



**Office for Standards
in Education**

Achievement of Bangladeshi heritage pupils

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Introduction

'My family left Bangladesh because they wanted me, my brothers and sisters to have a good education. They wanted us to have a variety of choices of jobs. They wanted us to have good jobs and the jobs that we wanted. My ambition is to be a lawyer.'

The survey

1. The purpose of this small-scale survey was to explore the educational experience of Bangladeshi pupils in English schools. In carrying out the survey, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) examined available data. They visited nine secondary schools, details of which are given in annex A. The schools were chosen to reflect schools of different types in the local education authorities (LEAs) which have relatively high numbers of Bangladeshi pupils. The proportion of Bangladeshi pupils in the schools ranged from 11% to 59%. In their visits, HMI sought the views of pupils, parents, teachers and members of Bangladeshi communities.

Bangladeshi communities in England

2. Despite being the most recently settled of the major South Asian communities, Bangladeshi communities in England are well established. Migration in significant numbers first took place in the 1960s. Most Bangladeshis in England come from the rural Sylheti region. They have a somewhat younger age profile than other South Asian communities in England. Most are Muslim.

3. The first Bangladeshi men arrived in the United Kingdom alone, and were then joined by their teenage sons, followed by wives and younger children. Bangladeshi children, therefore, came into British schools later than the main period of adult migration. The men who came first worked predominantly in clothing and restaurant trades. This pattern has continued, with many Bangladeshi families running and working in small textile and catering firms.

4. Most Bangladeshis in England speak Sylheti, which is a distinctive dialect of Bengali, the main written language used for administration and other purposes in Bangladesh. Bangladeshi parents value this linguistic heritage and encourage their children to learn Bengali. In the home, families often use a combination of languages – Sylheti, Bengali and English. English tends to be spoken between brothers and sisters.

5. People of Bangladeshi heritage make up around 0.5% of England's population. Many have settled in inner-city areas in the north-west and the Midlands, but by far the largest number are in Tower Hamlets in London, where they constitute over a quarter of the population. The majority of pupils are in schools in eight LEAs. The proportion of Bangladeshi pupils in these LEAs' schools ranges from 6% to just over 15%, the exception being Tower Hamlets, where over half the pupils are of Bangladeshi heritage.

Distribution of Bangladeshi pupils in maintained secondary schools

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6. The disadvantages faced by Bangladeshi communities in terms of housing, employment, health and education do not differ in nature, but in degree, from those faced by other migrant minority ethnic groups. The most recent surveys show that some 68% of Bangladeshis live in low-income, often overcrowded households that rely more on benefits than any other group. Just over 40% of Bangladeshi men under 25 years of age are unemployed, compared with 12% of young white men. People of Bangladeshi heritage are at higher risk of being victims of racially motivated incidents than most other minority ethnic groups. They are four times more likely than others to describe their health as 'bad' or 'very bad'. Many of these difficulties persist and, when combined with a lack of command of English, can restrict access to health and social services and have a negative impact on educational achievement.

7. Free school meals (FSM) data offer an indicator of deprivation. Bangladeshi pupils have the highest eligibility for FSM at each key stage compared with other groups. Between Key Stage 1 and 2, 52% of Bangladeshi pupils are eligible for FSM. The figure rises to 62% in Key Stage 3 and 4.

8. Despite their often limited educational experience and qualifications, Bangladeshi parents generally have high aspirations for their children and see educational achievement as a means to better job opportunities and greater social

status. Some improving trends are discernible in Bangladeshi communities, with growing evidence of higher educational achievement and success in business and professional careers.

Main findings

- Compared with all pupils nationally, Bangladeshi pupils have below average attainment at the end of each key stage, but achievement is improving, especially among Bangladeshi girls.
- The schools visited use a range of strategies to meet the needs of their pupils, including those of Bangladeshi heritage, and are having increasing success through them.
- Careful analysis of data to assess and track pupils' progress, close observation of learning in class and full discussion with pupils are among the keys to effective action. Support to improve spoken and written English is critical in raising the achievement of Bangladeshi pupils at all stages.
- Schools' knowledge of Bangladeshi culture and religion, reflected in modifications of the curriculum and in other ways, is much appreciated by pupils and parents and helps them to feel involved in the life of the school.
- The great majority of pupils interviewed in this survey value school and are keen to do well. They appreciate their teachers' efforts on their behalf, against a background in which racist behaviour and criminality outside school can threaten their security and well-being.
- Bangladeshi teachers and other bilingual staff provide good support for pupils and help to make valuable links with families and the wider community.
- Out-of-school classes and other activities funded by Excellence in Cities or other schemes are an important element in schools' efforts to boost achievement. Poor take-up by pupils in some schools lessens their impact.
- Many of the Bangladeshi parents interviewed in this survey are very ambitious for their children. They appreciate the advantages that education can bring and the opportunity it gives their children to play a full part in a diverse society. They give strong support to their children, although the nature of that support is sometimes limited by lack of knowledge of the education service and lack of command of English. Conflicting family priorities mean that not all young people feel able or encouraged to take advantage of the educational opportunities available.

