



Muslim Parents Association
High Wycombe

Proposals for:

- 1 Increasing levels of achievement by Muslim pupils of Pakistani origin in Bucks schools, thereby increasing their access to training, employment, further and higher education.**
- 2 Providing relevant training and building confidence of Muslim men and women to equip them with the necessary tools to help their children and at the same time improve their employment prospects and thereby improving the economic wellbeing of a 'disadvantaged' community.**
- 3 Addressing the issue of community Cohesion.**

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These proposals are available by e-mail and comments would be welcome and should be sent to the author by e-mail please: rafiqraja@hotmail.co.uk

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1 Summary

- 1.1 The Muslim community in High Wycombe is now well established, and numbers range from 15,000 to 20,000. The first new arrivals in High Wycombe are recorded in 1957.
- 1.2 The majority of the Muslim population in High Wycombe is of Pakistani origin and the majority of the Pakistani origin population comes from District Mirpur of Azad Kashmir.
- 1.3 In the early days the Town of High Wycombe offered employment in the furniture, plastics and rubber industries for which the Town was famous and this was where the original migrants from Pakistan found employment.
- 1.4 With the passage of time the town has lost most of its traditional manufacturing base and is now mostly a dormitory town with the retail and service sectors in an increasingly 'knowledge based economy'.
- 1.5 The early arrivals came from a pre industrial world into a developed industrial society and had to adapt to a different language, culture, food, climate and modes of living. They saw themselves working in England for a few years and then returning to their homeland. This dream has now been replaced by people accepting that their and their families' future lies in this country; the availability of relatively cheaper air fares and spouses for their children have maintained a strong link with their relatives back in Pakistan.
- 1.6 Being hardworking, simple in outlook and primarily religious, in the early years, they worked hard to repay the debts incurred in coming to this country, to buy a house and bring their families over to join them. At the same time they built places of worship in the town; the first Mosque in jubilee Road was started in the early 1970s and now the town has nearly half a dozen Mosques.
- 1.7 The parents, due to language difficulties and unfamiliarity with the education system in the country have not always been able to give support to their children as they passed through the school system. This is one of the reasons the Pakistani heritage children, born and bred in this country, are achieving less than their peers in the mainstream group.
- 1.8 The result is that many, without the GCSE passport of 5 or more passes at A* to C, fail to get on to further education or training programmes.

- 1.9 Some young people have drifted into petty crime and are not prepared to accept the low status and low paid jobs, which their limited or inadequate qualifications entitle them to, even if there was no racism in the society.
- 1.10 Some have even fallen prey to people with extremist views, although the number of such people is not known but likely to be very small.
- 1.11 Whilst the vast majority of British Muslims are law abiding and reject extremism, nevertheless, the British government is looking for ways and means of combating 'Muslim' extremism and it is now common to have a new idea floated every week. The gains worked for by the first and second generations in the 1970s and 1980s have now been swept aside and replaced with a relatively harsh attitude towards the feelings of the Muslim community, primarily as a result of the British involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan and the violent reaction by some members of the Muslim community.
- 1.12 The MPA has been working with colleagues, head teachers and School governors and indeed the Local Education Authority (LA) to remove the disparity which exists in the achievement levels of the Pakistani/Muslim origin children and the rest, so that the obvious areas of disenchantment can be minimised and a cohesive society created.
- 1.13 The Mosques have played and continue to play a pivotal role in the life of the Muslim community and act as the hub of religious and even social and cultural life. The mosques have also been used as a place for after school classes principally in the learning of Arabic and Urdu.
- 1.14 The MPA wishes to use some of the facilities on offer at the Wycombe Mosques to not only help the Pakistani origin children with homework, but have classes dealing with good citizenship and recognizing the dangers of following an extremist view point.
- 1.15 An interventionist proposed programme will help the mothers of school age children to not only get a grasp of the English language but at the same time learn about the school system and how it operates and how they can improve their personal skills and employment prospects.
- 1.16 The MPA will co-operate and work with any group, be they a supplementary school or after school club or established institutions such as the Race Equality Council or the Ethnic Minority Foundation, (which is based in London but runs programmes in other towns and cities to teach Muslim women English, crafts and IT skills *-* contact details on final page).

