

United Kingdom

Debates on difference and integration in education: Muslims in the UK

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Summary

This paper examines and analyses Muslims in the sphere of education in the UK. The findings investigate the debates and discourses regarding difference and integration and go onto identify discriminatory school structures. Exploring policy documents as well as drawing upon data generated by in depth interviews the paper examines the way in which racism is increasingly denied as a problem in schools and furthermore we examine the extent to which initiatives in place in the education system tend to reproduce rather than challenge negative representations of Muslims. The methodology for the fieldwork consists of 11 in depth, semi structured interviews based in Leeds. The respondents involved included primary and secondary school teachers, BME educational support organisations, academics specialising in education, youth workers and supervisors of Islamic cultural and community centres. Our key findings focus upon 4 key areas including the monitoring of extremism in schools to understand the various measures and practices adopted to both regulate and govern young Muslims. Alongside this we explore debates surrounding the 'dangers' of Muslim faith schools in encouraging 'separatism' rather than integration and the ways in which such discourses have been mobilised to furnish the 'threat' of the Muslim terrorist. We examine the lack of teacher training and promotion of diversity and difference and finally the paper explore the various barriers young Muslims face in the education system in terms of experiences of Islamophobia and racism.

This paper analyses the policies and measures in place promoting tolerance and anti-racism in the compulsory schooling system and develops a critique by drawing upon the interview data with respondents in the field of education. The focus of this paper centred upon the way in which Muslim pupils are constructed in schools, both

primary and secondary. We explore how Muslim pupils are positioned within the education sector, and the effectiveness of support mechanisms and measures in place. Fundamentally we examine the various discursive configurations surrounding Muslims to unravel the ways in which schools respond to discrimination and the extent to which the education system is committed to fostering anti-racist practices. This enables us throughout the report, to critically examine how the experiences of Muslim pupils reinforces or challenges the wider political discourses of Muslims as 'problematic' and 'self-segregating' and furthermore how this restricts them in terms of reaching their full potential in the educational system.

Introduction

Don't let them change ya,
Or even rearrange ya! Oh, no!
We've got a life to live,
Only the fittest of the fittest shall survive -
Stay alive
(Bob Marley)

Education is a key sphere in which the post-racial logic manifests itself in an attempt to deal with Muslim subjects. Current debates surrounding 'failed' multiculturalism as stated by David Cameron in his speech in Munich, February 2011, have fuelled and reinforced notions of 'segregated' communities and 'ghettoisation', as such the so called lack of integration and cohesion has according to the Prime Minister led to extremism among Muslim communities.¹ This assault on multiculturalism by the new British Tory Prime Minister is part of a wider critique of supposedly multicultural policies carried out by right wing commentators and politicians (Merkel, Berlusconi and Sarkozy) throughout Europe and beyond. In these debates Muslims are often cited as an example of the failings of multicultural policies in producing homogenous strife free societies. This paper will explore the monitoring of extremism in schools to understand the various measures and practices adopted to both regulate and govern young Muslims. Alongside this we will explore debates surrounding the 'dangers' of Muslim faith schools in encouraging 'separatism' rather than integration and the ways in which such discourses have been mobilised to furnish the 'threat' of the Muslim terrorist. We will go onto explore how difference and diversity is reflected in education especially when that difference and diversity comes in the form of a Muslim.

This paper will focus of the sphere of education, examining the policies and measures in place promoting tolerance and anti-racism in the compulsory schooling

¹ See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12371994> Accessed Feb: 2011.

system. The paper will develop a critique by drawing upon interview data with respondents in the field of education. The focus of this report centred upon the way in which Muslim pupils are constructed in the schools, both primary and secondary. As such we will examine the commitment to the promotion of cultural and religious diversity in schools, as well as the impact of 'extremism', racism, faith schools and teacher training on different cultures and ethnicities. We will explore how Muslim pupils are positioned within the education sector, moreover the barriers and difficulties they encounter as well as the support mechanisms in place. Fundamentally we will unravel the ways in which schools respond to discrimination and the extent to which they are committed to fostering anti-racist practices as well as the initiatives in place to encourage tolerance and multiculturalism. This will enable us to understand how the experiences of Muslim pupils reinforces or challenges the wider political discourses of Muslims as 'problematic' and 'self-segregating' and furthermore how this may restrict them in terms of reaching their full potential in the educational system.