Recommendations

- To help raise the achievement of Bangladeshi pupils, schools should ensure that:
 - the school ethos is one that recognises and celebrates diversity and takes a firm stand on racism
 - analysis of data on pupils' performance is used to track their progress and plan action to meet their needs

- a range of strategies is used to improve the English language skills of pupils at different levels
- bilingual staff are effectively used to build links between schools and Bangladeshi families
- aspects of the cultural heritage of Bangladeshi pupils are reflected in the curriculum
- take-up by Bangladeshi pupils of support classes and other extra-curricular activities is monitored and increased
- further steps are taken to encourage Bangladeshi parents to become more involved in school life so they can better support their children's education and help them exploit the full range of opportunities provided.

Achievement

9. The attainment of Bangladeshi pupils is below national averages.¹ Many young Bangladeshi people are not participating in post-16 education or training. Bangladeshi adults are less likely to be involved in job-related training and adult education than many other groups. These trends persist in higher education, with Bangladeshi women, in particular, significantly under-represented in admissions to universities.

10. The attainment of Bangladeshi pupils at Key Stage 1 is considerably below the national average and the same pattern is shown in Key Stages 2 and 3. The proportion of Bangladeshi pupils attaining five or more A*–C grades in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is also below the national average.

11. However, the overall position is improving, as indicated both by national performance data and the experience of the schools visited in this survey.

12. Greater fluency in English is playing a key part. As shown in *Statistics of education: Pupil Progress by Pupil Characteristics* (DfES, 2002), the progress of Bangladeshi pupils through Key Stages 1 and 2 in English tends to be rapid compared with other subjects. At the end of Key Stage 2, they are attaining 11 percentage points above the national average in English. This is a considerable achievement when set against the fact that their peers who have English as a mother tongue are also improving their language skills from a very different starting point.

13. Once Bangladeshi pupils have become fluent in English, they are showing that they can match the attainment of other groups in similar circumstances and, in some cases, exceed it. Key Stage 2 test scores for Bangladeshi pupils match those for other pupils in similar socio-economic groups when account is taken of their fluency in English. Bangladeshi pupils make more progress than several other minority ethnic groups between Key Stage 3 and GCSE. Bengali speaking pupils with greater English fluency are closing the gap for GCSE average scores with other language groups. For example, 71% of Bangladeshi pupils who achieve level 5 at Key Stage 3 achieve five or more A*–C grades at GCSE, compared with 67% of Pakistani pupils and 48% of Black Caribbean pupils. Overall, the correlation between FSM eligibility and attainment at GCSE is less strong for Bangladeshi girls and boys than for other groups.

14. In the schools visited, Bangladeshi pupils did better than all other pupils by the equivalent of four GCSE points more than all the other pupils. (See annex B.) In common with other learners of English as an additional language (EAL), they can find it difficult to acquire the more advanced skills in reading and, particularly, in writing that are necessary for high-level performance in the GCSE. Nevertheless, in Tower Hamlets – a London borough with more than 50% of its pupils of Bangladeshi heritage and where the community is well established – Bangladeshi pupils, and, notably, the girls, attain better than the London average. More proficient EAL speakers in Tower Hamlets

¹ The data on the attainment of Bangladeshi pupils is based on 80% of all schools that provided a return for the National Pupil Database for 2002 using the ethnic categories then employed. In some instances there is not 100% coverage of all pupils when matching school characteristics to attainment. The national averages used have been calculated by Ofsted.

achieve on average higher grades than pupils who speak only English. A similar trend is evident in Birmingham and Manchester, although there the proportions of Bangladeshi pupils are very much smaller, at about 3%.

15. These trends are not consistent from school to school. There is ample evidence that pupils in schools in similar contexts achieve very different outcomes. These variations are as significant for Bangladeshi pupils as for others.

Community views

Parents

16. Inspectors held discussions with small groups of parents in most of the schools visited. In a few cases, parents did not feel able to come forward to take part. Although many parents were not able to speak English confidently, contributions were facilitated by interpreters.

17. Their Islamic faith is very important to most of the parents interviewed. They are also ambitious for their sons and daughters. They believe that to be educated carries social prestige, as well as providing the opportunity to secure a good job and to make a contribution to their own and to the wider community.

18. Most parents sent their children to a particular school because it was nearest to their home. They wanted all the members of their family to attend the same school if possible. It was also important that a school had a good reputation and some said they felt their chosen school had improved in recent times. In the main, parents interviewed said they would prefer their children to attend a local multicultural school rather than a Muslim school, whether state run or independent, reflecting a desire that their children should play a full part in England's diverse society.

19. The parents praised the schools for what they were doing for their children. They believed the schools respected their Islamic faith and that they took the trouble to communicate well with them. However, some parents were unable to understand the language and presentation of school reports and this was a serious barrier to good communication about their children's progress and performance. Many parents relied on their children to interpret reports for them if there was no other adult in the family who could do this. Some parents who were clearly interested in their children's school work said they could not really help them to improve it, though they enjoyed looking at what had been done.

