

MUSLIM PARENTS ASSOCIATION - HIGH WYCOMBE

Minutes of the Special Meeting held on Wednesday, 15 March 2006, at Wycombe District Council Offices, at 7PM.

Present

Dr Katy Simmons (Chair of Governors Cressex School), Mrs Rashida Kazi (MPA Secretary & Teacher in Hertfordshire), Chauhdry M Shafique (Head of Equal Opportunities at BCUC & Vice Chairman of MPA and Cressex School governor), Sharafat Ali (MPA & Cressex School governor), Khuram Shahzad (Trainee Teacher) John Bajina (Sir William Ramsay School governor), Gaynor Comber (Head of Sir William Ramsay School), Abdul-Sallam JP, Teacher at Sir William Ramsay School), Abid Waheed, Grammar School Teacher in Slough & WISE), Cllr Glyn Galbraith (Highcrest Community School governor), Cllr Peter Morris (Disraeli School Governor), Sahibzada Ghulam Jeelani (Imam Jubilee Road Mosque High Wycombe) and Cllr Rafiq Raja, MPA Chairman and Highworth School governor)

Apologies for absence

Cllr Rickie Akhtar Hussein (MPA), Raja Amir Dad Khan (MPA & President Pakistan Forum HW) Amjad Iqbal (MPA/ Wycombe Islamic Society (WISE), Mohammed Khaliel (MPA and Sir William Ramsay School governor) Chauhdry Abdul Khaliq (Community activist), Linda Lewin (METAS) .

Talawat

Sahibzada Ghulam Jeelani offered a recitation of a passage from the Koran with translation in English.

Introduction

The chairman, Rafiq Raja, welcomed the gathering and asked those present to introduce themselves.

He thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and mentioned that, of necessity, the meeting has been restricted and perhaps more people could have been invited.

The meeting had been called to look at the educational Underachievement of Pakistani heritage pupils in Bucks schools. He mentioned that MPA has been aware of the fact that the Pakistani heritage school pupils in Bucks were underachieving and was thankful to John Bajina for having raised the issue with him. The chairman mentioned that MPA often have the welcome presence of Dr Katy Simmons at the MPA meetings and she has been assiduously informing us of the blatant disparity which exists between the mainstream white children's academic achievements and those from the Ethnic minority communities in general and the Pakistani origin children in particular.

The MPA has tried to pursue this topic but with no real result and the chairman was therefore hoping that the meeting tonight will not only try to understand the current position but will also consider an action plan, so that the 'invisible and silent' minority may get their voice.

He invited Dr Katy Simmons, Chair of governors at Cressex School and an Open University lecturer, who has carried out some research in this field to explain the basic issue.

Dr Simmons gave out a handout titled "**Educational Underachievement and children of minority ethnic heritage**". **And highlighted some aspects.** She mentioned that the statistics about Attainment by Ethnic Groups was out tomorrow, which may be helpful in giving further information.

Dr Simmons explained that 80% of the Cressex children came from ethnic background and the Pakistani heritage children accounted for roughly 60% of the total.

Bucks was rightly proud of having very high attainment standards: 5 passes at GCSE at grades A* -C, the 'Gold Standard of attainment'. However, this was not true for children of Pakistani heritage and there was a considerable gap between the performance of 'white' children and those from the Pakistani background.

Dr Simmons went on to mention that according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation, (IMDs) **poverty was defined as lack of education, skills and training**. Using these indices as criteria 48% of all Cressex children came from four areas that are identified as within the most deprived 10% in England. Furthermore, 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 nearly 40% of pupils live in areas identified as among the country's worst 20% in terms of **adult skills**.

She felt that the Gold standard of attainment acted as a passport to future education and employment opportunities and as the Pakistani origin children were coming out of school without the appropriate 'passports' then in the long term there was a serious danger of damage to the community cohesion and would not be resulting in desirable outcomes.

