

MUSLIM PARENTS ASSOCIATION - HIGH WYCOMBE

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Minutes of the meeting held at Highworth Combined School on Thursday 21st September 2006, between the MPA and BCC – Education Department.

Present: Rafiq Raja, C.M Shafique, Khalil Ahmed Khan, Riaz Ahmed, Mohammed Hanif, Zahid Jawed, John Bajina, Dr Katy Simmons, Suma Din and Amjad Iqbal.

Guests: Louise Goll (Divisional Director, Achievement & Learning at BCC), Yvette Thomas (County Adviser – Diversity), Nigel Cook (Manager of METAS BCC), Bill Moore (Healthy Schools)

1 Welcome and introductions; the Chairman welcomed all present, and attendees introduced themselves.

2 Talawat of Qur'an – A short passage from the Holy Qur'an was recited by Mohammed Hanif.

3 Resume of discussions which took place with Sue Imbriano on 24 July.

The Chairman recapped various points raised at the meeting with Mrs Imbriano on 24 July and summarised the MPA's commitment to raising standards for BME children, (especially the issue of underachievement, at GCSE level by Pakistani origin pupils) through cooperation with schools and the Education Department at BCC. He repeated the need to look at the real issues beneath figures and data and then find some workable solutions.

4 County's proposals for elimination of the significant gap in levels of achievement – the main factors seen by BCC

Nigel Cook emphasised a range of long term strategies which were needed to address the issues. Louise Goll led the discussion about the need for a higher level of action which is required to solve the current problems. Ms Goll shared information about the Joint Area Review (JAR) which is an inspection of what the BCC does with its partner agencies. This inspection covers areas that OFSTED cover as well as looking at social, health and Adult Learning etc, as 'every child' mattered and needed a safe environment to learn.

Particular focus is paid on the following areas, as the target areas in the Every Child Matters agenda:

- Children in communities that are 'at risk of lower outcomes'
- The extent of enjoyment and attendance in school
- Children's ability to make a positive contribution to the community
- The economic well being of each child when they've left school – opportunities
- The focus groups who are Pakistani, Afro Caribbean, Working Class English boys

Ms Goll stated that the self evaluation carried out by BCC, that there was much work to be done in these target areas, was confirmed by the Inspection report. She suggested a number of ways forward

- More emphasis on target setting and individual pupil progress.
- Personalisation of learning (asking whether the school is organised to allow personalised learning, through mentors and others at the community level).
- Schools need to be challenged in a supportive manner – asking questions at all levels; concerning teachers, governors and pupils.

- As change is entwined with the attitudes and thus motivation and level of expectation of those providing the various services was crucial to raising standards.

A variety of comments and questions were raised in relation to the points above:

Chauhdry Shafique found these measures encouraging and reinforced concerns Yvette had previously highlighted. He welcomed the understanding and acknowledgment of the underachievement issue.

Dr Katy Simmons asked whether, as a result of the recognition of the underachievement, the funding model would be revisited. Ms Goll responded that additional funding is very unlikely, that it is more likely this will be addressed by more effectively targeting existing resources, shifting resources and using certain grants at the discretion of BCC. Ms Goll felt that funding would be required for mentors; homework clubs, partnerships with the community etc.

Bill Moore endorsed the need for sharing good practice and disseminating ideas between schools.

Monitoring progress

Mr Hanif asked what systems were in place to monitor progress.

In reply Yvette Thomas explained that there are advisors and Link Consultants attached to EM grants. Their role is to monitor the achievement of EM children. This is in conjunction with staff at any given school and is conducted on the good will of the staff. There are also national strategies in place to monitor progress, such as the EAL project where there were half term meetings to monitor specific targets.

Nigel Cook added an example of the Learning Mentors initiative which proved to be most effective which was initiated by Heads of schools. However he warned of the danger of having too many initiatives which may be disjointed.

5 The County's timescale

Khalil Ahmed Khan asked about any real results in narrowing the gap between the achievement of BME children and the rest of the County. Yvette Thomas answered there was a narrowing of the gap. She felt one had to acknowledge that some children are coming from an EAL starting point as young learners. There was a discussion around EAL – some group members felt that sometimes undue focus on this issue obscured other significant issues.