20. Day-to-day communication with schools was usually very good, especially when school staff took the initiative to approach the parents to discuss a problem. Some parents found the usual parental consultation evenings difficult and wanted more opportunity for informal, private discussion. The availability of an interpreter was much appreciated.

21. Parents were content with the school curriculum their children encountered. They appreciated the fact that the schools incorporated some elements of Bangladeshi life and culture into school subjects – for example in religious education (RE), personal, social and health education (PSHE), English, geography, history and art lessons.

22. The need to enable their children to acquire an appreciation of Bengali language and culture was a very high priority for most parents. Many sent their children to after-school classes at the local mosque or community centre to learn Bengali if teaching could not be provided by the school.

23. The schools visited respected cultural diversity and in several the approach was very well established and managed, so that pupils felt confident about discussing matters of history, language, culture and religion.

One ethnically diverse secondary school with a high proportion of Bangladeshi pupils carried out an audit on how each subject addressed cultural diversity and, in particular, celebrated Bangladeshi heritage. PSHE and RE, for example, made significant contributions on racism, stereotyping and opportunities to discuss family and community life. The mathematics department included work on Islamic patterns and the contribution Muslim scholars have made to the discipline. A study of immigration into the local community by Bangladeshi families was included in a history topic within the wider context of Empire. A study unit on Bangladesh in geography provided the opportunity for Bangladeshi pupils to make informed contributions, but also enabled their peers to have insight into the backgrounds of friends and classmates. As part of a unit on language change in English, Bangladeshi pupils read aloud in Bengali and spoke Sylheti.

24. Parents appreciated and were impressed with practice such as this. One parent, a local councillor, asked: 'How many other countries and ethnic groups around the world do this?' However, most parents thought it important not to have too much specific attention to their culture. As one parent said: 'They are British Asians, and this is most important. They need to learn about the range of communities in the United Kingdom, and especially the native British.'

25. Schools were praised by the parents for their sensitivity to cultural issues. When a school provided a halal menu or incorporated recognition of the Muslim dress code for women in their policy for school uniform, this was much appreciated by pupils and parents. Schools often included an element of Muslim worship into their assemblies. The schools were also praised for their scrupulous handling of any racist incidents, which were thought to be very few and far between, on the schools' premises.

26. Some Bangladeshi parents took what they described themselves as a traditional view of the education of their daughters, believing it important that access to further and higher education be fitted around marriage rather than the other way around.

27. The parents wanted the best for their children and felt that it was the school's job to ensure that this objective was fulfilled, rather than theirs. Nevertheless, a number of parents said they wanted to know what *they* needed to do to help their children to do well, re-emphasising their wish for their children to achieve as highly as possible.

School staff

28. Discussions with staff included some with those of Bangladeshi heritage. Some were teachers, while others were classroom or bilingual support assistants or acted as home–school liaison officers. These discussions provided insights into the experience of young Bangladeshi people as they moved through school and considered the prospect of continuing their education beyond the age of 16.

29. Staff of Bangladeshi heritage offered invaluable help to the schools in building understanding of ethnic and religious issues. Their strong links with the community enabled them to understand the role of schools in times of tension, when pupils needed a great deal of reassurance and guidance in order to come to terms with local, national and international events. In one example, the headteacher of a school visited demonstrated great skill in the way she calmed pupils and offered them opportunities to discuss before school an alarming news story which had occurred overnight.

30. Bangladeshi staff were able to offer insights into family life and conflicts of values. They described families where older brothers and sisters had gone on to further or higher education – indeed they themselves were often role models in this respect. There were cases where, for example, pursuing education beyond 16 was more difficult where a boy or girl was the first in the family to have such an aspiration. Their accounts made it clear that families sometimes had difficulty in reconciling themselves to the idea of a son or daughter fulfilling their aspiration by going on to college or university and that, generally speaking, it was easier for parents to contemplate this for a son than for a daughter. While the principle of going on to further and higher education was often admired, the practical implications of doing so could loom large.

31. One young teacher spoke of the difficulties she had encountered when at the age of 15 her father began putting pressure on her to marry:

'My father was educated to a high level in Bangladesh. For years I had to resist his plans for me, and this was very stressful. My mother just kept quiet, not wanting to take sides. My sister supported me. I insisted on going to sixth form college. Eventually I went to university and read biochemistry. I then did my postgraduate teaching certificate. Eventually I married outside my community. My family was furious. I became an outcast and I lost contact with everyone but my sister. I became pregnant, and ill, and needed the support of my family. I am now living quite near to my parents and my mother gives some support. I have two children now and am just as determined to have my own life, despite my husband being more religious than I am and quite conservative about women. We do argue quite a bit but I hold my own. My family would love my marriage to fail, but, so far, I think we are making it work.'

32. The staff interviewed noted that, if the education of girls can be disadvantaged, there also can be pressures on boys, notably to take employment in order to support a family perhaps subsisting on benefits or where the father may be in poor health or unemployed.

