

Manchester Supplementary School Network (MSSN) Policy Brief supported by Manchester City Council and Manchester Metropolitan University's Critical Race and Ethnicity Research Cluster¹

Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper: Building stronger, more united communities

Executive summary

Supplementary schools are volunteer-led spaces, offering educational, cultural and language provision for mainly black and minority ethnic (BME) children and young people. Research has consistently shown that they offer an invaluable resource for many pupils, but are often overlooked by mainstream schools and education funders. (Nwulu, 2015, p. 7). According to Ramalingam & Griffith's (2015) report, there are between three to five thousand supplementary schools across the country that operate mainly on Saturdays and sometimes on weekdays in the early evening. These statistics are especially important when we consider that approaching a third of all BAME pupils attend supplementary schools alongside mainstream education.

In order to give feedback on the Green Paper, we arranged two focus group meetings with a range of BAME supplementary schools from Greater Manchester's African and African Caribbean, Somali, Muslim, Arab and Chinese communities. Our discussions with the focus groups revealed the wide range of activities that our supplementary schools undertake and although their central focus is education, they very much act as *community hubs* with the potential to deliver an even greater range of community services. The overwhelming sentiment from our groups was that the government needs to greatly expand its current recognition of 'out-of-school settings' to include the wide range of community activities that supplementary schools already run to "build[ing] strong, integrated communities" that "challeng[ing] attitudes and practices which...foster[ing] division" (HM Government, 2018, p. 16)

Policy Recommendations

We would suggest that funding is needed for pilot projects that promote community cohesion and inter-school cooperation. These pilot projects could act as opportunities for supplementary schools to build track-records for larger consortium-based commissioned community services (e.g. youth engagement, adult literacy, etc.)

We would suggest that more funding is needed to create a dedicated Local Authority team that looks

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after safeguarding and (teacher) training for supplementary schools. This team would also be responsible for managing any paper work that future regulation might create.

Introduction

This policy brief aims to suggest ways of placing supplementary schools (“out-of-school settings” (HM Government, 2018, p. 27)) at the heart of the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper by acknowledging their role as grassroots community organisations (hubs) that inherently foster community cohesion. This is important because the Green Paper, although recognising some of the diverse educational benefits of “out-of-school settings”, unfortunately still manages to imply that safeguarding is an overwhelmingly defining issue for these community organisations. We acknowledge that “a high standard of safeguarding in all education settings” (HM Government, 2018, p. 14) is important. However, we feel that framing supplementary schools wholly in terms of safeguarding ignores the significant opportunities that these community organisations are able to generate in order fulfil the Green Paper’s aspiration of building “stronger, more resilient communities” (HM Government, 2018, p. 46). This brief will shine a light on the wider community activities of supplementary schools, which can play an important role in bringing together communities, some of whom can often face isolation. We will also suggest concrete ways in which the government can support supplementary schools to continue to “play an active role in building strong, integrated communities, celebrating and building on shared local assets and strengths, as well as challenging attitudes and practices which are holding back groups or individuals or fostering division” (HM Government, 2018, p. 16)

Methodology

We arranged two focus group meetings with a range of BAME supplementary schools from Greater Manchester’s African and African Caribbean, Somali, Muslim, Arab and Chinese communities (Clennon, 2018a; Clennon, 2018b). We asked the supplementary schools to comment on the “out-of-school settings” section of the Green Paper. We then asked them to place that section of the Green Paper into the context of their wider community activities before asking them to reflect on the potential regulation of “out-of-school settings”. After we built up an outline of their wider community activities, we then asked them how best they could be supported to “play an active role in building strong, integrated communities...as well as challenging attitudes and practices which are holding back groups or individuals or fostering division” (HM Government, 2018, p. 16). Our discussions around “practices which are holding back groups or individuals or fostering division”, were especially important in the context of the PREVENT agenda, which led us to ask the organisations what role they thought that the Local Authority could play in helping them to deliver activities and initiatives that decreased “division” and promoted cohesion.