The methodology for the fieldwork consists of 11 in depth, semi structured interviews based in Leeds.² The sample for the interviews consists of respondents involved in the following professions/organisations:

- Primary and secondary school teachers
- BME educational support organisations
- Academics specialising in education
- Youth workers
- Supervisors of Islamic cultural and community centres.

The findings are analysed using a discourse analysis approach, thus we are concerned with mapping out the hegemonic narrative surrounding Muslims in the sphere of education and what this reveals about the wider discourse on Muslims in the climate of Islamophobia in the post-racial context. That is, we want to understand how Muslims are constructed in the education sector and the interplay between the current paradoxical backdrop which on the one hand signals towards the end of racism, yet on the other, cements, facilitates and subscribes to a widely embedded anti-Muslim stance circulating throughout the west.

² Keeping to the ethical guidelines of social research by the British Sociological Association (BSA), we ensure to safeguard and protect the anonymity and privacy of those who have participated in the research, thus throughout this paper we will refer to the interview respondents as numbers, we are unwilling to add anymore information as this could compromise issues surrounding confidentiality. See: <http://www.britisoc.co.uk/equality/Statement+Ethical+Practice.htm>

1. A critical overview of the political context and debates on education

Education has often been the most high profile policy field where changing national and local government priorities are signalled and implemented. From 1945 to the late 1950s racial discrimination legislation was seen as unnecessary despite strong popular racism. These issues and ethnic diversity were largely ignored in government policy. From the late 1950s to the late 1960s a cross-party political consensus emerged advocating strong racialised immigration controls and weak protection against discrimination to manage the perceived de-stabilising effects of minority migration. In education, assimilation was a key goal with a focus on dispersal and English language teaching. Cultural pluralism and integration came to dominate policy rhetoric into the 1970s with an emphasis on minorities changing and adapting to 'fit in'. Increasing community, ethnic and religious-based and antiracist protest led to the popularisation of multicultural and antiracist education across local education authorities through the 1980s, but schools had great freedom to ignore these developments if they wish, and many did. From 1986 onwards there was a weakening of these movements and a government drive to curb and push back these developments. The introduction of a National Curriculum which failed to acknowledge race and ethnic diversity is indicative of this position.

New Labour from 1997 onwards signalled a change of direction with a welcome explicit focus on the significance of these issues, but this more progressive stance lacked a fundamental understanding of racism and equality issues (Somerville 2007, Gillborn 2008). Following 9/11, government policy moved from 'naïve' to 'cynical' multiculturalism, (in other words a move from promoting the values and organisations concerned with different minority cultures with little commitment to equality to a view that this was misguided and primarily led to increasing divisions between communities which then required action to promote social cohesion) and signalled a return to integrationist and assimilationist priorities with an increasing perception that multicultural policies had failed through encouraging greater ethnic division. In the wake of the urban disturbances of 2001 much policy discussion has focussed on the goal of community cohesion. To some extent this has replaced an earlier emphasis on social exclusion and inclusion, in part because some analyses of those events suggested that self-segregation of minority ethnic communities was a factor in undermining cohesion. Following the 7/7 attacks, the rights and perspectives of the white majority became increasingly asserted with calls for stronger intervention to improve integration, community cohesion, security and contemporary assimilation,

summed up by Gillborn (2008) as 'aggressive majoritarianism'. In education this is exemplified by attacks on wearing the veil by Muslims in school in new guidance on school uniform codes which emphasised security, integration and cohesion which was quickly interpreted by the Media as 'a school ban on veils'. Here, looking different is seen as a 'common sense' threat to national society and local community cohesion. This indicates a deteriorating policy climate and one in which it is increasingly difficult to prioritise fundamental race equality and ethnic diversity objectives and which shows greater concern for white racist sentiments. The attacks in the UK provided justification for increasingly punitive and disciplinary policies in a range of fields.

