivered a judgment stating that Shabina's rights to manifest her religion or belief and her right not to be denied an education, had not been violated or if they had, then the infringement was necessary and proportionate for the protection and well being of the wider school community.

The judgment arrived at the correct decision by balancing Shabina's needs against the needs of other Muslim girls who were fearful of being labelled 'bad Muslims' for not wearing the jilbaab. They needed protection from outside political influences which sought to impose a particular religious identity on young women. Nevertheless the judgement remains problematic in its reinforcement of the multicultural approach. By endorsing wholeheartedly the school's attempts to reflect 'mainstream' Muslim opinion which confirmed that the uniform conformed to the Islamic dress code, it was implicitly stating that Islamic clerics and Muslim 'community leaders' were the proper representatives of Muslims in the area. It did not recognise how the practice of multiculturalism can be incompatible with a secular school ethos, especially when multiculturalism is increasingly taken to mean reflecting multi-faith diversity.

It is then both unfortunate but also highly revealing that guidelines issued by the National Union of Teachers entitled 'The Muslim Faith and School Uniform'⁶³ despite warning school governors to be aware of obligations under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Race Relations Act

⁶¹ R (on the application of Begum (by her litigation friend, Rahman)) v Head teacher and Governors of Denbigh High School. [2006] UKHL 15

⁶² Long tunic and trousers worn by women in the Indian Sub-Continent

⁶³ The Muslim Faith and School Uniform. NUT Guidelines March 2006. It should however be noted that the guidance came out before the judgement in the Shabina Begum case.

1976, focuses only on the need to be *'sensitive to the needs of different cultural racial and religious groups'*. The guidance draws specific attention to the emphasis on the need for Muslims to show 'modesty' as part of their religious requirement.

'It should be recognised that for Muslims in particular, the concepts of modesty and dignity in dress carry the status of religious obligation'

The guidance ends with the following recommendation to all teachers:

'The success of any school policy on dress codes or uniform will depend on the extent to which it is implemented on a well-informed and culturally sensitive basis. Teachers may therefore benefit from initiatives in schools aimed at promoting greater understanding of aspects of the Muslim faith within the broader framework of equal opportunities and anti-discrimination training'

Even though the guidance warns against privileging one interpretation of the requirement for modesty of dress over another, and asks that teachers bear in mind whether or not a *'pupil's choice of dress hinders the process of teaching and learning'*, there is no guidance on how teachers should balance the right to manifest one's religion with the rights of the child and the rights of parents. Conflicting rights, and in particular the clash between gender equality rights and cultural rights is not addressed. Indeed the entire tone of the guidance suggests that cultural sensitivity should trump other equality rights. Through casework examples, the guide recommends that decisions be taken in consultation with the 'community' which is taken to mean 'community representatives' and/or 'religious leaders'. There is no warning of the fact that such leaders are not democratically elected and may have a vested interest in the issues.

Disturbingly, equal opportunities are not taken to mean gender equality since the entire guidance is framed within the need to be mindful of the Muslim faith. This is also borne out by the list of recommended organisations for further advice, many of which are not known for their work on gender equality within Asian communities.

Our findings suggest that although the debate around dress codes are complex, there is an urgent need to recognise that certain religious dress requirements may have the effect of dividing a school community, creating a ‘them’ and ‘us’ situation especially for girls, which in turn creates a climate of fear and intimidation.

Gender Equality and Multiculturalism

As has been noted elsewhere in this report, the most contentious areas discussed by participants involved the conflict between the accommodation of multicultural, and mostly religious demands with the need to secure gender equality for girls from ethnic minority communities. One of the key findings of this project is the way in which indirectly, and often unintentionally, the practice of multiculturalism in the participating schools undermined the rights of girl children and directly contradicted the Every Child Matters guidance. We were also concerned that the patterns we can identify with regards to gender equality also extend to the question of gay and lesbian rights.

Perhaps the greatest danger arising from the ‘over-accommodation’ of religion in state schools is its negative impact on the rights of girls from minority communities. All religions and cultures are built on patriarchal notions of womanhood and this can and does circumscribe the participation of women in civil society. Whilst many parents from Asian minority communities wish to educate their daughters to the highest levels, the same parents may also wish to control them and their sexuality in particular. Education has become an important lever in terms of gaining a marriage partner but too much knowledge is not regarded as a good thing since it encourages independence of mind. This is considered undesirable and incompatible with marriage. This is why single sex schools are extremely popular for many Asian parents since it provides one less opportunity for their daughters to mix with boys. Religious single sex schools are considered even better since these schools are not simply seen as places of learning, but as places where access to knowledge can be contained. This development is not unique to Muslim parents. Increasingly, Sikh and Hindu parents are also demanding state funding for faith schools.

Although gender equality has been discussed throughout this report as a central area of concern with regards all findings, this section will look specifically at two areas: parental withdrawal of children from areas of education and educational activities and the incidence and response to violence and abuse against ethnic minority girls. Both these issues are raised within the context of an ongoing tension in schools to uphold, on the one hand, rights afforded to parents to define their children's participation in education and on the other, to enforce a child focused agenda based on a combination of child welfare policies, child protection legislation and human rights principles. As one teacher commented in respect of teaching religious education:

'obviously what we want to do as teachers is introduce students to the world religions and different cultures and open their eyes: to foster tolerance and understanding. But we have this tension because some parents do not necessarily want their child in their eyes to be exposed to it. So you might have this tension that you are trying to balance between'

Children's rights are clearly enshrined within the **Declaration of the Rights of the Child 1959 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989**. Whilst these international standards do not directly inform the delivery of education, they are a reminder of what the education system in this country should be striving for. The principles enshrined in such international standards serve as a necessary guide when faced with demands that implicitly or explicitly signal that respect for cultural or religious autonomy should trump other rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child for instance, directs all states to be mindful of the cultural background of the child but also to the need for:

- 'the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential';
- 'the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;'

- ‘the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations’.

Moreover, the **Every Child Matters** agenda signalled a change in the government’s approach to children. It set out a new vision for children’s services which was incorporated into **The Children Act 2004**. The need for change followed Lord Laming’s report into the death of Victoria Climbié, the young girl who was horrifically abused and tortured, and eventually killed by her great aunt and the man who she lived with. The Laming report highlighted a need for improved integration and accountability across the children’s services. The Act was a response to the findings in the report. It defined a new long-term approach to children, in particular the well being of children and young people from birth to the age of 19. The approach places better outcomes for children firmly at the centre of all policies and approaches involving children’s services, including schools. These five outcomes are:

- Be healthy;
- Be safe;
- Enjoy and achieve through learning;
- Make a positive contribution to society;
- Achieve economic well-being.

Under the Every Child Matters framework, schools are expected to focus collect and use data in order to identify barriers to pupil’s learning that can be tackled by supporting their wider well-being. Moreover, school inspections now include an assessment of the contribution that schools make to pupil well being.

However, a number of parental rights are also legally defined within the 1993 and 1996 Education Acts. **The 1993 Education Act** made sex education, (including education about HIV AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)) statutory in maintained secondary schools and special schools, but failed to include it in the National Curriculum. However, it also established the right of parents to withdraw their children from sex education and amended the Science Orders of the National Curriculum to remove any references to HIV, AIDS, STIs and human behaviour other than the biological aspects. Essentially, this meant that parents could withdraw their

children completely from learning about the non-biological side of sexual health and relationships, even if they were over the age of consent. This amendment to allow parents to withdraw children from aspects of sex education was introduced following a campaign by Christian fundamentalists. As a result, school governors decide on the nature of sex education and parents have the right to withdraw their children from sexual relationships aspect of sex education which is taught within the Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) sections of the curriculum rather than within the science unit.

Moreover, **the Education Act 1996** re-affirmed the law on sex education and the right of parents to withdraw. The governing bodies of schools were required (bearing in mind their LEA's policy statement) to consider whether sex education should be part of the school's secular curriculum. They were also required to keep an up-to-date statement of their sex education policy. It was stated that this should include information on the content of sex education and where in the curriculum it took place. The Act also stated that sex education should be provided in such a way that it encourages pupils '*to have due regard to moral considerations and family life.*'⁶⁴

The right of parents to withdraw is encouraged by many minority community and religious leaders who argue for more campaigns to raise awareness of the right to withdraw amongst ethnic minority parents. For instance, one group made up of Muslim 'Educationalists' states the following:

*'parents not only need to have rights, but also need to know what those rights are. Many parents will be unaware, for example, that they have the right to withdraw their children from sex education where it is not part of the NC and from RE lessons. We applaud the steps that have already been taken at both the national and local levels to inform and educate parents in essential matters of choice.'*⁶⁵

In our view, the underlying message in this statement is that parents should withdraw their children from sex education and RE according to their religious principles and that it is parents rather than children that need to be empowered so that they can make

⁶⁴ [Section 403 (1)] Education Act 1996

⁶⁵ Muslims on Education: A Position Paper by The Association of Muslim Social Scientist and Forum Against Islamophobia, and FED 2000 (For Education and Development) The Muslim College.

informed choices. There is no recognition here that parental choice may conflict with the rights of the child to full education in its widest sense.