2 Preamble

- 2.1 It is no secret to realise that the Muslim pupils, (who in High Wycombe principally hail from the Pakistani community), in Bucks schools are in the grip of a double whammy at the moment. On the one hand they are underachieving in schools for a number of socio economic, social and cultural reasons and on the other they are now under suspicion and are to be scrutinised for signs of extremism, by the schools.
- 2.2 The directive from the central government for school teachers to promote universal rights and free speech to counter any emerging "hate values" among pupils and at the same time to look out for pupils who strongly advocate violent extremism is a regrettable development but perfectly seems to reflect the signs of our times that the Muslim community as a whole is under suspicion. This is, regrettably, a retrograde development as some of the children to be monitored are as young as 5 or 6 years of age. It also puts the onus on teachers to decide what amounts to violent extremism. A wrong judgement by a teacher has the potential of ruining the life of a child.
- 2.3 If the Pakistani community is to enjoy an equal status with the rest of the communities which exist around us, then the community needs to have leadership, which can assess and analyse its predicament and attempt to find workable solutions to some, if not all, of the problems.
- 2.4 It is therefore important that the Muslim community takes certain appropriate steps to prevent young people descending into life involved with illegal activity which could ruin their lives for the future. The future of the Town depends on its entire population of young people having the necessary skills to participate in education and work.
- 2.5 One way to counter the threat of alienation of the vulnerable young people is to remove the obvious causes of disenchantment, which mainly result from lack of appropriate employment opportunities, which should channel the energies of the young and give them a stake in the society they live in. After all they are the future of the Muslim community but also of the mainstream society. Everyone's future depends on proper education of all young people.
- 2.6 The main obstacle for people not realising their potential and consequent alienation arises from their inability to attain the 'passport' for future access to further education or training opportunities.
- 2.7 The draft proposals are therefore designed to remove some of the obvious breeding grounds of disenchantment with the society at large.