33. Such difficulties reflect conflicts between the aspirations of the young and the concerns of adult members of the communities. The schools visited did their best to motivate and support both girls and boys to continue with their education, but they could sometimes find that community pressures, borne of a combination of economic circumstances and cultural imperatives, conspired to limit educational aspirations. However, school staff reported an evolving picture, with more girls being supported in pursuing further and higher education.

34. The accounts of staff focused in some cases on anxieties that boys had too much freedom. Parents, too, expressed the view that boys were 'on the streets' too much, getting into trouble and occasionally becoming involved in serious incidents. Some boys were reported to be beyond the influence of older and wiser counsels within the family or the local community. A small number were said to have developed attitudes at odds with commonly held values, and which, occasionally, led them into conflict with the law. Many parents were clearly anxious about the future of some teenage Bangladeshi boys. As one parent graphically put it: 'It's like a can of fizzy drink. You mustn't open it just after you have shaken it. You must wait until the fizz has died down.'

35. In one school visited, where the attainment of the boys was very poor, a teacher of Bengali, who was also a science specialist, expressed his views on the local community and the problems faced by pupils in a severely disadvantaged area.

'When the pupils arrive in Year 7 they show in science, for example, that when concepts are translated into Bengali for them, they understand ideas well. However, they fail in tests because of an inability to read – in English of course – the language of the science. Thus they fail to engage with the concepts.'

What is needed? A lot of hard work in the communities with the parents for a start. The parents need to be much better educated than they are.... Sometimes community leaders are embroiled, still, in Bangladeshi village politics. They have a poor understanding of what is required to succeed.'

Pupils

36. Most pupils interviewed valued school and wanted to do well in it. They received strong support in this from home but they thought that their parents were sometimes able to offer little more than moral support because of their limited understanding of the education system and of English. Older brothers and sisters who had achieved well were often an inspiration.

37. Girls valued school because it widened their horizons, socially as well as educationally. Many did not have an independent social life outside school, often being confined to the family home while their brothers were allowed outside to play football and to meet their friends in other ways. The girls enjoyed seeing friends at school. Boys also enjoyed school for both social and educational reasons, but the greater freedom they had outside school meant that school was not the core of their social life to the same extent.

38. A number of pupils – mostly boys – spoke about situations outside school in which they were occasionally subject to serious racial abuse. Since they saw themselves as British, they found such abuse mystifying, as well as deeply offensive.

39. The pupils appreciated the help of their teachers and had great confidence in them. They were sure that teachers would, for example, deal with any racist incidents in an impartial and sensitive way. They thought teachers worked hard for them, and were willing to help if they experienced difficulty. Form tutors often played a key part, but all pupils were able to identify several members of staff to whom they would turn for support and guidance if necessary.

40. After-school and Saturday lessons were praised highly by those who attended them. Less well-motivated pupils seldom turned up to voluntary classes and in such cases parental intervention was weaker than needed. The failure of some parents to ensure their children take up the additional opportunities available was a concern for many schools.

41. Pupils in an inner London comprehensive reflected the views of many of the pupils interviewed. Although school was important to them, family and religion were their main priorities. The family, with its strong links to community and religion, was a significant consideration for them when they spoke about their hopes for the future. Many had visited Bangladesh, or were hoping to do so shortly. They were sure their parents wanted them to achieve well educationally, believing that ‘people look down on you if you are not educated.’ The prestige which education brings was often stressed rather more than its intrinsic value or its capacity to open doors to rewarding life choices.

42. Pupils almost unanimously saw English as their main language since most had learned it from an early age. They most often spoke English at home to their brothers and sisters but not always to parents, with whom Sylheti or Bengali was more commonly used. All accepted the importance of having some understanding of Bengali as the formal language of the community. If they did not receive lessons in Bengali at school, many attended classes elsewhere for this purpose. Many pupils, particularly the boys, also attended Madrassah (religious school) in the evenings to learn to speak Arabic and to memorise the Qur’an.

43. These connections with their community’s culture notwithstanding, the pupils, both boys and girls, strongly asserted their British identity. The diversity of cultures in a school was seen by them as an encouragement to do well. Girls in one ethnically mixed school, for example, felt that if the school had been largely mono-cultural – meaning predominantly Bangladeshi – they would have had less incentive to do well.

44. However, for ambitious girls in particular, there were worries that the family and community pressures could hinder their career aspirations, especially if their family wished them to marry early. The girls believed that their parents did not really understand the pressures they were under and that they therefore did not receive the support needed from them if they were to do well:

‘They don’t listen to us. We are not allowed to answer back. The boys have plenty of freedom to do what they want. We have none. They are wrong not to allow us any freedom as we would not exploit it in the way that the boys do. However, parents do not understand this. They worry all the time about

our reputations. But we'll prove them wrong and when we marry and have daughters we will treat them differently.'

45. Some girls were obviously disheartened at the idea of being married early and wondered whether it was worth battling to do well at school. However, despite such difficulties, some also said that their mothers have a more 'modern' outlook on life, understanding that they need space and quiet to do school work at home and trying to provide these conditions.