Participants in our study struggled to negotiate the rights of children, especially female children from ethnic minority backgrounds. In some instances, including those already discussed within the previous sections of this report, the need to respect and tolerate difference overrode other concerns. Moreover, they talked very little about legislative and policy requirements in relation to enforcing a fairly broad set of children's rights set out within the 'Every Child Matters' agenda. As a result we were concerned that Every Child Matters was only being partially applied when it came to ethnic minority girls in the 'Metroborough'.

In addition, the teaching union representative noted that despite an overall commitment to children's well being in its broadest sense, many teachers in the borough were too stressed about class preparation and marking to keep wider issues around well being at the forefront of their minds. As a result, he stated that an adequate inquiry into other issues affecting children's performance and behaviour is perhaps unintentionally likely to fall by the wayside.

We wish to bring the Every Child Matters agenda and the wider issues affecting the performance and well being of ethnic minority young women and girls back to the foreground with the hope that the following discussion will encourage teachers to push it back up their list of concerns.

Withdrawal from sex and relationship education

The aim of Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) is to provide pupils with learning opportunities through which they can be taught the knowledge, skills and understanding to take responsibility for themselves, show respect for others and to develop self awareness and confidence needed for life. PSHE covers a wide range of learning opportunities that reflect the needs of young people in their personal and social development including sex and relationship education; drug, alcohol and tobacco education, improving confidence to lead a healthy and safe lifestyle, managing personal money and careers education.

Schools have some latitude to decide on the resources and teaching strategies they utilise for the delivery of PSHE appropriate for the age range and cultural identity of their pupils. There are specific statutory requirements for sex and relationship education (SRE) which also includes the teaching of HIV/aids and other sexually transmitted diseases developed in consultation with teachers, parents, governors and the wider school community. The requirement to consult the community that the school serves brings with it dangers, especially if the dominant community that the school serves is conservative.

In this particular study, almost all of the participants raised concerns about parents exercising their right to withdraw children from the teaching of sex and relationship education (SRE) units. Significantly, the majority of the interviewees talked about the removal of girls and not boys from the SRE and PSHE discussions on sexuality and relationships. One of the participating schools noted that the majority of withdrawals at their school were from Muslim parents.

The majority of participants expressed sadness about parents taking such action and frustration with legislation and guidance about parental rights. They discussed strategies that they had employed to tackle withdrawal from PSHE and SRE based on a commitment to the inclusion of all children in such classes. They stated that participation in discussions and gaining vital information was vital for the emotional development of the children. However, most also stated that they felt compromised by parents who wished to withdraw their children which often resulted in having to explain to those children that they were not allowed to participate in the relevant classes.

'Well the kids are quite open with me, as a good teacher they openly talk to me about it. So you know I have a chat with them about why it is important to learn these things ... they might ask questions about what it's about. And (they might state) my mum says I'm not allowed to watch it. I will say to them this is what we're doing, this is what it's about and this is why your mum doesn't want you watching it'

Moreover, the teachers in the workshops noted the contradiction in government policy that places pressure upon schools to tackle teenage pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted infections but also gives parents the right to withdraw their children from these discussions. Thus one participant stated:

'I understand why parents (withdraw) but at the same time there are national expectations with regards teenage pregnancies, drugs...there is outside pressure on us to be the fixers of society's problems or to see to society's problems'

The Head of School Z emphasised the importance of sex education for all girls and hinted at her feeling of helplessness in the face of withdrawals:

'Some parents don't want their children to have sex education taught ...there may be areas like presentations on HIV and AIDS and so on, and you inevitably talk about family planning, which in some communities is not thought to be appropriate, abortion and so on. Now we teach those because we think it's important that girls understand those areas and there will be discussion around that. I think personally that those discussions will be very valuable whether it's to do with Down Syndrome children or as a result of a rape...all those kinds of things, and in fact it's extraordinary how moral the girls are. Nevertheless there are some parents who choose to withdraw...they would mostly be Muslim and over the last couple of years there have been a few'

Many teachers echoed the above concerns. One teacher noted the following:

'Contents of Sex Education in most secondary schools will include matters of sexuality, learning to be assertive in saying 'no' and managing relationships. However it is often precisely this aspect of sex education that parents wish to withdraw from...They don't want their daughters learning this and it is often the mothers that tend to say no. So they pick and choose...'

All participants noted that when children are withdrawn from areas of education they either end up sitting in a corner of the room where they may well be catching some of the discussions such as watching parts of a film or they learn about the content of the

class through the other children. This led some of the participants in this study to attempt to convince parents that it was better that their children learnt first hand rather than be misinformed through other sources including friends and television.

Several strategies were employed by teachers and Heads to tackle withdrawal. The Head of School Z for instance, invited those parents who did not wish their children to attend SRE to a meeting to discuss their concerns. However, in her experience, those parents who withdraw their children are fixed in their view and very rarely agree to a meeting or get involved in any discussion about the reasons for this. A teacher at the same school, in charge of PSHE had managed to engage parents that wished to withdraw their children and made several pertinent points about her experience. Firstly, she attempted to encourage them to understand that their children are likely to be misinformed since they would rely on other children at the school or be influenced by a range of media television programmes, magazines and newspapers. Secondly, she attempted to convince parents that the information received by children was unthreatening and useful. However, thirdly, when asked whether this engagement had placed her under pressure to change the content of the classes in order to reduce withdrawals, she admitted that she had considered this but decided against it because of the needs of the class as a whole.

Some teachers noted that often parental withdrawal was based on fear and ignorance. Strategies such as holding meetings with all parents did in some instances dispel concerns. As one teacher at School Y explained:

'For many parents it was often just a question of 'fear' and once the contents are explained and shown to be age appropriate, they are fine'

Ironically, the following quote from another teacher in the same workshop who was attempting to balance a desire to ensure girls are not withdrawn from classes with a concern to respect parental rights concluded that parental fears deserved more respect.

'But I think a lot of it comes back to fear... ... you've got to respect that. It is fear. It is that we don't want our daughter to know this because she may take part in this... but still we've got to give them that choice'

More specifically several participants noted that such fears were more to do with young women being given the opportunity to debate issues and formulate their own views rather than the fact that they were given knowledge per se:

'I think it's been more PHSE where they're allowed to discuss the subject more freely'

However, it was very clear that, in all but the sex education lessons, the most useful strategy employed by teachers in the face of parental withdrawal or reluctance was to be able to state that the unit or activity was compulsory. This was best highlighted by points made by two teachers about how they had responded to questions from students from Muslim and Christian (Jehovah's Witness) backgrounds about the content of science classes. Teachers were able to confidently state that whether students agreed with the content of the subject or not, they had to sit in the class and engage with the material at hand. However, parental rights regarding sex and relationships education prevent such positions being taken with regards to SRE and PSHE.

Interestingly, in the face of parental objections, girls themselves also developed inventive ways of getting around their restrictions:

'I suspect what would probably happen is that some parents may well send in letters that don't actually arrive and I've no grounds for saying that. I have no idea if that is the case but I suspect that some girls manage to do their self-censorship or self liberation or whatever and the letters don't arrive and so they're not withdrawn'

This also suggests that but for the inventiveness of the girls themselves, withdrawal levels could be even greater than they are currently.

However, such tactics, even where they are successful, cannot address the systematic exclusion of ethnic minority girls from their right to a full education. The problems encountered by girls who have no tradition of education in relation to their bodies was raised by the Head of School Z who pointed out that at the well woman clinic within their school (itself an unusual but positive development in respect of the quality of

pastoral care on offer to girls), some ethnic minority girls were unused to examining their breasts let alone other more intimate parts of their bodies as part of a process aimed at preventing cancer and other illnesses. In our view, this highlights the need for all girls, particularly those that are likely to be sheltered from such debates and practices at home, to attend wide ranging discussions about relationships, sexuality and sex.

Teachers also talked about parental reluctance to allow girls to have access to information including the use of tampons since they perceived this to interfere with the 'virginity' of the girls considered crucial for marriage purposes. Indeed it was stated that some parents felt uncomfortable about their girls being taught any aspect of sex education since this is considered taboo in their culture.