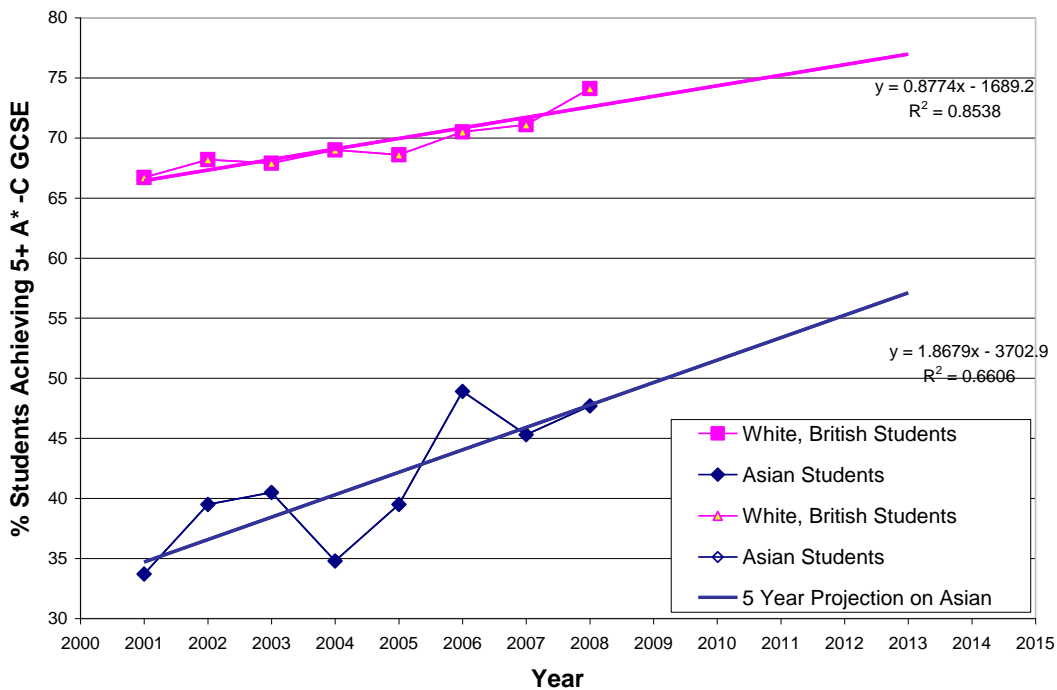
3 The Current position

- 3.1 The Pakistani origin community has grown, in High Wycombe, from a few at the end of the 1950s to around 15,000 to 20,000 individuals.
- 3.2 The community is vibrant, self reliant (within reason) robust if a little lacking in confidence/diffident at the moment, with its members represented among all the professions. Yet it is no exaggeration to note that the majority are still 'underemployed'. Moreover, as a whole the community is at the bottom of the pile in terms of economic power and suffers discrimination and disadvantage as most of its members, especially older members and significant numbers of females still do not have a working command of the English language or a step on the employment ladder.
- 3.3 According to recent research 48% of Cressex (Secondary) School pupils live in 4 areas that are identified as within the most deprived 10% in England, in terms of income deprivation. With 15.6% of pupils live in an area identified as one of the 5% most deprived in England in terms of education, skills and training, whilst 39.8% of pupils live in areas identified as among the country's worst 20% in terms of adult skills. Since about 70% of the children of this school come from the Pakistani origin households the implications of the information are self evident.
- 3.4 Rather than suffer endless bouts of discrimination in the area of employment members of the community have taken up jobs where they do not need to have approval and thus most of the taxi drivers and mini cab operators in High Wycombe are of Pakistani origin and proportionately a larger number are self employed and have set up small scale family businesses and are now able to present healthy growth and portfolios.
- 3.5 The Pakistani / Muslim community also believes in self help rather than government handouts and has built up a number of places of worship with weekly donations. Indeed during the month of Ramadan the three Mosques under the control of the Islamic Mission and Mosque Trust raised around £1,500 for charity every other night.
- 3.6 The Mosque therefore acts as a hub in the life of the Muslim community and apart from offering a place for combined worship it also serves as a place where children are taught Arabic and Urdu in the afternoons and weekends.

3.7 Buckinghamshire is rightly proud of its academic achievements as it has some excellent schools, a very passionate and determined army of teachers as well as a dedicated governing body for each school. Some of the recent school results at GCSE and A level have been the best in state schools in the country.

3.8 However, whilst the majority of children from the mainstream community are achieving very high results and indeed the black and ethnic minority children are staying with the national averages for Black and Minority Ethnic pupils, the gap between the two sets of school children in Buckinghamshire is rather wide. The Pakistani origin children in Buckinghamshire on average are underachieving by some 25%, as far as the number of pupils leaving secondary school with 5 or more GCSEs at Grades A* to C (including English & Maths) is concerned. The graph below gives the current picture and future projections of the levels of achievements of the two groups.

% Students Achieving 5+ A* -C GCSE for Period 2001-2015 in Buckinghamshire : Actual Results and Projections



3.9 There are many reasons for this state of affairs ranging from economic deprivation, lack of articulate parents and English as a second language, the selective system and underlying racism in society, especially when it is in the form of institutional racism, but which is camouflaged with all the 'politically correct' language. The selective system for allocating places in secondary schools has resulted in over-concentration of children from less advantaged homes in some upper

- schools – this has meant over representation of children of Muslim and Pakistani heritage in some schools. This effective segregation cannot be good for community cohesion or good race relations, especially as every fifth child in Bucks schools is from an ethnic minority.
- 3.10 The Muslim community in Wycombe as in any other town in the UK would have organised classes for children to learn to 'read' the Quraan, which is in Arabic from the very early days. Even before the Mosque was built Muslim children were being taught to read the Quraan on Saturday afternoons in the Guild Hall (circa late 1960s). So children learn to read and write basic Arabic but as soon as they can read the Quraan, they then concentrate on the reading side and little on the understanding or about the Arabic language, if my own experience and those of my children are anything to go by.
 - 3.11 The Arabic classes may (for the Pakistani origin Muslim children) also be augmented by Urdu classes. Very often the Mosque provides the venue and the atmosphere for these classes.
 - 3.12 Unfortunately, as the Mosques do not have any income other than donations from the community, the teachers are often volunteers, although they may be given a small stipend.
 - 3.13 The standard of teaching is not uniform and oscillates depending on the quality of the teacher. To my knowledge the volunteer teachers do not undergo any meaningful training (they may have taught in say Pakistan or may be relying on their own experience) or subsequent professional
 - 3.14 There is therefore a need for adequate supplementary provision to be made available to provide the extra impetus required if the children of Pakistani origin and indeed from white working class and African Caribbean background are to receive meaningful assistance at the time that this intervention can make a difference. The provision of some supplementary Saturday schools in High Wycombe, in the near future, is thus a notable and constructive initiative.
 - 3.15 Funding has to be located to find a reasonable numbers from the Pakistani community, especially females, who can be trained as community champions, who for a small outlay can reach the members of the community who do not read newspapers or are interested in the education debate.