Research, Results and Conclusions

Research

Supplementary schools are volunteer-led spaces, offering educational, cultural and language provision for mainly black and minority ethnic (BME) children and young people. Research has consistently shown that they offer an invaluable resource for many pupils, but are often overlooked by mainstream schools and education funders. (Nwulu, 2015, p. 7). According to Ramalingam & Griffith’s (2015) report, there are between three to five thousand supplementary schools across the country that operate mainly on Saturdays and sometimes on weekdays in the early evening. Sixty eight per cent of these schools offer core curriculum support and GCSE tuition. These statistics are especially important

when we consider that approaching a third of all BAME pupils attend supplementary schools alongside mainstream education. As mentioned previously, even though supplementary schools are contributing to higher BAME attainment (Maylor, 2012; Evans & Gillan-Thomas, 2015; Nwulu, 2015), there still appears to be a gap in accessing employment or higher education for BAME school leavers (Delebarre, 2016; Boliver, 2015; Boliver, 2013). However, in order to fill this gap in attainment, Lord Adonis outlines the potential of supplementary schools to nurture soft Life Skills where their “activities can bring a tremendous sense of achievement and can boost children’s confidence and motivation, both in and out of the classroom” (as quoted in Ramalingam & Griffith (2015, p. 1). This is an extremely important point that touches on cultural competency and its implications for community cohesion because eighty per cent of supplementary schools teach community languages and the percentage of ethnic minority participation in state funded primary education (for example) has risen from thirty to sixty per cent from 2004.

Results

The discussions from our focus groups highlighted the following themes from the brief research review above:

“Supplementary schools are volunteer-led spaces”

General Awareness of Supplementary Schools (Clennon, 2018b)

Many of our supplementary schools are also examination centres (especially with Edexcel) and cater for ambitious, high achieving young people. Our focus group said that mainstream schools did not seem to appreciate the input that supplementary schools have in helping to raise the educational attainment levels of their ethnic pupils who also attend supplementary schools. Our focus groups said that although they achieve these high attainment levels on shoestring or non-existent budgets for pupils from their immediate communities, they are very keen to teach *all* young people from their wider communities, irrespective of background. The consensus from our groups was that they wanted to strengthen their links with mainstream schools in order to create effective partnerships.

Creating a Platform to Promote Manchester’s Supplementary Schools (Clennon, 2018a; 2018b)

Our focus group said that they wanted a wider platform to showcase their work and asked if Manchester City Council could provide it. The Council representatives who were present at the focus groups said that they were in the process of creating just such a platform to promote the activities of their schools. The groups said that they would like the government to take notice of this platform in order to become better informed about the integrative and cohesive work that is happening in communities at the grassroots level via supplementary schools. The focus groups said that they want to dispel the myth that they are closed and are reluctant to open their doors to scrutiny. The groups said on the contrary, that they wanted more people to know about their work and that they are eagerly awaiting a platform that will give their work wider exposure because “there [is] a lot of undiscovered talent at the schools”.

Voluntary Code of Conduct (Clennon 2018a; 2018b)

The representatives from Manchester City Council reminded the groups that they already run a voluntary code of conduct built on firm relationship building and good will and that they were concerned that official regulation might jeopardise the good practice (and good will) that already exists on the ground. Our council representatives were particularly concerned that Islamic schools could be unfairly targeted by regulation. The group also made the point that if regulation were to be adopted, their schools would need to be adequately resourced in order to effectively manage the additional administration. Leading on from the point from the previous section, the groups suggested

that the government should first have a better understanding of what it is that they would like to regulate before its introduction.

Funding (Clennon 2018a; 2018b)

Our focus groups discussed various options for how they would like to see funding allocated. They included:

- Funding for training; safeguarding, teacher training, governance training, policy development training
- Funding for pilot community integration projects that could be used to build a track record for bigger consortium commissioning bids
- Commissioning opportunities to deliver community services; youth groups, adult literacy, employment services, homework clubs, exam revision intensives etc.
- Funding for school administration should regulation become a reality
- Funding for Local Authority to expand their team to manage and oversee supplementary schools in Greater Manchester, especially in the context of potential regulation

“a third of all BAME pupils attend supplementary schools alongside mainstream education”

Supplementary Schools as Community Hubs (Clennon, 2018a)

In discussing the activities of our supplementary schools, our focus group recognised how their school activities often act as replacements for statutory youth-service provision by “keeping young people off the streets with worthwhile activities”. The schools said that they were keen to receive funding to expand the range of their service provision in the community.

Radicalisation and Exploitation (Clennon, 2018a)

Our focus group said that for them radicalisation represented a perversion of Islamic teachings. The groups also suggested that there are other equally important forms of exploitation such as drug use/distribution, gang membership and sex trafficking that could be seen as pre-cursors to radicalised behaviour, which also need to be monitored across agencies, in a joined up manner. In the context of PREVENT, the groups also suggested that funding should be allocated for work with mothers whom they believe for some communities, at so called risk of radicalisation, would be able to play a crucial role in tackling it from a family perspective.

