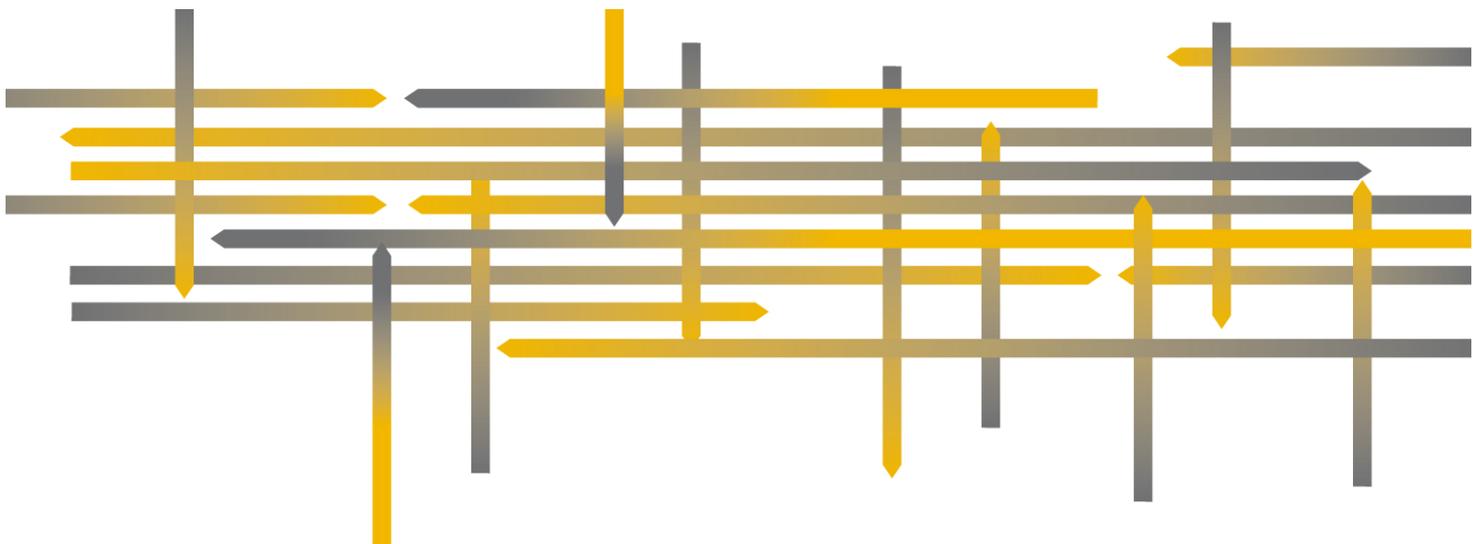


## NEWLY ARRIVED MIGRANT AND REFUGEE CHILDREN IN THE BRITISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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**Action for Social Integration (AFSI) is a registered charity that aims to relieve poverty and prevent social exclusion and to advance social and cultural integration, social justice, inclusion, equality & diversity and to eliminate prejudice, stereotype and discrimination in relation to asylum seekers, refugees and minority ethnic communities from all ethnic backgrounds. AFSI provides advice, guidance and information to children and young people from disadvantaged families and lone parents, mainly black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. The charity works with families and schools to fight against child poverty, and to raise education attainment of school children from BME communities.**

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## **Introduction**

In 2010 the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at Middlesex University was commissioned by Action for Social Integration to produce a guide to the British Educational System for BME parents (including newly arrived migrants and refugees). In preparing the guidebook, the research team undertook background research to identify changing migratory and demographic patterns and to explore the key issues facing BME and newly arrived parents in relation to schooling. The following research methods were undertaken:

1. Review of demographic data on BME parents and children to identify the main groups, languages and potential issues.
2. A review of guidebooks and other information resources already available to parents.
3. Interviews with parents and a range of key informants, including teachers and education experts within local authorities.
4. Designing a guide book based on fieldwork and collection of information about the school system.

The guidebook aims to provide information to help parents understand better the UK educational system, highlighting what may be different from those of other countries in the world and discussing issues such as language support and parents' involvement.

This executive summary presents some of the key findings emerging from our background research. A more detailed research report is also available through AFSI and the SPRC.