4 The Way Forward - Children

- 4.1 There is a ready made market for supplementary schools/home work clubs, which can also help with the school curriculum and even citizenship/community cohesion issues. This is because you already have children coming for Arabic and Urdu classes on a regular basis and you have a pool of volunteers and of course an appropriate venue. The parents are also comfortable for their children go to the Mosque.
- 4.2 To improve the standards of education in our schools for the Pakistani origin pupils therefore means that some projects/resources need to be targeted through the Mosques, after a properly workable method has been found. I believe there is scope in the County realising some of its improvement targets through this route, although it may not reach all the disadvantaged children, as not all of them attend classes in the Mosque.
- 4.3 This will also provide access to the parents who can be sent a monthly newsletter highlighting basic ways and techniques for parents to enable them to help their children. At such classes the parents can also be passed other important information, which can help them to help and monitor their children.
- 4.4 There is a need for an innovative and less traditional approach to helping vulnerable children. In Birmingham, for example some very innovative means of motivating the children from the Muslim community, (most of which is replicated in Wycombe), are being tested together with an approach to make children use a larger proportion of their 'brain power'.
- 4.5 We can thus, not only raise the standards of achievement for this traditionally under achieving section of the community but help to promote good citizenship and arm the children with strategies to cope with the demands of an educational system, which is not designed for them. But, to which they have an equal entitlement and right of access.

5 **The Way forward - Adult learning**

- 5.1 The first teacher for a child is undoubtedly the mother. Yet we find that for one reason or another, females in the Pakistani community are behind the males as far as the command of the English language is concerned or the general educational levels achieved.
- 5.2 This may be due to cultural factors, which encourage the female to remain at home, while the male acts as the bread winner. The problem may be a little more acute because many of the young mothers have arrived from Pakistan, after marriage and therefore English would be a problem.
- 5.3 It is important therefore that some attention is paid to the mother in this equation. The mother needs to have her confidence boosted and this may be partly achieved through giving her the rudimentary command of the English language and understanding of how the British society functions.
- 5.4 A course on good citizenship for the mothers may be based on the level of knowledge required for someone applying for British nationality, which covers British history, culture, politics, economics and even basic things like the need for 'queuing'.
- 5.5 There is however, a need for funding to entice reluctant participants. A small daily allowance for attending the class of say between £20 and £30 per session may ensure that there is sufficient interest generated among the community for places on the course and for the enthusiasm to be retained. A certificate after completion of the course and a monetary reward should ensure that the interested remain interested.
- 5.6 For this section the ladies will have to have their own classes separate from the men to ensure that no one is prevented from taking up the classes for reasons of religion or culture.
- 5.7 The parents and ladies in particular can receive help about the ways to support their children with home work or how to survive a parents evening or how to identify possible areas of misconduct by the children such as being involved with anti social activities, drug abuse or interest towards extremist elements in society.
- 5.8 The mothers can be our 'champions in society' to bring about a natural cohesion and remove the dangers inherent in intolerant attitudes.
- 5.9 The mothers would thus be in the front line for ensuring a cohesive community, but they need help and assistance to achieve this. In this respect the MPA proposes to collaborate with organisations such as the Ethnic Minority Foundation. *-*

6 Resource implications

- 6.1 Whilst the Muslim community has the Mosques and may be able to offer volunteers for the task required, it may not be possible to achieve all that is being outlined by using the Mosque as the venue.
- 6.2 We therefore need venues, such as schools and local halls in community centres.
- 6.3 Above all we need some resources being made available by the central government to promote community cohesion.
- 6.4 The MPA should be able to offer initial leadership and help to monitor the scheme(s), but such initiatives need to be put on a more formal and professional footing, if the initiatives are to achieve the results we desire.
- 6.5 The County Council should also be able to find sufficient funds to help set up homework clubs and citizenship classes, if it is serious in removing the high disparity which exists in the levels of educational achievement between the mainstream and Pakistani origin children
- 6.6 Young professionals from among the Pakistani origin community also need to be tapped for help and to act as role models and where necessary they would need to be reimbursed for their time.
- 6.7 A Home work class of say 20 children (between 10 & 16 years of age) would require one 'qualified' teacher and a couple of teaching assistants. If the course runs for 3 hours, twice weekly for 8 weeks every term, then over a term we are looking for costs of employing one teacher and two teaching assistants for nearly 50 hours plus some cost towards the venue.
- 6.8 For the citizenship and English language course, again for the same duration, we would need a qualified person and a few assistants, some of whom can be volunteers. In this case the duration may be 4 hours per day, twice weekly for 8 weeks or 3 hours per day for three days a week. (64 - 72 hours per term). As the venue will have to be a room in a school or a hall, the venue costs have to be factored in.

Increasing educational opportunity is the challenge that we need to address.

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