However, two teachers who were parents themselves expressed sympathy for such parents and therefore found themselves torn between recognising the rights of the child and those of parents. One teacher, for instance, talked about her dilemma with regards to the right of a young woman at her school who had had an abortion. She noted that the school had supported the young woman without her parent's knowledge and admitted that the school had (in our view rightly) prioritised concern about the repercussions for the young woman if her parents were to find out. The teacher confessed that being a parent herself, she would find it difficult not to sympathise with parents who were not kept fully informed about their child's activities in school. Her position caused her some unease. As a professional, she felt very torn between her desire to inform the parents and her duty to maintain confidentiality:

'I don't think...I don't know. I don't know. Part of me thinks if I were the parents and my daughter had an abortion and she's at school and the teachers knew, I would want to know. But another part of me says I understand the school's policy, but I don't know what the right answer is...'

Whilst such dilemmas are unsurprising, we were concerned about the possible consequences for young women and girls where teachers might choose to prioritise empathy for parents over and above the welfare and protection of many young women and girls who are likely to face severe repercussions if their parents were to find out

that they had engaged in sexual activity. This response would not be unusual in a climate which urges greater respect for religious or cultural values.

Moreover, such a position would betray a lack of awareness of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda which emphasises the need to provide a safe environment for children and to enhance their well being, particularly in relation to vulnerable children who may have no other way of accessing information and support.

It is highly significant that at the second training workshop, the majority of teachers welcomed the recommendation suggested by us to diminish or remove the right of parents to withdraw children from SRE or PSHE. However, one teacher was not convinced and expressed empathy for parents. He stated that in some cultures discussion about sex and sexual relationships within the family or home environment was negligible because such discussions with or in front of children were considered taboo. Implicit in this position was the view that such taboos should be respected. Other participants responded by stating that the lack of discussion about sex and relationships was not limited to any particular culture. Indeed many of the teachers who represented a range of ethnic backgrounds, stated that they came from cultures where discussion of such issues were also taboo or difficult but this did not justify the right of withdrawal. Rather it provided a more compelling argument as to why sex education ought to be compulsory. For many of the participants at the workshop it was clear that SRE and PSHE were essential aspects of sex education given that the likelihood of children gaining this information at home or accurately through mass media was nominal.

In our view, the withdrawal of girls from sex education is alarming since it prevents them from developing their own critical thinking with regards to values, individual conscience and moral considerations. As one teacher put it '*are they getting enough information to make their own minds up?*' Withdrawal means that pupils are also prevented from learning about how to manage emotions, conflict and relationships confidently and from learning how to recognise and avoid exploitation and abuse. Attending such classes is a crucial step in empowering young women and girls to live

free from violent and abusive relationships and is therefore an essential part of any preventative strategy on violence and abuse.⁶⁶

We suggest that there needs to be clear guidance on how schools are to implement the 'Every Child Matters' framework and achieve the five outcomes for all children regardless of their background. The contradiction between giving parental choice on the one hand, and seeking to educate teenagers on the dangers of teenage pregnancies and abuse generally must be resolved. Nor can it be acceptable to simply disapply the Every Child Matters agenda when it comes to children from minority communities.

Withdrawal of girls from other school activities

All schools reported that girls from certain religious backgrounds were prevented from attending residential trips or other after school activities especially those that were mixed gender activities. Some attempts were made to find innovative ways of getting around the problem but they remained strictly within an overall acceptance of parental wishes. This then raises serious questions about whether the girls are fulfilling their full potential in schools in accordance with the Every Child Matters agenda which stresses the importance of after school or extended school activities in improving children's '*motivation and engagement*'.

The Head of School Y sought a creative way round the problem. She allowed activities to take place in the lunch times to take account of cultural restrictions on girls in particular. The Head of School Z pointed to the creativity and inventiveness of the girls themselves in getting around parental objections. She stated that pupils are often selective about the information they give to parents. Whilst such strategies are important, it nevertheless remains an unsatisfactory way of addressing the curtailment of the full range of educational opportunities to which all children should be entitled. In our view, this issue needs to be tackled head on if the current drive towards good citizenship and cohesion is to be meaningful.

⁶⁶ See Sex and Relationship Education Guidance Dof EE 2000.

Violence and abuse

As with the question of parental withdrawal from sex education and activities, the question of abuse within minority communities was mainly discussed by participants in this study in relation to girls. A number of key points can be made in this regard. Firstly, it was clear to us that the Heads of all three participating schools were very committed to tackling violence and abuse irrespective of its cultural manifestation and that for them this commitment overrode any concern about tolerance of cultural and religious views or practices. However, the teachers that participated in the two workshops were in need of more discussions and guidance to enable them to feel confident about making the same assertion.

The Head of School Y for instance had challenged other members of the school and health care professionals who were worried about addressing issues of violence and abuse within certain ethnic minority communities for fear of adverse consequences such as parents removing girls from the country. The Head of school Y was however very clear that cultural arguments cannot be used to excuse violence and abuse. She stated:

'Perhaps when I came I was perhaps a little naïve ... and the person I worked for then said oh, you can't do anything about that, you can't do anything about that, they'd get shipped off to Pakistan or wherever, you know... they'd be off. And I, you know, I think I tried very very hard to deal with that at all costs because you certainly can't condone that...'

A number of examples of good practice were cited by all three schools. Many related to interventions in cases of forced marriage and sexual abuse to safe guard the welfare of the girls involved and also to bring back to the UK, young women who had been abducted and taken or held abroad. Indeed it was encouraging to see that many of the teachers and Heads that participated in this study were clear about the role of schools in protecting children from various forms of violence and abuse. The Head of School Y summarised her perspective in the following way:

'be sensitive to the needs of the community...(but) I think we do have some things that are not acceptable. In fact you wouldn't say it was acceptable to drive across a red light and kill somebody. But if you turn over (some say) that is acceptable because people aren't used to that. Therefore, you know, you can't blame them for doing that. (BUT) There are certain things you've got to get used to, you know, the little red light shines, that's when you stop. But it might not be what you are used to, but that's what you do. I know it's simplistic. But I think very clear, you know...'

Also several participants reported good links with organisations working specifically with young Asian women and stated that they do refer young women and girls to these services if needed. The existence of pastoral care within the school also meant that teachers themselves did not feel the need to be in the front line of decision-making regarding issues such of abuse and violence.

The Head of school Z for instance, stated that often her duties of confidentiality conflicted with her duties to parents. She therefore preferred to direct a pupil to the nurse at the school's well woman clinic because the duty of confidentiality for health professionals is different to those of a head teacher. The Head of School Y on the other hand was far more defiant in her stance on domestic violence.

However, for teachers at the workshops, two issues persisted. Firstly, they felt unable to intervene for fear of being perceived to be 'insensitive' and for fear of being labelled racist. Of concern to us is that such a fear can lead to a total paralysis of action and where intervention is attempted, it is overly concerned with negotiating with the family without regard to the need to prioritise child protection.

Secondly, despite a range of guidelines on domestic violence (including those issued by the teaching union NUT) that also covers the role of schools and teachers in tackling culturally specific forms of abuse such as honour related crimes and forced marriage, none of the teachers at the focus group sessions mentioned these or raised issues arising from them in any detail.⁶⁷ Rather, several stated that they found it

⁶⁷ *Silence is not always golden. Tackling Domestic Violence* NUT 2005

difficult to '*steer the right line*' when it came to difficult issues to do with Asian and other ethnic minority girls.

Evidently, each school needs to have a clear set of guidelines and policies addressing specific issues regarding abuse and violence towards minority girls in particular based upon nationally established good practice. A study conducted some years ago by a police officer in Bradford highlighted the fact that many Asian girls simply disappeared from primary school rolls. The study tracked 1,000 boys and 1,000 girls with Muslim names as they moved through school; at primary, for 1,000 boys on roll, there were 989 girls; by secondary, the 1,000 boys were still around, but the number of girls had dwindled to 860. In such cases, by the time the teachers noticed that the girls had disappeared it was too late to do anything. The report asked the question: '*Where have all the girls gone*'? The answer is that many of them had been taken to Pakistan or Bangladesh. As a result of the study, there have been growing calls for schools to monitor their attendance records and to do more to address the issue and use its position as a key institution to prevent and protect violence and abuse as far as possible.