Cuts in public expenditure and ramping up the neo-liberal agenda of choice and competition in education, developed under New Labour, are the two key drivers of current government policy on education. Expansion of the academies programme, creation of 'free schools' and severe budget cuts mark out some of the central actions of the new government in this sphere. The further re-structuring of secondary education in this way is likely to have a detrimental impact on ethnic minority groups, as in Sweden (Law and Swann 2011). Cuts are leading to the dismantling of the complex raft of policies, initiatives and programmes concerned to address ethnic minority achievement and address issues of racial and ethnic diversity in schools. In a recent survey of half of all local authorities in England about the current position of Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) services 80% of respondents had experienced or were expecting to experience restructuring and/or the reduction of posts through forced or voluntary redundancies in the near future and nearly a third of authorities had already completed or finalised plans to delete or reduce their Ethnic Minority Achievement Services (NUT/NALDIC 2010). Common negative impacts on schools included a reduction in pupil support; a reduction in availability and a rise in costs of valued additional school based work such as interpretation or home school liaison; a shortage of knowledgeable specialists when demand is rising and a disproportionate impact on less well funded schools in which ethnic minority pupils are concentrated. The biggest deterioration reported was in the quality or availability of support for ethnic minority pupils and students.

The attempt to scrap the education maintenance allowance (EMA) by the government was partially reversed but still substantial cuts will be made and this impacts differentially on ethnic minority students as a much higher proportion of some minority groups had received this support, 43 percent of all 17- to 18-year-old full-time students received EMA whereas 67 percent of Black African and 88 percent of Bangladeshi students were in receipt of this allowance.

The move away from prioritising issues of racial and ethnic equality in educational policy is clear in the silence on many of these issues from the Department of Education and reflects the explicit rejection of multiculturalism and policies to address ethnic diversity by the Prime Minister. The Department of Education website (accessed 7/4/11) now contains practically no information or guidance for schools on matters of ethnic minority achievement which is very different to the mass of reports and guidance made available to schools under New Labour. Overall, this new climate of muscular majoritarianism and strengthening neo-liberalism resulting in the decimation of progressive interventions marks a political acceptance of increasing racial and ethnic inequalities, an indifference to the racialisation of education and hostility to race and ethnic specific policies and programmes. There are strong parallels here with trends in Central and Eastern Europe in relation to the Roma (Law and Swann 2011).

Segregation and integration are 'chaotic concepts' and their misrecognition and mis-interpretation provides fertile ground for 'myths to grow' (Finney and Simpson 2009). There are many myths associated with schooling in the UK, including a current government view that multiculturalism has facilitated segregation and that minority ethnic groups prefer segregated schools. Multiculturalism, in terms of the recognition of the human needs that arise from ethnic diversity in social policy, and anti-racism, in terms of the recognition of the need to challenge the fundamental basis of racial hostility and associated violence, have not led to increasing spatial, structural or cultural segregation, and these objectives remain legitimate policy goals. Despite the political rhetoric, ethnic managerialism, recognising the need to respond to ethnic diversity in the provision of public services and applying 'new public managerial' strategies to this issue is prevalent across all sectors, for example the sanctioning of faith schools and adapting institutions, law and professional practice (Law 1997, Modood 2011). Also, the failure of institutions to adequately identify and respond to differing needs does lead to poor quality service provision and reproduces patterns of exclusion, as in the case of the failure of secondary education in relation to Gypsy and Traveller children (also recently confirmed in evidence on Scotland, Netto et al 2011) and the very limited attention to issues of racism and ethnic diversity in the national curriculum (Ball 2009). Race relations law in the UK defines segregationary practices as direct discrimination, treating someone less favourably because they are a member of a specific group, and cases of for example segregation of minority ethnic children in special remedial English classes which deprive them of learning from the national curriculum have been found to be unlawful.