46. Most of the boys interviewed enjoyed school and found great satisfaction in doing well in lessons. In some cases they identified friendly rivalry among themselves to see who gets the best marks, but noted that they supported one another as well. Information and communication technology (ICT) was often a favourite subject. Some boys cited a range of professional careers in which they wanted to move but did not appear to appreciate the commitment to school work that gaining access to such careers involves.

47. However, overall, the Bangladeshi pupils in these ethnically mixed schools came across as essentially serious about their futures. They praised the schools they attended and wanted to go on to have good careers for themselves. They saw themselves remaining close to the communities in which they have been brought up and which they ultimately want to serve as best they can. All saw academic achievement as a route to fulfilling themselves as British citizens.

Conflicting values and views

48. The interviews with parents, staff and pupils, as well as with headteachers and other senior managers in the schools, provided valuable insights into ways in which the stress on the importance of education to Bangladeshi communities can reinforce what schools do. At the same time, tensions were evident, and it was clear that they had not always been worked through.

49. Among the older generation, lack of understanding of the education system, often combined with lack of fluency in English, can inhibit involvement. Sometimes, a general commitment to the value of education is not translated into practical support – for example in relation to continuous attendance at school, avoiding term-time breaks for holidays in Bangladesh, or in relation to participation in out-of-school activities. Similarly, belief in education, especially for girls, can falter in the face of competing priorities for those over 16. Among the younger generation, understanding of their parents' experience and of their fears of weakened family, religious and community bonds, is sometimes not strong. Young people have loyalty to their families and many are determined to be good Muslims, but they also want to participate fully in British society. For some, these two ambitions can be at odds.

Action by schools to raise achievement

Ethos

50. It was clear from the discussions that schools have a key role to play with parents as well as pupils. Home–school liaison workers, and school staff more generally, do much to help parents to understand what is needed if their children are to achieve success in the educational system. More generally, schools make a strong contribution to community life by providing a calm and purposeful environment which is a counterbalance to the often volatile world of the streets.

51. All the schools visited see it as vital that pupils feel secure at school and work hard to achieve high standards. They do much to make sure that pupils of Bangladeshi heritage feel included within the school and share a commitment to achievement. The effects of their efforts were encapsulated by one boy in this way: ‘They show us who we are...through support for our learning and by encouraging us to do well.’

Attendance

52. Attendance is an issue which benefits from good communication and co-operative action between schools and communities. In the best practice, not exemplified in all of the areas visited, schools and communities co-operate well.

53. There are sometimes difficulties to overcome. In one inner-city school, attendance at Friday prayers at the local mosque was causing some older boys to return late for lessons, so the mosque modified the prayer time to fit in better with school times.

54. Extended holidays in Bangladesh, running into the school term, can pose a particular problem. An illustration of the effects was given in an interview with a group of sixth form pupils, none of whom had attained grade C or better in English at GCSE. All were re-taking the subject and described the amount of time they had missed over the years. One had missed the whole of Years 7 and 8; one had missed six months in Year 6 and then a further six months in Year 9; one missed all of Year 9; one had missed three months in Year 8; and one had missed four months in Year 11. The lack of continuity in the schooling of these young people stood out, as they recognised themselves, as a reason for their failure to achieve at the level expected, especially, but not only, in English.

55. All the schools were seeking ways to overcome the problem. The most effective approach combined four elements: discussion with community leaders about the importance of continuity of education; straightforward information and advice to parents; where necessary, the provision of school work to be done while pupils were away; and re-induction support when pupils returned.

Meeting needs

56. Within their different circumstances, the schools employed a range of strategies to meet the needs of the pupils. This range of strategies was illustrated by the work of one inner-city denominational school in which 60% of the pupils are of Bangladeshi heritage.

The staff and governors are strongly committed to their multi-faith school serving its local community. The school is in a socio-economically disadvantaged area with about 70% of its pupils entitled to free school meals. In 2002, the Bangladeshi pupils out-performed other groups in the school, with 61% achieving five or more A –C grades at GCSE. The introduction of more courses leading to General and National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) has benefited the pupils, but other factors have also had a bearing. The particular cohort of Year 11 pupils in question was able to study Bengali from Year 7 onwards. Staff and pupils believed that learning and being able to use the mother tongue in lessons enhanced achievement in other subjects as well.*

The school, having recently become a language college, has strengthened its approach to mother-tongue learning. The move was designed to celebrate the bilingual characteristics of the great majority of the pupils, and Turkish, Urdu, Arabic, Mandarin, Spanish, French and Russian also feature in a strongly language-oriented curriculum. In the view of the senior management team, the focus on enhancing pupils' mother tongue skills has had three benefits: bilingual pupils are able to show what they can do, since they may be academically able, yet relatively weak in English; facility in the mother tongue helps pupils to understand some difficult subject ideas better; and pupils' self-esteem rises.