## Background: the increasing diversity of pupils in England

In January 2010 there were around 6.5 million pupils in maintained primary and secondary schools in England. Of these, over 1.5 million were of **'minority ethnic' origin** – i.e. their ethnic group has been classified as other than White British (see table below). A decade ago minority ethnic pupils made up a fifth of the school population, while in 2004 they were 18%. They now represent about 24% of the pupils in England and in particular 25.5% of those in maintained primary schools and 21.4% of those in state-funded secondary schools.

**School Census 2010 - Primary and Secondary Schools, Minority Ethnic (ME) Pupils**

	England	London	Inner London	Outer London
<b>All pupils</b>	6,479,050	939,180	313,470	625,710
<b>ME</b>	1,518,990	605,380	247,580	357,790
<b>ME %</b>	23.44%	64.46%	78.98%	57.18%

In London the proportion is even higher – 66.7% in primary and 62.1% in secondary schools – and varies significantly across the boroughs. The local authority with the highest proportion of minority ethnic pupils in its primary schools is Newham (91.0%), followed by Brent (88.3%), Tower Hamlets (87.6%) and Hackney (85.4%). In terms of proportion of minority ethnic pupils in secondary schools, the top 4 local authorities are Newham (88.0%), Tower Hamlets (85.8%), Lambeth (82.5%) and Westminster (82.2%).

This ethnic diversity in the population is partially reflected among the teaching staff: in 2004 9% of teachers in England were from a minority ethnic background, in London this figure raises to 31% (source: DES 2005).

The Ethnic Categories used in the School Census are usually more detailed than the standard, Census-like classification. In London schools, the largest groups are Black (21%, of which almost two thirds are Black African) and Asians (19%, including Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi), but there is also a large number (10.5%) of 'White other than British', including Irish, Irish Travellers, Roma and other European groups.

The data on pupils' **first language** offer further insights on the diversity of schools population, with major implications on the teaching and learning environment. Overall, there are 896,230 pupils in English primary and secondary schools whose first language is known or believed to be other than English, almost 14% of the total. In London alone, pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) are more than 380,000, 40.6% of the total. However, whilst in London this proportion has been relatively stable in the last few years, for the country as a whole it has increased by almost a third from 2004, when EAL pupils were just 10% of the total. This indicates the extent to which new migrants, and migrant families in particular, have scattered across the country much more than in the past. For some schools, this has meant dealing with ethnically and linguistically diverse classes for the first time. According to the latest available data (2010), the main language groups in English schools included Urdu (96,610), Panjabi (86,030), Bengali (60,980) and Polish (40,700).

## Methods

The fieldwork was conducted between May – July 2010. Information about the research and an invitation to participate were sent to Ethnic Minority Achievement (EMA) teams in all London boroughs using our existing networks. In addition, the study was widely promoted at a conference held at Middlesex University (May 2010) which was attended by EMA consultants and teachers from across London and the South East. As a result telephone interviews were carried out with six EMA specialists. Telephone interviews were also conducted with staff from a range of primary and secondary schools. These included teachers, a deputy head, an Extended Schools Coordinator and an EAL coordinator. In total, **thirteen** key informants were interviewed from eight London boroughs (Barnet, Brent, Camden, Ealing, Enfield, Hackney, Lambeth and Southwark). We also interviewed members of an Afghani community organisation and a BME voluntary sector group.

Face to face interviews were carried out with **ten parents** from a diverse range of ethnic groups including: Afghani, Albanian, El Salvadorian, Indian, Iraqi, Nigerian and Black-British. This is not intended to be a representative sample, but rather a diverse selection of case studies, providing some interesting insights into the issues faced by BME parents. Due to constraints of time and budget it was not possible to conduct any focus groups with parents. In addition, we have previously facilitated focus groups with Somali and Afghani mothers in Barnet and where appropriate we also draw on those research findings (Ryan et al, 2010). We have also drawn on research we previously carried out on Polish Children in London Primary schools for which we interviewed teachers and parents in four London boroughs (Sales et al, 2008).