In relation to schooling, ethnic composition is not growing over time and there is a strong desire for ethnically mixed schools among both white and minority ethnic

families (Weekes-Bernard 2007), although a minority of both white and minority ethnic parents do prefer schools where their child is a part of the ethnic majority in the school. Ethnic composition of schools and resulting segregation arises largely from differentials in income and wealth and decisions in the housing market and the resulting mismatch between choice of schools and outcomes (Finney and Simpson 2009). Here, the statutory legal duty placed on schools to promote both 'good race relations' and 'community cohesion', for example in contexts where there are concentrations of either white or minority pupils, and also where there is evidence of inter-ethnic conflict, is of particular importance. Further, all minorities, including Muslims, want to live in mixed neighbourhoods and increasing residential concentrations in certain areas is caused by those who move out. Paradoxically, both increasing suburbanisation and increasing inner-city concentrations characterise the housing outcomes for all minority ethnic groups result from both increasing socio-economic polarisation within minority ethnic groups and 'white flight'. White middle-class children often have little interaction with children from other backgrounds. These children rarely had working class friends and their few minority ethnic friends were predominantly from middle-class backgrounds. It was clear that there has been little social mixing despite the ethnic mix in some schools as a whole, confirming the persistence of embedded ethnic and racial divisions.

So, in response to the segregating tendencies in education it is paramount to both address the attitudes of white children and young people as well as ethnic differentials in child and adult poverty through the tax and benefit system, the minimum wage and implementation of the race relations legislation. Persistent disadvantage and complex barriers to both work and benefits are experienced by minority groups. The creation of destitution amongst some asylum-seekers, rising unemployment differentials and failure by the Department for Work and Pensions to implement statutory race equality strategies (Law 2011) are all further signs that indicate poor prospects for the future and the likelihood of increasing ethnic differentials in both poverty and in income and wealth, and hence the reproduction of current patterns of ethnic polarisation in schools. The relative vulnerability of minority ethnic groups in a variety of market contexts means that the current economic recession and associated cuts in welfare are having and will have a greater negative impact on these groups and also on school outcomes.

Fully implementing the eradication of direct and indirect racial and ethnic discrimination in schools and other educational institutions could go a long way to dismantling segregationist practices, for example in differential examination entry and setting, across schools. Race relations legislation has placed a statutory responsibility on schools in this regard since 1976. There have been successful formal investigations

and court cases but currently the lack of leadership, data collection, accurate analysis and action within schools on issues of racial and ethnic equality indicate that this is a low priority, and this reflects the prevailing reticence to grasp these issues effectively at national (and international) level. Racial and ethnic inequalities, racial and ethnic hostilities and patterns of racial and ethnic segregation in education are known, broadly understood and largely they are ineffectively dealt with in political, policy and professional contexts. Yet a post-ethnic, post-racial society is being built as declining racist attitudes, increasing mixed-ethnicity friendship groups amongst young people, increasing ethnic mixing in residential neighbourhoods, and the demand for ethnically mixed schools are evident as positive social trends in the UK. These trends are constrained, counteracted and frustrated by the powerful effects of hostile political rhetoric and divisive structural forces, such as the marketisation of education and increasing child poverty. We need to change the terms of the political debate about ethnicity and education and build educational policies and practices which nurture and facilitate these positive multicultural social trends. Despite the constraints of politics, policy and markets everyday multiculturalism is a living, powerful social process which will not be denied.

2. Key findings

The findings which are based on our interview data are focused around four key areas including, the monitoring of 'extremism' in schools, the debates surrounding faith schools, the extent of diversity and teacher training promoted in schools, and the impact of racism and Islamophobia in reinforcing barriers for Muslims in the education system. Throughout the paper we will examine the way in which Muslims have been constructed within the discourse and moreover the key challenges and problems they encounter in the field of education. The findings will draw upon the responses by those interviewed for the research and elaborate upon the way in which the discourse reflects wider debates surrounding Muslims, tolerance and anti-racism in the sphere of education. We will explore how such a discourse reinforces (or challenges) the contemporary Islamophobic context and how it feeds into the post-racial logic; that is the idea that western societies have seen 'the end of racism' (Sayyid 2010: 3).