We continue to be concerned that throughout our study there was little or no reference to the Every Child Matters outcomes. From our perspective it is important to remember that the Every Child Matters agenda was formulated as a direct response to the case of Victoria Climbié, a black child whose death resulted from the misconceptions and inaction of social workers, police and schools. All of these agencies were unwilling to see past her cultural, racial and religious background in order to recognise the abuse which led to her death. Teachers and teaching assistants rather than pastoral workers are likely to be the first point of contact for any child within a school environment. It is therefore absolutely vital that all professionals within the field of education are clear about addressing violence and abuse and is trained to recognise its various manifestations and cultural specificities. If this aspect of education is not sufficiently addressed it is likely that there will be more tragedies waiting to happen.

Conclusion

This pilot project was borne out of a feminist concern about multicultural practice in secondary schools and whether demands for greater recognition of religious and cultural identity conflicts with equality and other educational principles. In particular, the project was concerned with the interaction of race and gender issues and how teachers and other educational professionals responded to such demand made in relation to both. The aim was to establish some principles and good practice guidelines to help teaching staff manage competing demands in a way that does not lead to segregation along religious lines or compromise the right of all children to equality of access to a full and adequate education.

This action research project set out to address the following questions within the context of the shifting political landscape in relation to multiculturalism discussed in the introduction to this report:

1. What is the experience of secondary school teachers in one London borough in promoting and managing multiculturalism?
2. How are multicultural policies and practices balanced against other equality issues such as gender equality?
3. To what extent do policies and practices on multiculturalism conflict with those relating to other equalities and how are these conflicts mediated?
4. What guidance are teachers drawing upon in order to respond to these competing demands and what are the principles that underline their practice?

The project has made a number of pertinent findings in relation to these questions but its limited nature inevitably leads to the urgent need for more substantial research on the issues conducted on a wider scale. The research findings have to be read against the backdrop of a cosmopolitan and ethnically mixed borough with a strong history of feminist, anti racist and secular activism within its minority communities. But we are

of the view that some of the findings are likely to be echoed in other boroughs. Our contention is that the concerns raised within this report are an indication of what could be taking place on a wider scale and on a more regular basis in other boroughs and regions within England, particularly those characterised by stronger racial segregation and strong religious leadership.

As stated in the Introduction, this research is not to be read as an attack on multiculturalism per se. Multiculturalism can and does have a role to play in challenging racism. All the participants in this study expressed a firm and robust commitment to the notion of multiculturalism, rejecting the idea of monocultural schools in areas where the population is ethnically mixed. All three schools provided good examples of how a multicultural approach is necessary for the pursuance of tolerance and respect for diverse backgrounds within schools. At its best, multiculturalism in the UK has been positive and this was reflected in the example of how in one participating school, some young Muslim girls were shocked by the hostility they encountered for wearing the hijab when they went to France on a school trip. The level of racism faced in France was markedly different to what they encountered even outside their school in the UK. In the school itself they had felt shielded from aggressive forms of racism. This led the Head of the relevant school to assert that her ethnically mixed school with its emphasis on inclusion is effectively a haven against racism. Notably the girls in question were wearing hijab or headscarves and this highlights the complex interplay between racial, cultural and religious identities and the experience of discrimination. Multiculturalism can potentially create spaces to recognise and enable the coexistence of complex and diverse identities.

However, our study also raises a number of problems about the practice of multiculturalism in schools which in our view has had three important effects:

Firstly, multicultural policy is not being used to address institutionalised racism but rather to accommodate demands for greater recognition of religious identity. Although all schools had racial equality policies in place and one school did address the substantive issue of underachievement amongst African – Caribbean boys within its School Improvement Plan, it was recognised by the Head of the same school that schools generally have not adequately addressed issues which go to the heart of racial

inequality and the reduction of life chances that go with it. This view is also echoed in a damning high level government report, in which institutional racism is blamed for the fact that 'black pupils are three times more likely to be excluded than white, and five times less likely to be on the official register of gifted and talented students.'⁶⁸

Our study revealed that the wider context in which religion is shaping the development and delivery of social policy, is also reflected to some extent in the participating schools. In schools, multiculturalism has come to mean multi-faithism and this has brought with it a set of problems about how religion and racism is perceived.

Secondly, related to this, we witness a creeping accommodation of religion in state schools across a range of activities and are concerned that this could potentially squeeze out the secular nature of educational spaces. Indeed the central argument made by many religionists, that the education system should not compromise issues of faith, appears to be heard.⁶⁹ Demands for separate prayer rooms, dress codes, withdrawal from activities including on religious grounds were, in many instances in this study, accommodated if not institutionalised. Workplace organisations such as teaching unions have also been responding to such demands along the same lines.

Of course this process has not been helped by the State's attempts to impose an essentially Christian characteristic to British identity as shown for example in the imposition of Christian assemblies in schools. This development along with others has led to many in minority communities to demand the right to be recognised first and foremost by their religion.

A number of the demands, made by students or parents, or provisions made by the schools as a result of their own understanding of multiculturalism has resulted in an increasing accommodation of Muslim and other religious identities. In our view, this is a direct result of two wider political and social trends: On the one hand, it reflects a common response to Muslim groups and indeed many voices within anti racist groups

⁶⁸ See 'Getting it. Getting it Right'. December 2006. Department of Education and Skills.

⁶⁹ Muslims on Education: A Position Paper by The Association of Muslim Social Scientist and Forum Against Islamophobia, and FED 2000 (For Education and Development) The Muslim College.

who make various demands for greater religious recognition in the face of anti-Muslim racism. On the other hand, the demands also reflect a process of the communalisation of South Asian communities that has been quietly taking place for some time, which involves religious and community groups mobilising solely around religious identities. For Muslims in Britain, the period around 'the Rushdie Affair' is a significant turning point where demands for recognition and equality became focused upon religious observance and identity. Other minorities also followed suit.

However, our study found that the interface between religion and multiculturalism is not about Muslims alone. Participants noted a trend amongst parents who are Jehovah's Witnesses for instance, to limit their children's full participation in schools on the basis of their religion. In particular they were withdrawing their children from the teaching of religious education. At the very least, this indicates the potential for segregation and intolerance based around religious divisions to increase. Another important question was whether or not the accommodation of religion left any space for the traditions of those who are non-believers or have no explicit religious affiliation to be adequately included and respected. Our study suggests that many other traditions, including those of marginalised sub groups within a minority as well as secular and highly syncretic traditions of South Asian and other communities are not being properly acknowledged.

Minority communities are being constructed in different ways within state schools. Some communities tend to be viewed through the lens of religious affiliation and are addressed accordingly, whilst others are regarded as more secular and political. This is nowhere better exemplified than in the way in which in the main, assemblies and RE have become the main forums in which the diverse religions and perhaps cultures (mainly food and dress) of Asian communities are celebrated. This is in sharp contrast to the way in which Black History Month has been established to show case the political, musical, artistic and literary achievements of African-Caribbean communities.

Many teachers expressed the view that Black History Month could provide an invaluable forum for the recognition of the rich social and political traditions of a range of diverse backgrounds. Moreover, it could provide a potentially rich means by

which to create unity between different groups through shared histories and experiences. Some would argue that unity between minority communities was always a fallacy. However, at a time when the more established minority communities in Britain are harbouring resentment and prejudice towards the new migrant communities, we believe that a reiteration of shared histories of migration, colonialism and experiences of racism has an important part to play in dealing with these tensions.

In recognition of the need for unity, many teachers called for the need to re-examine the antecedents and objectives of Black History Month in the British context to make it more inclusive.

Another worrying aspect of the growing accommodation of religion in state secular schools was the way in which demands for religious dress codes were being addressed. Although there was some awareness of the problems that arise when religious identities are emphasised, namely segregation of groups and young women who are divided into 'good' and 'bad' categories, there seemed to be no consistent recognition of the imperatives behind demands for certain religious dress codes and the implications of this for educational achievement. Several examples were provided where participants were conscious of the influence of local fundamentalist politics in demands for stricter dress codes for girls and the potential that this created for further segregation and division within their schools. However, this does not allay our concerns about the general move towards greater religious accommodation which is contributing to an entrenchment of particular identities over time and to the slow de-secularisation of spaces within schools.

This emphasis on religious identities brings with it a number of problems linked to questions of 'validity' and 'authenticity'. Questions about which religious identities and demands are valid and whose opinion constitutes the 'authentic voice' were all issues that arose in this study. The need for greater religious awareness or 'literacy' raised for instance questions about the role of teachers from minority backgrounds. Our study found that such teachers were often compelled to play an informal and formal role (as experts) in representing a particular religion. The corollary of this was that many White teachers felt unable, due to lack of knowledge and confidence, to

intervene in matters to do with other religions and cultures. This has enormous implications for the question of whose representations are ‘authentic’ and in the case of violence and abuse, for strategies and policies for effective protection.