Although pupils do not have to study Bengali, if they choose to do French or Spanish they are encouraged to attend after-school classes in Bengali. The school has worked hard to counter the view, held by some, that for Bangladeshi pupils to take Bengali is not a productive use of time.

57. Most of the schools have invested time in analysing data and the findings of observation of pupils' learning in class. They were generally becoming more sensitive to the different learning needs of pupils, including Bangladeshi learners. They were increasingly using data and tracking systems more systematically to improve understanding of pupils' potential, an approach that also demonstrates fluctuations in pupils' performance.

58. One school had analysed data to help them monitor particular groups of pupils, including Bangladeshi boys. Through close co-operation among subject teachers, tutors and heads of year, the day-by-day performance of these boys was tracked and linked to patterns of attendance and behaviour. A full picture was thereby built up which allowed the school to direct support where it was most needed.

59. Another school had found that Bangladeshi girls were underachieving in Key Stage 3. Often the girls were too reticent and did not ask questions or assert themselves

enough in discussion. As a result of this investigation, teachers encouraged the girls to take a fuller part in lessons and organised activities and groups so that they do this. The school was also looking at ways to make plenary sessions in lessons more effective, noting that Bangladeshi pupils said that it was particularly useful if they were helped to write down summaries of difficult concepts at the end of a lesson.

Support for EAL

60. The schools recognised that proficiency in English was the key to educational success for their bilingual learners. Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) funding was, in the main, used to meet the needs of early stage learners of English. As is the case nationally, support for more advanced learners of EAL, whose oral proficiency can mask continuing literacy needs, tended to be limited. Good practice in meeting these continuing needs tended to be seen in a few subjects rather than across the curriculum. Generally, the schools needed to do more to use their additional funding to enable all teachers to work with greater confidence in linguistically diverse classrooms.

61. In one school, excellent partnership teaching between subject teachers and EAL specialists had resulted in the widespread adoption of teaching methods supportive of pupils with EAL:

- a focus on discussion as an aid to learning and an essential prerequisite for writing
- use of visuals to support understanding
- provision of models and frameworks for written work
- clear definitions of key words and frequent checking of understanding not only of subject specialist vocabulary but also of idiomatic English
- help with understanding the language of textbooks, coursework assignments and examinations
- use of differentiated materials
- use of the home language to support the understanding of key concepts.

In this school, results had risen strongly over the past few years and the pupils achieve above average GCSE results when compared with similar schools.

62. The failure to achieve a high enough standard of English by age 16 often leads Bangladeshi pupils onto post-16 courses with insufficiently advanced English skills. To counter this, one school had been taking part in a sixth form project set up by the LEA aimed at improving students' English language skills in business studies and other GNVQ subjects. The project concentrated particularly on improving pupils' writing. As EAL learners, Bangladeshi pupils benefited from this approach.

63. Other approaches were employed. A number of departments at one school worked together to help pupils at different levels to understand the more difficult ideas in

lessons. A range of differentiated materials were used, which, coupled with targeted use of their mother tongue, helped Bangladeshi pupils make good progress. Pupils said that they learned better if they had plenty of opportunity to discuss ideas. Spoken and written summaries also helped to reinforce what was to be learned. Teachers tried to focus on the needs of older EAL learners in particular.

In a history lesson, a Bangladeshi teacher used differentiated materials and on occasion the Bengali language, to teach a topic on British rule in India. The teacher checked understanding throughout, using Bengali with some pupils as appropriate. These pupils were able to answer fully in their mother tongue and then transpose this into English. The teacher had a very good appreciation of what the pupils find difficult, especially important historical concepts, and acts accordingly. It is expected that the balance of the two languages used in the classroom will shift over time as pupils become more competent in English.

64. Teachers in another school identified that EAL pupils in Key Stage 4 often find that the reading material used in subjects is too difficult and that the written tasks given in conventional textbooks provided insufficient guidance and support. Longer, written texts can be especially daunting for EAL pupils. Various approaches were being used, including summaries and more explanation of the text, individually and in small groups.

The curriculum

65. The schools visited sought to ensure that their curriculum reflected cultural and linguistic diversity, though all thought they could do more in this respect. Bangladeshi pupils warmly appreciated schools' efforts to make use of examples from Bangladeshi tradition and culture. Drawing on the past and present achievements of Islamic scientists, writers and artists, for instance, helped pupils to identify with and better understand their heritage and contributed to the sense that their background and experience were valued by the school. Their approach to learning and their attainment benefited as a result.

66. Pupils appreciated subject teaching when it incorporated appropriate topics into programmes of work, and they thought that such topics had important messages for pupils other than those from Bangladesh. Like teachers in their schools, they saw the importance of a curriculum that reflects the cultural heritage of different groups if all pupils are to improve their understanding of diverse cultures. However, Bangladeshi pupils also wanted their lessons to be relevant to what they are interested in as young British Asians. For example, one teacher was surprised when a lesson on the partition of India proved less interesting to her pupils than the story of the American civil rights movement.