2.1. Monitoring 'extremism'

Following the events of 9/11 and 7/7 the UK government heavily invested in counter-terrorism initiatives in attempts to reduce and contain the 'threat' of 'extremism'. This is perhaps most clearly manifested with the PREVENT (or 'Preventing Violent Extremism'

PVE) agenda. The initiative 'was first announced by the Labour government in October 2006 and inaugurated through government offices and local authorities from 2007, with further expansion and development' (Thomas 2009: 2). Initially £6 million was pumped into the initiative and spread across 70 local authorities who had a population of 5 percent or more of Muslims, as well as communities who were seen most susceptible to the 'risk' of recruitment or 'grooming' by 'extremists' (Thomas 2009:2). For 2008-2011 further funding was provided and the PVE agenda expanded to cover 'Youth Offending Teams and Young Offenders Institutions, Police Forces, and Further and Higher Education Institutions, which were regarded as key recruiting grounds for Islamist 'extremist' organisations' (Thomas 2009: 2). Through this expansion there was the hope that 'extremist' activity could be identified and countered more effectively (Thomas 2009: 2). The PVE initiative was enforced in schools and educational institutions 'across the full age range of children and young people' in both primary, secondary, further and higher education (Thomas 2009: 3). The PVE policy agenda is composed of several key approaches including, tension monitoring, the promotion of shared values and challenging 'extremist ideologies', building civic capacity and leadership with Muslim communities and strengthening the role of faith institutions in Muslim communities (Thomas 2009: 3-4). According to Thomas (2009),

"This has led to a significant focus on educational standards in general, and citizenship education specifically, in after-school Mosque schools and Madrassahs, and capacity building training, support and movement towards charitable status for many Mosques and other Muslim community organisations. Above all, though, PVE activity to date has focussed on engagement with Muslim young people, using a variety of approaches and techniques, through youth work, schools, and arts and sports activities" (Thomas 2009: 4).

It is suggested that as many as 44,000 people, most of them young people, have been involved in the PVE programme, however, as Thomas points out "it also claimed that the monitoring and evaluation data from the programme to date is weak and unreliable" (Thomas 2009: 4). For Thomas the PVE agenda has two significant contradictions, firstly is the exclusivity upon Muslim communities, "a specific ethnic/religious concern explicitly at odds with the Government's approach to community cohesion" (Thomas 2009: 4). The second contradiction is related to the first point in that the PVE agenda "is a consequent avoidance of 'violent extremism' in other ethnic communities, especially the significant growth of activity by, and popular support for, the far right groups within some white communities" (Thomas 2009: 4). For Thomas:

"Such a clear focus within PVE on Muslim communities, and the associated lack of focus on racist extremism within white communities could well have the unintended consequence of hardening a defensive and antagonistic 'Muslim' identity amongst those involved in response to a perception that their whole identity and community lifestyle is being implicitly criticized and scrutinised" (Thomas 2009: 7).

We want to focus on how this has specifically impacted Muslims in education. The main government publication produced for monitoring the threat of 'extremism in education comes in the form of a booklet published in 2008, entitled *Learning Together to be Safe*, subtitled, *A toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism*. This document has been widely circulated throughout the UK and provides a toolkit for teachers and staff in preventing 'extremism':

"The PVE toolkit outlines what it considers to be practical advice for schools in implementing the spirit of PVE; this is centred around four core areas, leadership and values, teaching, learning and the curriculum, pupil support and challenge and managing risks and responding to events. The end goal of PVE in schools is to develop a school ethos, evident in both student and teacher, which accommodates shared values and responsibility, a respect and understanding of difference and the development of critical thinking. Added to this is the building of capacity to monitor risks and devise appropriate responses through networking within the local community, local authorities and other groups" (Mirza 2010: 21).