She explained that the authorities appeared not to be interested in the plight of these children as their parents and representatives were not vocal or articulate enough to make the LEA (Local Education Authority) listen to their views and to develop remedial action. Consequently the children had become 'invisible' and unfortunately she felt that anyone, including herself, who speaks on these children's behalf becomes invisible as well.

She said that studies have been carried out in Bradford and Luton and we could pick up the basic information without too much difficulty. **She asked for BCC to commission a similar study in High Wycombe.**

The MPA, she felt, had to become the champion of the underprivileged, the invisible and silent minority, so that these children could have a voice.

She also gave information about the difficulties of Cressex, which had many defects as far as the building was concerned and the school's attempt to attain an Academy status has been ignored by the LEA. The selective system in Bucks resulted in unacceptable impact on the education provided by upper schools and as a result it was potentially building up difficulties because there would be an under educated and under skilled children. Nevertheless, selection was part of the local set up and our main gripe was about the lack of adequate funding for schools such as Cressex.

She also referred to a letter written to BCC by the CRE, at her behest, but the letter appears not to have been answered by BCC to date (the CRE has apparently not followed it up).

Following Dr Simmons' contribution a wide ranging discussion took place and it was agreed that there was a serious problem and the meeting then also looked at some possible means of finding a solution to the gap (which is even bigger between boys of Pakistani heritage and their white peers) between the educational achievements of Pakistani origin pupils and the pupils in the mainstream.

Some of the suggestions are listed below:

- 1 How do we reach the parents and raise awareness of the issue?
- 2 We need a sustained intervention programme, which needed to be properly managed and resourced.
- 3 The intervention needs to be at the Primary sector, so that the foundations are strong to start off with.
- 4 We needed to engage parents and improve their confidence in helping their children with homework, attending parent's evenings, be able to read and understand the subtleties of the words used in school reports.
- 5 Make parents aware of the problems caused by extended holidays during term time.
- 6 A holistic approach was needed: use grandparents as well in raising educational standards.
- 7 Studies carried out around the country need to be reviewed.
- 8 Find mentors and role models within the community. Mentoring and Role models to be explored aggressively.
- 9 Fight low expectations and economic deprivation.

- 10 Use the statutory landscape/legislation for example the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, which demands promotion equality and ask the LA to prove that it is meeting the requirements of the ACT.
- 11 Mosques to be asked to help facilitate dissemination of information.
- 12 MPA to broaden its Committee structure, so that non Muslims could participate.
- 13 Bucks' education kite was flying very high and we, at least, needed to hang on to the kite's tails.
- 14 Police are a tremendous ally in the fight against substance abuse and crime fighting, therefore they may consider helping to resource homework clubs.
- 15 The government apparently matches funds (pound for pound) a school can raise for after school club activity in schools.
- 16 Involve the local Imams, the REC, METAS and the CRE.
- 17 Help children with home work; like WISE (Wycombe Islamic Society & Education) undertakes and as happens at some Mosques.
- 18 MPA should become the champion of the invisible and voiceless school children and parents of High Wycombe.
- 19 MPA should take the lead in a campaign to INFORM, GUIDE & EMPOWER.
- 20 Challenge, empower, change was another idea.
- 21 Organise training workshops for parents.
- 22 Organise a seminar to involve decision makers.

The meeting closed at 9PM; the chairman summarised the main areas for the action plan and thanked all participants.

Action plan

- 1 Prepare minutes of the meeting and circulate these to MPA core membership and friends.
- 2 Prepare letters for BCC and copy to all BCC Councillors and WDC Councillors: at least 15 wore both hats.
- 3 A letter to go to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills.
- 4 Dr Simmons to make the CRE letter available, which could form the basis of a campaign, where parents write in to ask why our children are being neglected and why the CRE letter has not been answered.
- 5 Issue a newsletter with information about the plight of upper schools in HW and distribute it to the people of HW.
- 6 Organise Workshops for parents to give practical advice and assistance, this year.
- 7 Organise a Seminar/workshops involving schools, governors, councillors and other decision makers in the autumn.
- 8 Look at potential areas for attracting funds for our campaign.