Community Cohesion and Differences (Clennon, 2018a)

Members from our focus group representing Islamic schools recognised that they needed to work more closely with other Mosques and Madrasas that follow other Islamic traditions. The group also suggested that inter-faith barriers between the different Islamic traditions needed to be broken down. The group suggested that targeted funding for these community engagement projects between different Islamic traditions would also aid the process of “building stronger more united communities” especially in areas of higher numbers of Muslim residents.

“Life Skills...and cultural competency”

Supplementary Schools, Advocacy and History (Clennon, 2018a)

Our focus group discussed how their supplementary school teachers are often held as role models within their communities and how this positively affects the self-esteem of their communities. Members from our Islamic schools also suggested that they should be supported to teach an inclusive

history that places Islam within the context of world history (and colonialism), as well as teaching more widely about Islamic philanthropy (waqf).

Supplementary Schools, Community Cohesion and Humanitarian Work (Clennon, 2018b)

Our focus group recognised that they are able to achieve higher levels of motivation with their young people despite spending less time with them than their mainstream schools. The group attributed this to their high quality youth engagement programmes. The group wanted Manchester's supplementary schools to meet more regularly to collaborate more on inter-cultural youth engagement programmes. The group also noted that many schools also do valuable charitable work (e.g. fundraising) for groups in their 'home' countries.

Conclusions

Our discussions with the focus groups revealed the wide range of activities that our supplementary schools undertake and although their central focus is education, they very much act as *community hubs* with the potential to deliver an even greater range of community services. The overwhelming sentiment from our groups was that the government needs to greatly expand its current recognition of 'out-of-school settings' to include the wide range of community activities that supplementary schools already run to "build[ing] strong, integrated communities" that "challeng[ing] attitudes and practices which...foster[ing] division" (HM Government, 2018, p. 16)

Implications and Policy Recommendations

Implications

Radicalisation and Exploitation: PREVENT

The debate about regulation in the context of PREVENT seems to conflate two distinctly different constituencies of young people because the schools represented by our focus groups work with high achieving, studious and ambitious young people who would be least likely to be at risk of radicalisation. It would appear that the young people at risk of radicalisation would also be at greater risk of other types of exploitation, which should also be closely monitored. Schools operating in dangerous environments that could be putting young people at risk were not likely to be participants in the voluntary code of practice that has already been established, in other words they will already be operating underground. We argue that regulation might further drive these schools underground, as the goodwill generated by firm relationship building might evaporate.

Supplementary Schools, Advocacy and History

It is also important to note that Muslim communities are also passionately committed to eradicating Islamist radicalisation, so they, in theory would support PREVENT but it seems that they would like to be assisted in fighting against radicalisation on their own culturo-religious terms. The solution has to come from the grassroots and cannot come from the top down process that is currently administered under PREVENT. Funding for developing these grassroots culturally-relevant (Islamic) anti-radicalisation programmes are essential.

Supplementary Schools as Community Hubs: Integration

Funding the role of supplementary school as community hub that provides wider community services is crucial because our school representatives are implying that radicalisation and its exploitation pre-cursors are exacerbated by feelings of isolation caused by structural disadvantage.

Community Cohesion and Differences

Mosques from different Islamic traditions need to be supported to link across to each other. This would be more effective than the Council trying to do this moreover, inter-Mosque outreach would help to counter any potential radicalised thinking within these faith communities.

Creating a Platform to Promote Manchester's Supplementary Schools: Training

In applying for project funding, Quality Mark from NRCSE² or Manchester City Council's safeguarding training³ as well as teacher training for supplementary school teachers⁴ could be made a mandatory requirement of accessing project funds. Successfully managing a community cohesion project could well benefit from integral training opportunities.

Using research of University of Manchester⁵ and of others' to evidence claims of attainment gains made by supplementary schools, they should be educational venues for all children. This could be especially useful for white working class families, whose boys are currently under-performing at school. This could also counter aspects of the 'white flight' phenomenon that many neighbourhoods experience.

Policy Recommendations

We would suggest that funding is needed for pilot projects that promote community cohesion and inter-school cooperation. These pilot projects could act as opportunities for supplementary schools to build track-records for larger consortium-based commissioned community services (e.g. youth engagement, adult literacy, etc.)

We would suggest that more funding is needed to create a dedicated Local Authority team that looks after safeguarding and (teacher) training for supplementary schools. This team would also be responsible for managing any paper work that future regulation might create.

² See <https://www.supplementaryeducation.org.uk/new-nrcse-quality-mark/>

³ See <https://www.manchestersafeguardingboards.co.uk/>

⁴ See <https://meapsite.wordpress.com/our-teacher-training-pathway-for-non-graduates/>

⁵ See <http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/>

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Useful Resources

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