According to Akram and Richardson (2009),

"The educational objectives set out in the toolkit are unexceptionable at the level of abstract principle. The danger in practice, however, is that they are too closely associated with the wider PVE agenda to win the trust and commitment of teachers, parents and communities, and of young people themselves" (Akram and Richardson 2009: 50).

They go on to argue that:

"Schools have to protest against superficiality and prejudice, to promote deep understanding of complex issues, to provide resources and opportunities to enable their pupils to play full parts as citizens locally, nationally and globally, and to produce outcomes that are fair for all. Yes: protest, promote, provide, produce for all, not just prevent for some" (Akram and Richardson 2009: 50)

Reading through the toolkit it is remarkable to see the focus on Muslims and the 'threat' of 'extremism', the document opens with the following statement:

"Dealing with violent extremism is nothing new. Throughout history there have been groups prepared to use violence to achieve their aims. Twenty years ago the major threat we faced was from Irish terrorism. Today we face a different threat. A small minority seek to radicalise young people with an ideology which justifies the use of violence through a distorted interpretation of a peaceful religion. While violent extremism influenced by Al Qaida poses the greatest threat to life, other forms of extremism and prejudice are also affecting individuals and communities across the country and can be a catalyst for alienation and disaffection and potentially lead to violence"³

Here the 'threat' of Irish 'extremism' twenty years ago is pointed out, yet it must be noted that there were never any initiatives in schools twenty years ago to prevent such activity. Moreover, Al Qaida is specifically named as a 'threat' whereas activities of the EDL and associated far right movements are simply dismissed as 'other forms of extremism and prejudice', this is extremely problematic as the Muslim 'problem' is played up, while 'other forms of extremism' are clearly played down. This emphasis on Muslim 'extremism' is further cemented in the document as follows:

³ See: Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), (2008) 'Learning to be safe: A toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism' pp3.

“The Government assesses that the UK is a high priority target for international terrorists aligned with Al Qaida and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. In practice this means a threat from British nationals and UK-based terrorists as well as from foreign terrorists planning attacks from abroad. The majority of violent extremist networks are located in major urban conurbations such as London, Greater Manchester and the West Midlands. However recent arrests in Bristol and Exeter also demonstrate that violent extremists are widely distributed across the UK. Experience suggests there is no typical profile of UK-based violent extremists influenced by Al Qaida. They can come from a range of geographical areas, from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and include a number of converts to Islam. The nature of support for violent extremist activity varies but can include recruiting others, training, fundraising and procurement of support for terrorist activities. Training can include outward-bound type courses to encourage bonding either in the UK or in camps operated by Al Qaida overseas”⁴

Throughout the toolkit, Muslim ‘extremist’ activity is almost exclusively remarked upon, in which examples, research, and advice, is given throughout concerning what factors can cause people to become involved in Al Qaida-associated ‘violent extremism’. With the ‘growing’ government body of ‘data’, ‘research’ and ‘knowledge’ in the area it is claimed that:

“Evidence suggests that this path, or ‘radicalisation’ process, is not linear or predictable. The length of time taken can differ greatly from a few weeks to years and proceeding down a radicalisation path does not always result in violence. For some, but not all, of those who have become involved in violent extremism, the transition to postsecondary school learning was a crucial time. However the secondary school age period was often when the process of radicalisation started which eventually tipped them into choosing to undertake violent or criminal acts”⁵

As such it is suggested that a number of key factors contribute to the ‘radicalisation’ process, these include, contact with recruiters, access to violent extremist material and use of extremist narratives,⁶ however, the document also goes on to say that “the key conclusion from available evidence is that there is no single profile of a person likely to become involved in extremism, or single indicator of when a person might move to adopt violence in support of extremist ideas”.⁷ This is remarkable, if as the document states, there is ‘no single profile or indicator’ of someone becoming involved in ‘extremism’, then why is there such an insistence on specifically Muslim activity?