67. Many of the schools expected subject departments to ensure that what they teach is relevant to the cultural heritage of the pupils. They also monitored what the departments actually did and how well they did it. PSHE and citizenship lessons often made a valuable contribution. One school in a northern city affected by racial disturbances had established a programme dealing with the migration, population and history of all groups within the community. The starting point, 'What should pupils know

about each other?’ was helping pupils to explore and understand the background and viewpoints of their peers. The difficulties of revising strongly held perceptions, often misconceptions, were not underestimated.

In one school an initiative, spearheaded by a deputy headteacher, has been set up to ensure that pupils keep achievement files that reflect work done in both citizenship and other subjects. The files become ‘Progress Files’ in Years 10 and 11, and the pupils take them to their post-16 interviews. It is one way for the pupils to demonstrate to others the inter-relationship between social and cultural values and academic work, and the importance of a strong thread of anti-racist awareness throughout. This school maintains a lengthy programme of initiatives designed to strengthen community links, and the LEA, for its part, takes a prominent lead. One particular event, a Bangladeshi Youth Awards evening, has been very successful as a city-wide high profile occasion that has brought together pupils, parents, the Bangladeshi community and educational and civic leaders.

68. Flexibility in the curriculum generally, and not just in relation to cultural diversity, was a feature of the effective schools visited. In some cases, a great deal of effort was being put into establishing greater flexibility. This involves adopting a wider range of courses, most notably those leading to GNVQs, but also seeking co-operation with other institutions to ensure that what a particular area offers meets the needs of the young people in both school and further education. One headteacher described the approach being taken.

‘All of the pupils do some kind of GNVQ. This is attractive to Bangladeshi pupils as many of their families are involved in small businesses. Many pupils do GNVQ ICT but the choice includes health and social care, and business; it will be widened to take in leisure and tourism from September 2003. As a result of good local co-operation, some pupils will be able to do GNVQ engineering and manufacturing at a local further education college in Key Stage 4. However, the equipment for these courses is actually in the process of being installed in two secondary schools also, so the schools themselves will soon be able to offer such courses in the near future. It is hoped this will attract more Bangladeshi pupils, who may be hesitant about attending college. Large numbers of pupils go on to do advanced GNVQ work at a further education college when they leave the school, proportionately more than from other similar schools in the borough. Other pupils will have a variety of apprenticeship pathways provided.’

69. Out-of-school classes were an important element in schools’ efforts to boost achievement. In some cases these included major investments in staffing, funded typically through initiatives such as Excellence in Cities. But poor attendance by Bangladeshi pupils, as well as by some others targeted, plagued many such initiatives.

70. One school with a large proportion of Bangladeshi pupils reported that the Saturday catch-up classes that were part of its Key Stage 3 strategy had had to be cancelled because of poor attendance. Similarly, Year 9 booster classes at lunchtimes

and after school were poorly attended, even though book vouchers were offered as rewards for good attendance. The only two pupils who sustained attendance sufficient to claim their vouchers were each closely supported and monitored by learning mentors. The latest problem the school was encountering was with a breakfast club, set up specifically to support pupils of Asian heritage with their class work. Many find completing homework difficult as they have long days arising from the expectation that they attend a mosque for several hours in the evenings. A support club that included breakfast had been carefully planned, but in its first three weeks, attendance was very poor, making its viability problematic.

71. Not all schools had the same level of difficulty with participation. In some schools, Bangladeshi pupils took good advantage of the additional provision offered and their participation was high. Extra-curricular activities were seen by them, as well as by the schools, as effective in raising aspirations and improving communication and other skills. One school, for example, took pupils on trips to universities, and had useful contacts with investment banks and other companies designed to inform pupils about careers and about business in general. Continuous efforts were made to increase the involvement of Bangladeshi pupils, especially girls. The work of the school's home-school liaison officer with Bangladeshi families to increase involvement in a Year 7 residential course was a case in point.

Involving parents

72. Schools were aware of the need to involve parents much more in the life of the school and in the education of their children. They were conscious that some previous attempts to increase involvement had foundered for lack of support.

One school, in a town that had suffered from racial disturbances wanted to encourage greater involvement of Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents in school life. Part of its renewed efforts was inclusion within a building programme of a community room with computers and other learning resources, as well as social facilities. It was to be built at the heart of the school. Bangladeshi mothers in particular had expressed an interest in learning to use computers, inspired by the enthusiasm of their children. The school hoped to be able to attract the parents into school and for further education through its new facilities. Bengali will be offered along with other subjects.

73. The wish to bring more parents into school was widely shared in the schools. Effective work by schools, pursued with persistence and ingenuity, often over a long period, created a growing sense of partnership, based on better understanding between school, families and local communities. In one area, a number of initiatives, involving a number of schools, was running to support Asian families in particular. In one example, bilingual staff visited homes and ran family learning programmes in schools and local communities.

The project utilises laptop computers to support women from Pakistan and Bangladesh and their families – plus some of the fathers – who need, essentially, to learn English. The laptops are available for use in parents'

rooms in schools, and participants are encouraged to tell their own stories, including researching their families. It is planned to use the finished books with children and to make available the opportunity for participants to progress to other local provision as their children move from primary to secondary school, or from secondary school to college. This initiative has had an encouraging start.