Louise Goll added that the reason for the lack of progress in some areas was due to incomplete solutions to various problems. She reiterated that the 'Personalised Learning Agenda' would provide a model of excellence to build strategies around.

John Bajina asked Ms Goll about the timescale for removing the gap, which was bit of a blight on an otherwise excellent education authority. He viewed the status quo of a 40% differential as totally unacceptable. He asked if there would be a clear mandate for this issue, and that he looked forward to the Joint Area Report to be published in December. Bill Moore, in reply confirmed that this would be a mandate of top priority. Ms Goll said that raised targets would need to be followed by resource re-alignment

6 Cressex School – an update

Dr Simmons gave a brief update on the success of the Cressex School Campaign. BCC had been allocated funding from central government, where each identified county would be able to build a new secondary school and Bucks has chosen Cressex to be that school in Bucks, although there had been other candidates for the funds. She praised the joint effort of the community in the public meetings towards this great outcome for the school and all associated. All present very much hoped that the county would not now deviate from the announcement so made.

7 The recent events in High Wycombe and the effect on schools.

Rafiq Raja distributed the statement of the MPA which has been circulated to schools and Head Teachers. According to his monitoring of the situation the County's proactive role in advising schools as how to handle the situation was successful and to his knowledge no unpleasant incidents have taken place in any High Wycombe school.

Zahid Jawed informed the meeting of various initiatives for working with the community including road shows; community services etc. He hoped there will be opportunities to work with BCC on this platform.

8 Motivation of Parents to get involved

Khalil Ahmed Khan asked the guests about the general consensus of parents feeling disenfranchised. He asked the whether BCC have any initiatives for parents.

Yvette Thomas replied that the Recruitment and Retention body in Schools Improvement Service recognised the need for more partnerships between teachers who come from within the community to solve this issue of distanced parents and children. She encouraged the recruitment of BME teachers as children and their parents have responded positively when someone from within the community is working in schools.

She suggested, for example, that the many of the Asian women working as Learning Assistants could go further up the ladder by gaining higher qualifications and go into teaching.

Mrs Thomas advocated challenging schools in a supportive manner, on what they have done for achievement. Effective schools, she added, have a strong ethos of respecting the teacher and good relationships with parents.

Bill Moore commented on the Local Authority needing to look at officers at higher management in a more creative way. He suggested INSETs where role models are brought into schools; making the workforce the whole community.

Mr Shafique raised the issue about the lack of parent partnership as well as the point about sharing good practice, which he saw as difficult to share between the gulf of Grammar and Upper schools. The gap between these types of school is what he envisaged required working upon.

Various strategies were discussed including the FLLN courses whereby parents attend courses in their children's school and become familiar with the setting; gaining confidence to come into school more regularly.

9 Ramadan

The chairman advised the meeting that the fasting month of Ramadan in the Islamic calendar was to start within a week and wondered whether schools needed to be offered appropriate advice in dealing with children who might be fasting.

Yvette Thomas informed that the Ramadan guidelines have gone to all schools. She also raised the issue of boys, who ostensibly leave home to take part in evening prayers in the mosque, but ended up not going in the Mosque, but using their time to create issues of anti social behaviour. She praised the Youth community work going on at the Green St Centre.

Zahid Jawed and Rafiq Raja suggested that these issues should be raised with Imams in the form of a letter to bring these points to their attention, although the problem was known to the Mosques and announcements were often made for parents to keep an eye on their children.

11 Date of the next meeting

Both sides felt that this was a useful platform for informed exchanges and that we should continue to meet at regular intervals. The date of the next meeting was agreed to be Monday 18 December 2006, at 7p.m. The venue to be ascertained by the chairman. The focus of the meeting will be the Joint Area Review, which will then be in the public domain.

The chairman thanked everyone for attending and Highworth Combined School for the hospitality. He was very proud of the fact that he has been a member of the school's governing body since the mid 1980s and that the school has made a lot of progress in all directions, since amalgamation in 1995.

The meeting ended 9.40 pm having started at 7.15pm.