The handbook presents a variety of speculative reasons as to why Muslims may become involved in ‘extremist’ activity ranging from questions about faith, identity and belonging, excitement and adventure, a grievance triggered by experiences of racism and discrimination, to enhancing self-esteem and ‘street cred’ and identification with a charismatic individual and attraction to a group which can offer identity, social network

⁴ See: Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), (2008) ‘Learning to be safe: A toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism’ pp11.

⁵ See: Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), (2008) ‘Learning to be safe: A toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism’ pp15.

⁶ See: Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), (2008) ‘Learning to be safe: A toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism’ pp15-16.

⁷ See: Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), (2008) ‘Learning to be safe: A toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism’ pp16.

and support.⁸ However, when discussing factors influencing far right activity, reasons included, 'need for protection', 'youth rebellion', 'anger' and seeking 'family, friends, community and father substitutes'.⁹ As such those seen entering far right 'extremism' appear to be constructed as victims who are more vulnerable 'seeking father substitutes' and 'needing protection', additionally the factors are more generic in this case, such as youth rebellion and anger, whereas within the Muslim example there is an emphasis on faith, culture and religion, for example:

"Adolescents exploring issues of identity can feel both distant from their parents' cultural and religious heritage and uncomfortable with their place in society around them. Extremist ideas can help provide a sense of purpose or feeling of belonging"¹⁰

And:

"The experience of migration, local tensions or events affecting families in countries of origin may contribute to alienation from UK values and a decision to cause harm to symbols of the community or state"¹¹

The toolkit claims to raise awareness for schools and provide information on 'violent extremism', as well as encouraging schools to make a positive contribution, protect the well being of particular vulnerable pupils and groups and providing advice on managing risks.¹² Staff are encouraged to adapt the curriculum to raise issues around 'extremism' in classes as well as look out for the following:

- Graffiti symbols, writing or art work promoting extremist messages or images
- Pupils accessing extremist material online, including through social networking sites
- Parental reports of changes in behaviour, friendship or actions and requests for assistance
- Partner schools, local authority services, and police reports of issues affecting pupils in other schools
- Pupils voicing opinions drawn from extremist ideologies and narratives
- Use of extremist or 'hate' terms to exclude others or incite violence.¹³

⁸ See: Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), (2008) 'Learning to be safe: A toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism' pp17-18.

⁹ See: Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), (2008) 'Learning to be safe: A toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism' pp19.

¹⁰ See: Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), (2008) 'Learning to be safe: A toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism' pp18.

¹¹ See: Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), (2008) 'Learning to be safe: A toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism' pp18.

¹² See: Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), (2008) 'Learning to be safe: A toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism' pp5.

¹³ See: Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), (2008) 'Learning to be safe: A toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism' pp34.

Furthermore, the documents states that, “if members of staff do have concerns about behaviour patterns, they should seek advice from other partners and use their professional judgement to consider whether a young person might be at risk.”¹⁴ Here we see that it is left to the ‘professional judgement’ of staff to decide whether or not a pupil is engaging within ‘extremist’ activity.

We interviewed several schoolteachers; two were from the same primary school and taught at reception level, as such the children they teach start from the age of 4-5 years old. Both had been involved in PREVENT training put on by the school which has a high Muslim and BME intake. When asked about what exactly the training entailed the following was stated:

“Well the whole thing is about preventing it before it occurs and it is like early warning signs, but there is no age really when you can start detecting the signs. It was not about labelling anyone or having any stereotypes, in fact it was just really good training about how there is no stereotypical extremists and breaking down those boundaries and giving us case studies. And being aware of patterns of behaviour and being aware of the things that kids say. A lot of the examples were secondary school related, but I just think in our area kids are growing up really fast and they are exposed to a lot of things that young children might not usually be exposed to...It was different patterns of behaviour that were out of the ordinary. Basically it was very kind of child protection like, we were told to look for things where children were saying things which were racially charged or using inappropriate language which they may have picked up elsewhere. They talked about children’s extended family coming to a parent evening and not ever seeing the parents and language barriers and all of that kind of thing.... We also talked about social factors that might lead people to become extremists or have extremist views and the psychological implications and how it can start at school the feelings of isolation and not being understood by your community and that kind of thing”(Interview 2).