74. At a secondary school in the same area, a City Learning Centre funded by Excellence in Cities offered the ideal environment for such work to be taken up and developed. It also provided a place for pupils to complete homework or access resources that were not available to many families at home.

75. Several schools employed the services of bilingual home–school liaison workers. Their work was valuable. In one, the worker had been instrumental in helping to draw parents’ attention to the school’s emphasis on raising achievement. Parents’ knowledge of the school had improved, confidence has grown and more parents were coming into school. Parents had welcomed the strong stand the school was taking over the involvement of some Bangladeshi boys in local gangs.

In another school, the headteacher feels the community has traditionally not done enough to support the education of young Bangladeshi people. A young outreach worker has multiple roles, one of which is to form links between the school and the families of the pupils causing concern because of poor attendance or poor school performance. He is making a difference through his professional links with the psychological service, health service, social services, community groups and the voluntary sector. Attendance of Bangladeshi pupils has improved. He also has hopes of helping to establish a homework club for Bangladeshi pupils in a local Bangladeshi community centre.

76. The contribution of such support in helping Bangladeshi pupils to achieve well and be prepared for adult life was considerable. The following extract, from a letter written by a Bangladeshi boy to the headteacher of his secondary school, illustrates the struggle that EAL pupils can experience and the way that problems can be overcome:

‘I arrived in England when I was 12 years old. I realised that it would be very difficult for me to learn English...I am unable to communicate with anyone and not knowing where to go for help...I always used to say to myself “Will I ever speak English like other students?” As I was getting support from the learning support teachers I became more confident ...I started to communicate with other students and teachers. I managed to pass all my GCSEs and my future plan is to become a manager of a retail company or open my own business.’

Annex A: The schools visited

Nine secondary schools were visited. The proportions of Bangladeshi pupils in them varied considerably.

Challney High School for Girls, Luton, is ethnically diverse, with Bangladeshi pupils making up around 12% of the population. The proportion of pupils with FSM eligibility is above the national average.

Denbigh High School, Luton, is an average-sized comprehensive. Bangladeshi pupils make up around 35% of the school population. Around 85% of the pupils have a mother tongue other than English.

Falinge Park High School, Rochdale, is an average-sized mixed comprehensive. FSM eligibility and the number of pupils with a mother tongue other than English are above average. Bangladeshi pupils are a minority in the school (13%).

The Hathershaw Technology College, Oldham, is a school of nearly 1,000 pupils with around 32% minority ethnic pupils, of which about 19% are of Bangladeshi heritage. Eligibility for FSM is well above the national average.

Holyhead School, Birmingham, is an inner-city mixed comprehensive with a very high proportion of pupils whose mother tongue is not English (77%). Bangladeshi pupils make up 12% of the school population.

Little Ilford School, Newham, has over 1,300 pupils and has high proportions of pupils eligible for FSM. The school is ethnically diverse, with around 27% Bangladeshi pupils.

Oaklands School, Tower Hamlets, is an ethnically diverse, mixed comprehensive of smaller than average size. Over half of the pupils are eligible for FSM, which is well above the national figure. Some 60% of the pupils have a mother tongue other than English, of whom around 50% are Bangladeshi heritage.

Primrose High School, Leeds, is a smaller than average mixed school. Nearly half the pupils have a mother tongue that is not English. Almost 19% of the pupils are Bangladeshi.

Sir John Cass Foundation and Redcoat Church of England School, Tower Hamlets, is a comprehensive school with Bangladeshi pupils making up the largest minority ethnic group (60%). FSM eligibility is well above average.

Annex B: Performance data

The figures show the performance of pupils in the nine schools visited and the national figures for pupils of Bangladeshi origin, compared with others.

GCSE results for nine secondary schools visited from the National Pupil Database 2001/2002

Bangladeshi pupils

Gender	Total no. of pupils	Total average points	% of pupils with 5 A*–C	% of pupils with 5 A*–G
Male	228	35.15	39.0	89.9
Female	210	41.98	51.9	92.4
All	438	38.43	45.2	91.1

All other pupils

Gender	Total no. of pupils	Total average points	% of pupils with 5 A*–C	% of pupils with 5 A*–G
Male	462	30.72	27.1	89.2
Female	557	37.40	41.3	91.0
All	1,019	34.37	34.8	90.2

National GCSE figures from the National Pupil Database 2001/2002

Bangladeshi pupils

Gender	Total no. of pupils	Total average points	% of pupils with 5 A*–C	% of pupils with 5 A*–G
Male	2,458	35.63	39.7	91.2
Female	2,391	41.65	50.5	95.2
All	4,849	38.60	45.1	93.2

All other pupils

Gender	Total no. of pupils	Total average points	% of pupils with 5 A*–C	% of pupils with 5 A*–G
Male	263,957	38.42	46.2	92.4
Female	259,146	43.44	56.6	94.6
All	523,103	40.91	51.4	93.5