In spite of assertions about the need to protect young women and girls from violence and abuse the increasing emphasis on accommodating religion and the fear of ‘causing offence’ in practice, led participants back to the conundrum presented by the Black feminist critique of multiculturalism outlined in the Introduction. Specifically, that the ‘traditional’ model of multiculturalism reinforces established power structures between and within minority communities and the State.

The ability of religious groups to use the multicultural terrain to influence policy by projecting a particularly fundamentalist or conservative interpretation of religion is evident in our findings. For example, some schools struggled with the question of the separation of religion and culture, which many fundamentalists and religionists have demanded. It is our contention that such demands are made in order to privilege a particular (political) representation of religious identity, which claims to return to a literal interpretation of the text. In the process complex social, political and cultural processes which make up lived experience are denied. This was vividly brought to life in an example provided by one school where there were competing views about whether or not dance constituted religious as opposed to cultural practice.

The process of privileging one representation of religious identity over others also has immense implications for tackling competing demands especially where they relate to gender equality. Reverting to the more ‘traditional’ model of multiculturalism both hinders the promotion of a range of equalities and panders to long-established power structures within communities and between communities and the State.

The third trend within our findings ties the implementation of multiculturalism within schools to the problematic concept of ‘parental choice’. As has been pointed out in this report, parental rights to withdraw children from aspects of sex education is a right awarded by successive Conservative government to demands made by fundamentalist Christians. We believe that the implementation of these rights within a context of strengthening religious identities amongst minority communities has

serious consequences for the right of ethnic minority girls to access education and for the right to have the opportunity to develop independent and critical thinking and extend the boundaries of their imagination.

The withdrawal of ethnic minority girls from sex and relationships education and mixed gender activities was perhaps the single most disturbing aspect of our findings. We believe that if religious accommodation is not questioned or checked, the impact on girl's education will be as devastating as is the current problem of the underachievement of African Caribbean boys. It is true that substantive issues such as the underachievement amongst African Caribbean boys and even Pakistani and Bangladeshi boys and the disproportionate rates of unemployment are not addressed adequately. Yet several studies have also noted that within these minority groups there are lower levels of labour market participation amongst Bangladeshi and Pakistani women.⁷⁰

All three participating schools revealed that girls from minority communities are being withdrawn from aspects of sex education, mixed gender activities and residential school trips. One school, interestingly a single sex school, pointed out that the number of withdrawals from their school was increasing and that this was a problem that had to be confronted robustly. One teacher who was herself of Muslim background and a co-ordinator of sex education at her school, called for better guidance to enable teachers to adequately address the question in relation to minority communities.

This study noted that teachers often struggle to ensure that they meet the needs of young girls when faced with some parents who use schools for another agenda – to control their sexuality. This is especially relevant in the way in which all too often, schools readily accede to demands which essentially attempt to remove girls from public spaces or restrict their access to knowledge and debate. The level of frustration amongst participants in this study in relation to legislative support for parental withdrawal and rights was expressed at the second workshop. The majority of participants supported a recommendation to diminish if not wholly remove parental

⁷⁰ See for example. Avtar Brah 1992 'Working Choices: South Asian Young Muslim Women and The labour Market, Department of Employment Research paper No 91.

rights to withdraw children from sex and relationship education, mixed gender activities, religious education and PE.

Another area of concern connected to the issue of withdrawal, is the tentative finding that the Every Child Matters Agenda is not sufficiently heeded when it comes to minority girls. Much more research in this area needs to take place, but some of our evidence suggests that access to all aspects of education is being restricted in the case of Asian and other minority girls and that the situation is probably much worse for girls from communities that are more traditional and controlled by strong religious leadership. Our findings suggest that a 'traditional' rather than 'mature' approach to multiculturalism permits the trumping of some crucial protection principles regarding violence and abuse. It would appear that minority girls are being denied the right to full educational opportunities and participation in all aspects of school life, even though these rights and duties are affirmed within child protection legislation and within the Every Child Matters agenda.

In the course of this study, we found that schools were making many attempts to re-assert an educational ethos that was inclusive and sometimes secular but they often became diverted when multicultural demands led them away from a secular ethos to one that was more multi-faith in outlook

Our view is that the school context provides the most conducive environment in which to nurture individual minds. It also has the potential to contribute to the construction of a unifying identity based on notions of social justice and equality. But in the current climate, the tendency is to exaggerate difference and separate religion from culture so that lived experiences are denied. The state is for the present embarking on a project aimed at capacity building in 'faith communities' and more religious awareness or 'literacy', although recent rhetoric around cohesion has tried to play down the attempts to reflect religious values in state institutions. But at the same time, the main mechanism for cohesion is not seen to be the promotion of a culture of human rights and values to which all groups can and should subscribe under a unifying identity, but the promotion of a new settlement between religion and the state.

The notions of inclusion and schools as secular democratic spaces need to be firmly embedded within school system so that racism and other issues can be addressed. Schools need to make structural changes in order to guarantee equality of access to everything that the school has to offer. There is a tension between equality and achievement on the one hand, and multiculturalism on the other. It is only possible to ensure high standards of education and the well being of all pupils, if human rights standards are followed. Mature multiculturalism means that these principles cannot and should not be compromised. 'Knowledge is power' but it is only by opening up and not closing down educational spaces, that we can create the conditions that can guarantee the 'emancipation of the mind'.

Further Research

This project was intended as a 'pilot project' only. Its scale being determined by the Commission for Racial Equality's offer of a small grant only. Nevertheless the grant presented us with an opportunity to gauge the level of interest that existed within the Metroborough's secondary schools to debate and exchange information about any conflicts and tensions that arise when multiculturalism is put into practice. Moreover, the small grants option provided us with the opportunity to test research tools and questions and to establish contact with schools and teaching unions so that we could examine their perspectives, practices and ideas on these issues.

There was a high level of interest and willingness on the part of the participating schools and the teaching union representative to discuss their assumptions about multiculturalism and reflect on their approach. Indeed it was clear from informal discussions with participants and potential participants within the Metroborough and with others who became aware of the project in other London boroughs, that there is an urgent need for more debate about multiculturalism in education. This in turn leads us to believe that there is scope for a great deal more work. We believe that it is possible to develop this pilot action research project in the following ways:

1. Extending the study vertically to include the views of pupils, parents, governing board members and community organisations;
2. Extending the study laterally to widen the number of participants within the borough so that a greater number of schools and teachers are given the opportunity to discuss their concerns and contribute to a more coherent borough wide approach to tackling the tensions that arise between multiculturalism and other equality demands;
3. Comparing experiences and practices across local authorities in order to pool examples of good practice and transfer knowledge across schools within different regions;
4. Examining in more detail, the role of workplace organisations such as teaching unions in assisting and supporting teaching staff to tackle competing demands.

Recommendations

1. Schools should promote a secular ethos

Secularism should not be about opposition to religion per se but about opposition to the institutionalisation of religion. Religion can and should be seen as a personal matter that takes place around school times. Secular schools can provide the foundation for developing a wider culture of rights and democracy in which people are encouraged to think freely. This is an important aspect of human transformation for all societies.

2. Schools should promote ‘mature multiculturalism’

There is an urgent need to reclaim multiculturalism but also to move away from ‘moral blindness’. In practice schools must not compromise human rights of the more vulnerable sub groups in minority communities in favour of cultural and religious sensibilities. A unifying identity based on principles of human rights should be promoted in opposition to religious identities which rely on exclusion of others.

3. Schools should have policies in place to address institutionalised racism

Schools must develop and put into practice clear policies targeted at the underachievement of boys and girls from African and Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds. Clear and consistent policies need to be in place to address disproportionate rates of exclusion, racist bullying and equal opportunities. A high aspirational culture must be instilled in boys and girls from all backgrounds and the connection between education, life chances and long term issues such as the labour market participation of ethnic minority women should be addressed.

4. Schools should be more robust in embedding the five outcomes of the Every Child Matters Agenda at every level of school life

Particular attention should be paid to how religion impacts on the right of minority children, especially girls, to full access to education. The Every Child Matters Agenda must be used to resist demands which prevent girls from having access to a full education.

5. RE should be taught as a Beliefs and Values Unit which incorporates a range of belief systems including humanism and atheism

All pupils should learn about the range of religions and beliefs, including humanist and atheist beliefs that exist. Inclusion is key for allowing for greater consistency of knowledge and standards across the country. Preference for a Beliefs and Values unit rather than religious education can help to counter the impact of religious identity in social relations and to breakdown segregation. It will also allow for better understanding of shared values that transcend religious identity. This will also help to decrease withdrawals from RE.

6. Abolish the right to withdrawal from RE

Parent should not be able to withdraw children from RE since this has the effect of contributing to an already intolerant, segregated and racist society.

