

MPA Seminar on Motivation of parents and children

A very interesting and informative seminar was held on Sunday, 9 October 2011 at Cressex School, High Wycombe, from 11AM to 1.15PM.

There were about 30 people present plus our three young doctor guests from London and included representatives from PFCACH (Parents Forum for Children of African & Caribbean Heritage – in High Wycombe).

Those present were very impressed by Dr Claire Lemer (a paediatrician in a London hospital) her colleagues Dr Shama Usmani and Dr Annas Ul Turabi, who were described as not just inspiring but 'awe inspiring'.

If you were not there you missed a really useful dialogue among people of a very high calibre.

Dr Claire Lemer, (despite a soar throat for having picked up a bug from one of her young patients) related her own family's story, where her grandfather (a refugee from Poland in the 1930's) did not speak English, but her grandmother saw the importance of education and as a result the next generation were imbued with the importance of education and in turn her siblings have been supported by her parents as her family had high expectations of all their children.

Dr Shama Usmani also mentioned the role of her parents in encouraging her and her siblings to do the best they could, whilst Dr Annas Ul Turabi had a very interesting and powerful story to tell. His parents came from the Sudan in the 1970's, because his father was studying for a PhD in Leeds, (It was his 'uneducated' grandfather's vision to have his son educated in the first place which sent Annas' father to England) whilst his mother did not have a good command of the English language. He was brought up in a council estate, went to a Grammar school and obtained his degree from Oxford and is now based in Cambridge with a brilliant medical career in front of him.

The following points were made in the seminar:

- 1 The support from home for a child was the key. Children should be encouraged and nurtured.
- 2 The families, teachers and all stakeholders needed to have high expectations of all children; schools belong to us!
- 3 The demand of the school had to be balanced against the needs of the child.
- 4 No school was interested in failing a child.

- 5 The schools needed to have the right ethos and right leadership in place to have high expectations of all children.
- 6 Everyone should set their own standards and not be driven by other people's expectations (or lack of any) for them.
- 7 To Dr Turabi Faith and Education were very important.
- 8 Children should be encouraged to read books, from an early age.
- 9 The need was expressed that children should be exposed to 'ideas'.
- 10 Parents should take their children to the British museum and Kew Gardens among other places, to broaden their horizons.
- 11 Whilst it was satisfying to have a child admitted to a selective school and succeed, but parents should have realistic aspirations for their children and not to expect every child to be a suitable candidate for the Grammar School.
- 12 Parents should compare the suitability of vocational courses against academic courses.
- 13 Children not able to get into a selective school should not be treated as failures.
- 14 The culture at home should be praising children for their successes, otherwise children can have low self esteem as 'lower than average self esteem' does not help.
- 15 Children should be provided facilities to do their home work.

There was a good discussion about the process of applying for university places especially at Oxbridge. It was Dr Turabi's view that apart from academic excellence the admissions tutors were also looking for someone who had more than academic qualifications to his/her name and would not only have a passion for the subject but be 'fun to teach'. The admission tutors were looking for people with passion for a subject and intellectual curiosity. This is why private schools do well in getting their pupils to universities and Oxbridge in particular. Because they give their pupils not just academic success but extra curricular activities as well, to go on the application forms.

It was felt that in due course we should be able to organise meetings for university applicants so that they can learn all the useful points about completing an application forms.

One speaker felt that all people should have equal access to opportunities. He thought many institutions and structures in place were designed to justify exploitation of other people and their resources and we should be aware of that, when looking at say the book lists in school libraries.

Some discussion was also devoted to children's centres, graduate unemployment, role of parents and the need for role models.

It is important to take one or two points from the above list and have them studied further and then we need to explore the ways and means of putting them into practice. So friends the real work starts now.

The seminar ended at 1.15PM, after a very generous vote of thanks from Chauhdry Shafique. Cressex School was prised for having wonderful facilities for such meetings.

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Colleagues in this day and age, with the shrinking economy, it has become even more important for all children (our future) to be properly equipped with educational tools so that they do not fall behind in securing training, further education and well paid jobs in the future.

Unfortunately, we seem to be sleep walking and have not yet realised that our children are underachieving at school, by about 25%, when comparing the GCSE passes at grades A* to C in five subjects including Maths and English. The 2011 results are a little better but the gap between the Pakistani origin and mainstream pupils remains unchanged, whilst there is also a big difference in the results of boys and girls; the boys in particular are in need of motivation and role models.

The MPA has been concerned for some time about underachievement and has been instrumental in getting the (Bucks) Education Authority to discuss the reasons for this state of affairs and whilst there are certain things the education authority, schools and teachers can do to improve this situation (such as having high expectations of all children and providing supplementary assistance to borderline pupils), the MPA believes that the parents and children and other members of the Pakistani origin community can also play their part in reducing this chasm.

The MPA knows that it needs to liaise with all the Stakeholders in High Wycombe and we need the help of the people who can see the problem and have something to offer to make a difference.

It is no secret that we need to mobilise our community as almost all the interested statutory authorities feel that the Muslim/Pakistani community needs to take advantage of the opportunities for improvement in all spheres especially in the field of education. More importantly they are prepared to help us in our work as much as they can. It is incumbent upon us therefore, to 'cease the initiative' and make a difference. Working together with all the talent we have in our ranks we should be making a difference and I therefore, look forward to your cooperation. As Masud from Chesham remarked 'We

have many fronts to confront' and it can be achieved so much faster and with your help.

Rafiq Raja
09.10.2011

Please remember:

- 1 To get in touch with the MPA if you have any ideas about reducing the achievement gap.
- 2 To speak to young professionals and invite them to future events.
- 3 We have Taleem Ki Duniya/The World of Education programme on Awaaz Radio (107.4FM) every Saturday, from 4 to 6PM until Christmas and share your success stories and share good practices as well as concerns.
- 4 The joint conference for Black and Ethnic Minority parents is being organized by the MPA & PFCACH on Saturday, 10 December 2011, at Cressex School in the afternoon, for which we need all your friends to attend. **However, to do so you will need to apply for a free ticket; details to follow.**
- 5 To advise the MPA of the email addresses of school governors and teachers from the Muslim community, or other interested people who wish to join us in our work.
- 6 That children only get one chance to have a go at a better future; please join us and make a difference.

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