## Summary of key Findings

1. **Changing demography:** While some schools have a good deal of experience working with BME groups, there is a need to keep pace with the changing make up of those groups. The demographic evidence presented in this report illustrates that the groups constituting BME are under going significant change across many London boroughs. Previous waves of migrants tended to cluster in specific areas, education authorities built up particular skills and expertise in responding to the needs of specific ethnic communities. However, newly arrived migrants and refugees tend to be spatially dispersed. This means that some schools now have to respond to diverse populations of pupils for the first time. More generally, there now tends to be a wider range of languages spoken within schools throughout the UK.
2. **Key Obstacles Facing Newly Arrived Pupils:** Our interviews with parents, teachers, EMA experts and community organisations identified the following areas:
  - Language is the most obvious obstacle facing newly arrived pupils. While they may pick up spoken English relatively quickly, development of higher order fluency and an advanced level of understanding may take some time and require on-going language support.

- Adjusting to a new system: Depending on their age, children may have had experiences of a very different educational system and it may take time to adjust to the British schooling environment.
  - Curriculum: The British curriculum emphasises learning through creativity, especially in primary schools, and this may be unfamiliar to children coming from different educational systems.
  - Classroom: the layout of classrooms, in tables rather than in rows of desks, may be new and unfamiliar.
  - Discipline: Children coming from educational systems where physical discipline is enforced may find the style of discipline in British schools confusing. The apparent informality of relationships between pupils and teachers may take time to get used to.
  - Socio-economic disadvantage: Newly arrived pupils, especially those from refugee backgrounds, may have to cope not only with trauma, loss of loved ones, a new and unfamiliar environment, but also financial uncertainty, temporary and insecure accommodation. This economic disadvantage may impact on their learning in varied ways.
  - Unaccompanied minors: we found evidence that some unaccompanied minors have disrupted education, limited English, and insecure migration status. Many are facing deportation back to their country of origin.
  - Making new friends: Language barriers may inhibit new friendships and in some cases children may stay within close knit groups of co-ethnics.
  - Racism: different groups of pupils may face racism. Children may be confronted by a range of negative stereotypes from other pupils, parents and even some teachers. Experiences of racism and xenophobia are not limited to Black pupils but may also be a problem for White, Eastern European children, especially in the context of economic recession.
3. **Pupils from more established BME backgrounds:** While this report has focused largely on newly arrived migrants and refugees, it was also noted that some established ethnic minority communities continue to experience lower educational attainment. Some established communities also face economic and social disadvantage. The need for on-going support to these groups should not be lost sight of.
  4. **The Benefits that migrant and refugee children bring to schools:** all the participants in this study were very positive about the benefits that newly arrived children bring to schools. Cultural and linguistic diversity enriches the whole school.
  5. **Challenges facing schools:** While our key informants were positive about the benefits of diversity within schools they also identified on-going challenges facing schools, especially in terms of resources:

- Resources: The on-going arrival of new children, not just at the start of term but throughout the whole year, can place high demands on class teachers. Many class teachers do not have specialised training in language teaching. While some schools do have specialist teams of EAL and EMA staff, in many schools there is an expectation that this work will be taken up within classrooms by ordinary teachers. In addition, the cost of translation services can be extremely high and schools may see computer software packages as a more affordable option.
  - Transitory populations: migrant families may move around in pursuit of employment, or in the case of refugee families may be moved between different temporary accommodation. This means that children change schools which can delay the settling in process.
  - Language barriers may delay the diagnosis of special educational needs (SEN) in some children. This may be exacerbated in some cases by stigma about special needs within some communities. Newly arrived parents may be reluctant to acknowledge that their child has SENs.
6. **Involving Parents:** most of the parents we interviewed were very positive about the efforts made by schools to welcome their children and involve them as parents. It was suggested, however, that events should not only be organised during the working day as this prohibits many parents from attending.
  7. **Working with community organisations:** while some teachers had found it difficult to encourage newly arrived parents to attend school events, it appeared that working through community organisations was a good way of communicating with and engaging parents. Some schools had developed good partnerships with community organisations and this also proved useful in addressing any potential areas of misunderstanding between school and parents.
  8. **Some challenges facing newly arrived parents:** Newly arrived parents are a very diverse group with different needs and experiences. However, there is evidence to suggest that some groups face specific obstacles and challenges. Some of the main problems identified in this research were: insecure migration status, especially among asylum seekers, language barriers, social isolation and socio-economic disadvantage. Some migrant parents may have also different expectations about the ways and the extent to which parents are involved in schools.
  9. **Information for Parents on the British Educational System:** in general, we found that most parents tend to rely on family and friends for information about schools. Although there is a huge quantity of information material available from local authorities, for example, it seems that some of the more disadvantaged groups are not accessing these resources. The key problem does not appear to be an absence of information but a lack of straight forward easily accessible information in user friendly format. All our participants agreed that parents need very basic information:

- How the system works – admission processes, the different types of schools, age at which children start school, the structure of the school day, class room lay out, uniforms, school dinners, attendance, holiday periods, homework, etc.
- Expectations – depending on their country of origin, parents may have very different expectations about schooling, discipline, assessment, progression from year to year, relationship with teachers, etc. There is a need to clearly set out and explain the policies and processes involved in the British educational system. Translating words may not be enough, it would be useful to translate across systems so that parents can understand the differences between the British and their own educational system.
- Religious Practices – parents need to know that, for example, they have the right to take children out of school for religious holidays and to ask that Halal food be provided for school dinners.
- Transfer to secondary school – we found a lot of confusion among parents relating to the process of secondary school allocation. This is a complex and potentially daunting process for all parents, especially in areas where schools are over-subscribed. There is a need for very clear and straight forward information.
- Subject choices – especially at secondary school level, parents need information about what subjects are available, what these involve and which subjects are necessary for future study/ career pathways.
- Signposting – no one source of information can tell parents everything they need to know. So signposting is necessary which can alert parents to where they can go to find out additional information. Community organisations may be well placed to advise and support parents, providing translation where necessary. There is an opportunity here for schools and community organisations to work more closely together.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Demographic data: the categories used in collecting demographic data need to be more carefully defined so as to capture the true diversity of new migrants and changing school populations.
2. Language teaching: policy makers need to pay more attention to teachers' experiences of delivering EAL training in large, mixed ability classes so that effective policies can be developed based on robust evidence from schools. Furthermore, specific training on EAL teaching needs to be incorporated into teacher education programmes, including both core programmes and specialist qualifications.
3. Information on schools: The key problem does not appear to be a lack of information but rather a confusing array of different kinds of information which may not be easily accessible to parents. Migrant parents, especially those newly arrived in Britain, require very basic information in user friendly format.

4. Whole School Policy: welcoming and supporting newly arrived children should involve whole school policy and practice and should not be left to the initiative of individual classroom teacher. Examples of good practice should be shared across schools. Local authority specialists and resources have a vital role to play here
5. Induction process: an effective induction process is crucial in building relations between school, parents and child. This is an opportunity to share expectations and aspirations and avoid future misunderstandings.
6. Base line assessment: upon admission an initial base line assessment in an appropriate language should be conducted where possible. Examples of good practice in this area should be shared between schools.
7. Involving parents: models of good practice can be developed and shared across schools and boroughs. Some schools have worked well with community organisations in order to enhance parental engagement and involvement.
8. Parents as resources: parents can be encouraged by teachers and liaison teams to contribute in positive ways to the life of the school. There is an opportunity to value the cultural and practical resources of the parents.
9. Partnership with community organisations: The extended school programme offers an opportunity to develop good relationships with community organisations. Models of good practice can be rolled out and shared across educational authorities.
10. Combating Racism: schools need to be sensitive to the varied forms that racism may take. The diversity of newly arrived migrant children and their dispersal throughout the country, may result in new forms of racism which challenge simplistic Black/ white dichotomies.
11. BME groups: although this work has focused largely on newly arrived migrants, it is apparent that some traditional BME groups continue to experience educational disadvantage. It is important that schools and policy makers do not overlook on-going issues of disaffection and low educational attainment.
12. Monitoring attainment: there is a need for data sharing across schools and local authorities so that specific patterns of underachievement or indeed educational success can be monitored and studied.
13. Parents learning English: schools have an important role to play in facilitating English language learning opportunities for parents, for example in providing information about available classes and allow the use of their facilities and resources, in partnership with community groups, for this purpose. .
14. Children as translators: every effort should be made by schools and local education authorities to avoid relying upon children as language brokers particularly when the children themselves are the subject of the conversations.

15. Identifying SEN: more sensitive work is needed to overcome the residual stigma around SEN in some communities. Home School Liaison teams can work with families and schools to support SEN children. The identification of SEN in children whose first language is not English can be speeded up by the involvement of bi-lingual staff and the translation of tests into appropriate languages.
16. Liaison between local authority departments: More liaison is needed between Housing and Educational departments within and across boroughs to avoid disruption to schooling when a family is being rehoused.