7. Teaching materials on RE must be carefully scrutinised to prevent fundamentalist religious groups from influencing learning

There is evidence that fundamentalists in all religion are attempting to use education to gain a foothold into schools and to promote highly selective and discriminatory interpretations of religion. Schools must be alert to such dangers.

8. Abolish Christian Assemblies

The imposition of Christian assemblies has played a central role in fuelling racism and creating divisions. It has also allowed other religions to demand equal space in schools. An ethos of inclusion must be instilled. Assemblies must include the voices of secular minorities and stress shared universal values based on human rights and citizenship.

9. Redefine Black History Month

There is an urgent need to rethink the concept of 'Black History Month' so that minority communities are not seen as either religious or political communities. It should be used to construct a positive unifying identity. Emphasis should be placed on the reclamation of values of compassion, tolerance, social responsibility and human rights that exist in all social histories. This is a potentially important project which can and should be firmly embedded in the teaching of all subjects.

10. Abolish Prayer Rooms

Prayer rooms must not be institutionalised since they have divisive tendencies and help reinforce the view that minority communities are religious entities. Prayer and belief is an individual matter and therefore prayer space should be made available if and as and when demanded but not institutionalised. The focus should be on inclusion and minimisation of segregation along religious lines. It has the potential to create a 'them and us' situation

11. There should be strict adherence to a dress/school uniform policy

The following principles should underlie the formulation of a school uniform or dress code policy.

- Requests for dress on religious grounds must balance the need of the individual against the need to protect the wider school community.
- Health and safety issues should be of paramount concern when deciding school uniform policy.
- School uniform policy should be determined by the school governing body, not religious and community leaders.
- All requests for religious dress should be monitored to ascertain whether they are influenced by outside groups.

Dress codes in all schools must have two main starting points: the requirement to ensure the health and safety of the pupils and whether or not the choice of dress hinders the process of teaching and learning. In developing school uniform or dress code policy, account should be taken of parent's wishes but no more or less than other issues such as the right of the child to have access to education and to participate fully in all aspects of school life. There is careful balancing act to be undertaken in assessing the various competing rights. A decision should come about between negotiations between parents, the child and the school and not through so called community leaders. The Shabina Begum case is critical in that it established principle that the right to manifest one's religion can be limited in the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

14. There should be clear guidelines on circumstances for withdrawal from school trips

Schools should be mindful of the fact that it is almost always girls from minority groups who are withdrawn from trips, in particular residential trips. Schools, NUT and the DfES should draw up clear guidelines on the circumstances in which children are withdrawn from such activities. Health, economic reasons or exceptional circumstances only, should be permissible.

15. Clear policies should be drawn up to encourage participation of ethnic minority girls in all aspects of schools life

It is vital that clear policies are in place to increase the participation of girls from minority communities in all aspects of school life including residential trips and after school activities. In line with the agenda on Every Child Matters, schools should also monitor the exclusion of girls from school activities on the grounds of religion or culture.

16. Schools should promote health-focused campaigns aimed at families and girls from minority communities

We need to see a fresh and innovative approach using the spine of the legislative framework for the encouragement of girls from ethnic minorities to participate in the full range of sports activities. This is vital to building confidence and self esteem amongst girls. (At present suicide rates amongst Asian girls for instance are up to three times the national average.) Such activities are necessary to develop social skills in relating to the outside world and to improve their life chances.

17. The right of withdrawal from sex education should be abolished

The Every Child Matters agenda must be strictly applied and the right of parental choice and withdrawal from sex education should be abolished. Increasingly more and more girls are being withdrawn from sex education on religious grounds. The result is that their emotional development is curtailed and they are denied the opportunity to develop the social skills necessary to participate in the outside world on an equal footing.

18. Develop policies and strategies to overcome parental withdrawal from sex education

Schools should develop policies to prevent withdrawal and monitor request for withdrawal from sex education on the grounds of religion or culture.

In all cases, heads of secondary schools should insist that all parents must have a meeting with the head first before withdrawing their child from sex education. Often discussion can lead parents to change their minds, especially if it is pointed out that their children will get to hear about the contents from other pupils and that it is better to get the information pertaining to SRE first hand rather than second and third hand which is likely to be misrepresented.

19. Schools must put in place clear policies to address domestic violence and other harmful practices

Schools must devise specific policies on domestic violence, including forced marriage and other forms of abuse to women to be clearly located within a child protection framework. 'Multiculturalism cannot be an excuse for moral blindness'.

20. Schools must not mediate between children and parents in domestic violence cases

Schools must not act as mediators where there are allegations of abuse and violence including forced marriage in cases involving minority girls. They must respect a child's confidentiality and understand that it should trump considerations of offending religious and cultural sensibilities. This is recognised good practice now in forced marriage cases in the police and other areas of the welfare system.

21. Training and monitoring of domestic violence and other harmful practices

All secondary schools should devise clear policies on domestic violence including forced marriage and provide training to all staff including pastoral staff. The notion of 'mature multiculturalism' must be embedded within the school ethos and promoted amongst staff and children.

22. Monitor the attendance records of minority girls

Schools must monitor attendance records and other appropriate records for signs of abuse and violence in respect of ethnic minority girls. Guidance from NUT, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and NGOs such as SBS must be followed. Clear systems for recording and monitoring abuse must be in place.

23. Create local networking forums for information sharing on multicultural good practice

Many teachers stated that there was an urgent need to have local forums for teachers organised on a regular basis to encourage the exchange of ideas and practices in managing multiculturalism, in particular where difficulties were encountered. Such exchange forums should be institutionalised at local levels across the country.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Key Respondent Interview Schedule (Head teachers)

Introduction

Aims of the project:

The aim of the project is to improve the knowledge, skills and abilities of secondary school teachers in the 'Metroborough' in managing multiculturalism. In particular, the project will focus on how teachers mediate conflicting demands from different agencies and individuals with different priorities. The project will seek to establish principles and good practice to ensure that in accommodating diversity and multiculturalism, the rights of the more vulnerable individuals within communities are not undermined. The Commission for Racial Equality has funded this project under its 'Getting Results' funding programme, which aims to promote good race relations.

Recording, transcription and anonymity:

For practical reasons we will record all interviews and then transcribe them. All transcripts will be anonymised and the names of all participant schools and interviewees will be changed in the write up of the final report to the CRE and any other publications that might emerge from the study.

Background – statistics, policies and decision making processes

(An overview of the school population and policies)

1. *Could you please provide an overview of your school's student population?* (I.e. total number of students and their ethnic, gender, religious and non-religious backgrounds, approximate numbers in each year, approximate classroom sizes etc.)
2. *Could you please give us an overview of the school's teaching staff and their backgrounds?* (E.g. approximate numbers, ethnicity, gender and religious or non-religious backgrounds)
3. *Could you provide details of your governing body?* (E.g. composition and background and how selected)
4. *How have you attempted to meet your obligations under the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000? Do you have a Race Equality Scheme?* (Get copy and any other related documents)
5. *What main issues/questions, if any, have arisen in the implementation of the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 and any policies on multiculturalism?*
6. *How have you sought to address these?* (Please provide examples)
7. *Has your school ethos in relation to race relations and/or multiculturalism changed since 7/7? If so, what guidance have you received or sought to implement? Have there been any particular problems in relation to this?*

8. *Have you been able to implement government policies on diversity and multiculturalism? If not why not?*

Multiculturalism

1. *How would you define multiculturalism?*
2. *How do you put this into practice? It would be useful if you could provide examples to highlight your points.*
3. *What policies on anti racism and multiculturalism does the school have and how were they developed? Who is responsible for their formulation and review? Where does guidance for such policies come from?*
4. *How are policies on multiculturalism and inclusion communicated to parents? Have there been any concerns shown by parents?*
5. *If you describe your school as secular in orientation, please explain what you mean by the term and how you seek to maintain this? (Any policies in relation to this?)*
6. *In your view, is there any incompatibility between managing secularism and multiculturalism? If so, what are the issues and how have you sought to resolve them?*
7. *Have any demographic changes in the school community affected the way in which multicultural policies have changed over time?*
8. *Have any children been withdrawn from your school for reasons to do with your multicultural or secular ethos? Please give details of ethnic and religious backgrounds and reasons for withdrawal)*

Classes and the curriculum

(E.g. Religious education, sex education, the teaching and content of citizenship, personal health and social education (PHSE) classes etc and parental involvement)

1. *Who determines the content of the subject matter and how it is taught?*
2. *What if any sensitivities need to be taken into account?*
3. *How do you ensure that the classes and teaching is inclusive?*
4. *Have any groups (including parents or external groups) lobbied for changes to the way classes are taught or sought to influence the content of the classes?*
5. *Have any parents, groups or pupils challenged or made requests about the content of such classes such as how their cultures/religions are represented?*

6. *Have any parents intervened to exercise their right to withdraw their child from any particular class? If so, please provide details, e.g. type of class, ethnicity and religious background of the parents and reasons for the withdrawal.*
7. *How have you resolved the problem of withdrawal or potential withdrawal? (Give details and examples)*

Social activities and events within the school and social relations

(Assemblies, holidays, mixed gender activities, celebration of festivals, interactions within the playground, demands for separate areas for prayer, accommodating demands around food, dress)

1. *What sorts of demands are made in the name of cultural or religious difference, for example around religious observance? Who is making these demands – teachers, students, parents, members of the governing body or external organisations? And what reasons are given?*
2. *How have you sought to resolve the demands? Any conflicts between meeting legal and policy obligations in relation to equality issues and the demands made? (E.g. conflicts about religious observance and gender and sexual equality?) Please provide details*
3. *How do you ensure that the views of minorities within minorities are represented when celebrating cultures or religions? Any ongoing problems in managing this?*
4. *Have you experienced any attempts from groups/parents/students who attempt to impose a particular religion or religious view on others? Please provide details*
5. *How do the views of non-believers or those not affiliated to any religion get represented or their views heard within the school?*
6. *How have parents and students from different ethnic or religious groups related to each other?*
7. *Have there been any issues of racism and hostility within the school or outside involving school students or parents? How have they been dealt with?*
8. *How do issues of multiculturalism and diversity impact on white (English) parents?*

Addressing issues of violence and abuse in the home

1. *How often do these issues arise?*
2. *Who has responsibility for addressing them?*

3. *What types of problems arise? (Give examples)*
4. *How are they resolved?*
5. *Who are the agencies you refer to or work with when such problems arise?*
6. *What is the ethnic and gender background of the students who report such problems?*
7. *How often do you encounter the reporting of more culturally specific forms of abuse such as forced marriage or female genital mutilation?*
8. *In your view, does cultural sensitivity impact on your ability to address these issues? If so in what way? How do you seek to resolve these difficulties?*

Extra curricular activities

(School trips, evening classes, after school clubs and other activities not part of the school curriculum)

1. *What kinds of classes and activities do you run and why?*
2. *Where does the demand for these come from?*
3. *Are any groups of students excluded from certain activities or trips and why? (Get gender, ethnic and religious breakdown)*
4. *Any objections from group/other sources about the kinds of activities you run? If so why?*
5. *Have there been any problems encountered by your students when on school trips, due to ethnic or religious backgrounds? If so, what are they and how have they been addressed?*

Local Context

(Local connections between the school and the wider community.)

1. *Is the school involved in any local initiatives that relate to multiculturalism, racial equality, community cohesion or faith based work? (Get examples)*
2. *What local connections does the school foster and for what reason?*
3. *Does the school have any links with any faith-based schools? If so, for what reason?*
4. *Does the existence of faith based schools impact upon your policies and your approach to multiculturalism?*

5. *Do you find central government or local authority policies on multiculturalism/diversity, social cohesion and integration a help or hindrance? (Please give examples and reasons)*

Other issues

Are there any other issues you would like to raise?

Recommendations

The intention of this project is to make recommendations or identify principles that can help teachers to tackle conflicting demands. Do you have any recommendations or suggestions that you would like to make at this stage?

Checklist of useful documents

- Statistical breakdown – students and teaching staff;
- List of Governing Board members;
- Ofsted report on the school including assessment of RRAA implementation;
- Specific policies on racial equality, religious observance, multiculturalism, cultural celebrations, etc;
- Guidance and policies on dress code;
- Policies relevant to the circumstances in which parents can exercise right of withdrawal or have some say in decision making in relation to any aspect of school life;
- Any other relevant documents referred to in interview or otherwise.

Appendix 2: Key Respondent Interview Schedule (Trade Union Representative)

Introduction

Aims of the project:

The aim of the project is to improve the knowledge, skills and abilities of secondary school teachers in the 'Metropolitan' in managing multiculturalism. In particular, the project will focus on how teachers mediate conflicting demands from different agencies and individuals with different priorities. The project will seek to establish principles and good practice to ensure that in accommodating diversity and multiculturalism, the rights of the more vulnerable individuals within communities are not undermined. The Commission for Racial Equality has funded this project under its 'Getting Results' funding programme, which aims to promote good race relations.

Recording, transcription and anonymity:

For practical reasons we will record all interviews and then transcribe them. All transcripts will be anonymised and the names of all participant schools and interviewees will be changed in the write up of the final report to the CRE and any other publications that might emerge from the study.

Background

- *So could we just start by getting a sense of the level of trade union density in schools in the area?*
- *Do you have any kind of breakdown in the trade union membership in terms of gender, ethnicity and/or religion or non-religion of your members?*
- *Are there self organised groups at branch, local, regional and national level?*

Representing Teachers

- *What sort of motions did you put forward to this year's annual national conference?*
- *Could you give us a sense of the kind of motions that members from this area were putting forward for conference?*
- *Will any of your members be going to the annual black members' conference at the end of this year?*
- *Do you have a sense of what sort of motions your Black members may put to the Black members conference?*
- *What sorts of issues are your members raising or asking you to represent them on?*

Multiculturalism

- *How you define multiculturalism?*
- *What sorts of issues do teachers in raise in relation to the implementation of multicultural policies within the borough?*

- *What sorts of demands are made upon teachers in the borough by pupils, parents, governing board members and external organisations in respect of multiculturalism? Probe areas if required include: tackling race equality; cultural sensitivity; recognition of language, ethnicity and culture; demands around religious observance and identity.*

Issues

- *This whole project is about competing inequalities, can you think of any instances in which the implementation of policies and demands related to multiculturalism –such as recognising diversity, racial equality, race ethnicity or religious observance - has come into conflict with any other equality such as gender equality and issues around sexuality or disability for instance?*
- *A number of issues have already been raised by other key respondent interviewees. Have these arisen during your own work experience within the borough or in your contact with trade union members? Prayer rooms, dress codes, parental withdrawal? Any issues about inclusivity and segregation?*
- *Some of the key respondents interviewed so far have noted the withdrawal of children from sex and relationships education and from RE classes. Has this come up as an issue in the schools you taught at or from contact with your members?*
- *What sorts of issues are coming up in terms of violence and abuse and how this connects with cultural sensitivity or multiculturalism?*
- *I would like to spend a bit of time exploring your experience of working within [name of Metroborough ward]. I have been into schools in that area and noted tensions between the more established communities and the newer migrant communities. Is this something that has come up for you or your members? How would seek to resolve these issues within the context of promoting multiculturalism?*
- *Do you think that teachers in Metroborough find local and national government policy on diverse and multiculturalism a hindrance or a help?*

Teaching

- *What sorts of issues are teachers raising about the implementation of race equality legislation especially obligations under the RRAA?*
- *What sorts of issues are teachers raising in relation to meeting demands around religious observance and / or implementation of policies or commitments around multiculturalism?*
- *What are their main concerns in terms of gender equality? Include probe on tackling violence and abuse particularly within ethnic minority communities*
- *What are their main concerns in terms of culture, language and ethnicity?*
- *What sort of teaching support are they looking for in these areas?*

Secondary schools as a workplace

- *Have any teachers come into conflict with managers or other teachers in relation to views on race, religion and culture or in terms of beliefs?*

- *Have any teachers moved from one school to another because of dissatisfaction over the schools multicultural, secular, anti racist policies or practices or lack of?*
- *Do you think that teachers in the 'Metropolitan' find local and national government policy a help or a hindrance?*

Additional areas

Is there anything else that you would like to add or discuss that we have not touched on during the course of this interview?

Recommendations

The intention of this project is to make recommendations or identify principles that can help teachers to tackle conflicting demands. Do you have any recommendations or suggestions that you would like to make at this stage?

Documents to collect

- Copies of any relevant motions
- Any guidelines produced by the union related to the issues discussed: domestic violence; multiculturalism; dress codes and religion and belief
- Trade union density figures

Appendix 3: Key Respondent Interview Schedule (Local Authority Officer)

Introduction

Aims of the project:

The aim of the project is to improve the knowledge, skills and abilities of secondary school teachers in the 'Metroborough' in managing multiculturalism. In particular, the project will focus on how teachers mediate conflicting demands from different agencies and individuals with different priorities. The project will seek to establish principles and good practice to ensure that in accommodating diversity and multiculturalism, the rights of the more vulnerable individuals within communities are not undermined. The Commission for Racial Equality has funded this pilot project under its 'Getting Results' funding programme, which aims to promote good race relations.

Recording, transcription and anonymity:

For practical reasons we will record all interviews and then transcribe them. All transcripts will be anonymised and the names of all participant schools and interviewees will be changed in the write up of the final report to the CRE and any other publications that might emerge from this study.

Questions and Probes

As we have such a short time, if you will permit, I would like to go straight into questions about your strategy for cohesion and in particular how that relates to education in the 'Metroborough'

1. *Can I just start by asking you what you mean by integration and cohesion?*
2. *How would you deal with the ongoing criticism that integration is a euphemism for assimilation?*
3. *What are the key aspects of your vision of integration and cohesion in respect of education in the 'Metroborough'? How do you think this can be delivered?*
4. *How would you define multiculturalism?*
5. *In your view, is multiculturalism dead? If not, what is your understanding of multiculturalism and how do you see it being developed in schools to further your cohesion strategy?*
6. *Why do you think the government has given such importance to capacity building of so called 'faith communities' in the cohesion strategy?*
7. *What role do you think so-called 'faith communities' have to play in education?*

8. *So far in this study, we have found that teachers are expressing tensions between promoting diversity [which itself is being reduced to tolerance and respect for other religions] and the need to be mindful of the main goals of education –(especially government policies on developing coherent strategies on Every Child Matters). Teachers appear to be confused about questioning respect for religious identity where this overrides other concerns or goals. What is your view of this?*
9. *We are also finding that schools are operating a multicultural environment which they find really invigorating but there are problem areas in terms of assumptions that appear to be accepted as ‘common sense’. For example- Black History Month is being discussed in relation to African and Caribbean communities whilst South Asians and other minority communities are being referred to in relation to religious assemblies? What are your views on this and its implications for creating a more equal society?*
10. *There is evidence to suggest that some of the groups that are claiming to represent religious communities in the UK are infact linked to fundamentalist and authoritarian movements abroad. Such organisations reinforce patriarchal values and discrimination in a variety of ways which lead to intolerance and divisiveness? How do you propose to counteract this development when you are promoting cohesion and integration?*
11. *From my reading of information about the Cohesion and Integration Commission, there appears to be a danger of reproducing a multiculturalist practice that has been criticised for limiting and prioritising consultation with a layer of faith community leaders who are not elected and of disregarding all the good work done mainly by secular groups to integrate those who are marginalised by challenging discrimination from within. What do you think of such a critique? What is the commission and this borough doing to ensure that such criticisms of multiculturalism in practice are taken on board? How will you ensure that internal power dynamics within communities are taken account of and that women within minority communities will have their voices heard?*
12. *How do you feel about the development of faith schools in the ‘Metroborough’?*
13. *Is it correct to assume that the first Sikh primary school in (name of Metroborough ward) is going to be established? Could you tell us a little bit about this and how you think it may or may not foster integration and community cohesion?*
14. *Can you provide examples of what could be good practice in respect of cohesion and integration in school elsewhere?*

Documents to collect:

- The Metroborough's 10 year vision document on 'balancing communities interests and reducing inequalities'
- Specific policies on racial equality, religious observance, multiculturalism, cultural celebrations, etc;
- Guidance and policies on dress code;
- Policies relevant to the circumstances in which parents can exercise right of withdrawal or have some say in decision making in relation to any aspect of school life;
- Any other documents that he feels are important;
- Any other relevant documents referred to in interview or otherwise.

Appendix 4: Focus Group Schedule

Focus Group Schedule

****Test the equipment – go round and ask all to say their names, name of their school, position within the school and number of years they have been at that school. Then play back to check recording ****

Introduction

- *Overall aim of the project:*

The overall aim of the project is to improve the knowledge, skills and abilities of secondary school teachers in the ‘Metroborough’ in responding to demands around multiculturalism. In particular, the project is focusing upon how teachers mediate conflicting demands from different agencies and individuals with different priorities. The project will seek to establish principles and good practice to ensure that in accommodating diversity and multiculturalism, the rights of the more vulnerable individuals within communities are not undermined.

- *The aim of today’s meeting is to:*

1. Explore the kinds of issues that are coming up in the three schools involved in this project – both at the level of everyday practice and in terms of developing policy
2. Discuss issues of concern and share experiences in managing multicultural demands
3. Consider some examples where there have been competing demands around different types of equalities and how these have been resolved
4. Establish whether there are any ongoing sticking points / points of contention
5. And start putting together a list of recommendations for how competing demands should be dealt with

The session will be followed by a period in November where Pragna Patel and Sukhwant Dhaliwal will compile information about policies, strategies and good practice examples with a view to finding ways to tackle some of the problems that have been raised and establish a set of principles for dealing with competing demands. A follow up training session will take place on Wednesday 6th December 2006 at which a list of recommendations will be presented and discussed.

- *Tape recording and speaking one at a time:*

We are recording this focus group session because we don’t want to miss any of the comments and views but no names will be attached to the comments if they appear in write ups. All references to names including pupils’ names, teachers’ names, school names and the names of the borough will be anonymised in the write up of the analysis and in any subsequent papers or public presentations on the findings and recommendations of the project.

We would be really grateful if everyone could speak up and speak one at a time. It would still be useful if people could restate their names and the names of their schools when they make their points.

Also in order to be able to glean a clear recording for transcription, we would be grateful if you would speak one at a time and refrain from speaking over each other. We know this may be difficult when it is such an interesting and engaging issue to discuss and so we hope you will not be unnerved by the facilitators' interjections to ensure that only one person is speaking at any one point in time. But we do want to ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak. We are interested in everyone's views whether this reinforces the comments of others or whether it is an entirely different view or experience to others, whether you are relatively new at your school or to this issue or whether you have been thinking and working on it for a long time, we want to hear from everyone.

- *Anonymity and confidentiality for discussion of cases:*

It is important for us to request that all participants respect confidentiality with regards to information discussed at this session. This is important if people are going to feel able and willing to discuss their own experiences within their particular schools or the problems that the school has encountered and feel that they can do so openly. It is preferable that where participants bring a case or example for discussion that you change the name of the person you are referring to such as for instance 'Ms A, 16 years old, South Asian origin' or 'Ms D, 14 years old, Somalian'. However, we would like to emphasise the need for participants to maintain confidentiality where any other participant does discuss an example or case scenario.

- *Arrangements for the day:*

This focus group will run for a total of two hours but we'll take a break after the first hour, at 3pm for 15 minutes for tea and coffee and then resume until 4.15pm. However, in our letters to you we have requested that you allow until 4.30pm for today's session just in case all of you are keen and willing to keep talking. Please do help yourselves to water and refreshments along the way. We will take it in turns to facilitate the discussion so I'll start the first half and then PP will take over after the break.

Questions and probes

Part A: Introductory warm up questions

1. What are the positive aspects of multiculturalism in your schools?
2. What are the negative or difficult aspects of meeting demands around multiculturalism in your schools?

Part B: Exploring tensions and competing demands

1. What sorts of difficulties have you had in implementing policies on racial equality, diversity and multiculturalism?
2. What sorts of demands are being made and by whom?

Possible areas to prompt if required:

- Religious observance

- Regarding recognition, culture, ethnicity, language
- Dress codes
- Prayer rooms and facilities
- Admissions
- Attendance and reasons for absence
- Withdrawal from classes, trips, activities, assemblies
- Grounds for withdrawal of children from classes, trips, activities and assemblies

3. Do these demands conflict with other equalities issues? If so, how and why do you think this is the case? How have you sought to resolve conflicting demands?

Additional probe questions to encourage discussion about the examples given:

What is the argument that is being presented?

Ideally how would you deal with this?

What are the obstacles in dealing with this?

What is stopping you from dealing with it in the way that you want to?

How could you get around these obstacles?

Part C: Secularism and Fundamentalism (optional area if there is time or these terms are raised or used at any stage)

1. Do you see your school as secular?
2. In what way? What does secularism mean to you?
3. What does this mean in practice?
4. Has this come up at all as an issue at your school?
5. How have you sought to resolve this?
6. Are there any ongoing issues that you are having difficulty with that you might welcome some brainstorming on here or as part of this problem solving exercise?
7. What does fundamentalism mean to you?
8. What does this mean in practice?
9. Has this come up at all in your school?
10. How have you sought to deal with it?
11. Are there any ongoing issues that are having difficulty with that you might welcome some brainstorming on here or as part of this problem solving exercise?

Part D: Recommendations

1. What policies and principles would you like to see in place in relation to tackling competing demands?
2. What policies and principles do you think are essential to tackling competing demands when managing multiculturalism?