A different teacher who had been on the same training stated:

“Everyone gets the training and you would generally assume it would be the older children but you can never make too many assumptions. I mean it might even be that children who are only six or seven are being brought up around something that might be going on and that to them is normal and they don’t know how to say that it is going on because they don’t see it as a problem or an issue, but it is telling them it is not really normal and if there is something like that going on that we would need to know about it. But you would assume it would be the older children and especially going up in to high school” (Interview 1).

When asked what was told to the staff to look for when judging whether or not a child is engaging with ‘extremism’, the same participant responded with the following:

“If the pupils are sat telling you that in their household they are sat making some kind of contraption with shampoo bottles or something, or they have got video cameras out all the time or if one of the family members is back and forth to Pakistan or Afghanistan and for long periods of time, or they might say to you that they are going to a camp somewhere or visiting family somewhere. I mean...it could be something simple and it might be that they are visiting family somewhere, but you always have to question the; ‘what if?’, no matter what, just because it might well be if you knew and you had that question about it in your own mind then you would want to dig a little deeper... we have a lot of children who spend a lot of time flying back and forth for long periods of time in Afghanistan and come back with more extreme behaviour and different views, so that is what we have to look for...” (Interview 1).

¹⁴ See: Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), (2008) ‘Learning to be safe: A toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism’ pp19.

This is worrying, as teachers are clearly encouraged to start 'monitoring extremism' in schools involving pupils at a very young age. The message of never making too many assumptions, and always questioning the 'what if?' is potentially very dangerous. If it is the case that a Muslim child is visiting family in Pakistan this is subject to scrutiny, whereas a white pupil going away on holiday to visit relatives is not questioned. Moreover, it is deeply troubling that the teacher states that when coming back from Afghanistan she has noticed that they have come back with 'extreme' behaviour and 'different views', despite never really being able to explain what she regards as 'extreme' behaviour and 'different views'. As we saw in the toolkit causes for concern are based on 'professional judgement', however, if this teacher can not even elaborate upon what makes the behaviour or views of the pupils 'extreme' it has to be questioned how she can qualified to make such a judgement/accusation. The ability to make these judgements seems open to interpretation, speculation and bias and also appears to take the form of a witch-hunt, in addition to this there seems to be a voyeuristic element in the digging deeper, to try and find evidence of 'extremism'. It must be stressed again the pupils taught by this teacher are very young, thus having 'extremist' views at such a young age of 5 years old is highly unlikely, and the fact that this is even thought to be the case by teachers is even more problematic. This concern is also highlighted by Mirza (2010) and Stevens (2009):

"Central government policy is left to teachers, head teachers and local authorities to interpret and act on; for teachers and administrators often with limited training in diversity and equality this may prove challenging... The vagueness of the strand in PVE on monitoring of risks is also troubling, for it encourages the scrutiny of students, individuals and groups connected with the school. It is not the intention to argue that the threat of violent extremism is imaginary, but this strategy of monitoring (essentially spying on your neighbour), also raises the spectre of PVE being seen as a 'witch-hunt' against Muslim communities; especially in light of the wide berth in terms of interpretation afforded to the relevant stakeholders in PVE by the government. Ultimately, PVE may prove counterproductive as many Muslim communities may feel singled out and further marginalised rather than part of an inclusive and accepting Britain" (Mirza 2010: 21-23; Stevens, 2009).

Although both teachers point out that the training dealt with all forms of 'extremism', we see that the examples of 'what to look for' are largely concerned with practices associated with the discourse surrounding Muslims, e.g. training camps and trips to Pakistan and Afghanistan as well as language barriers and extended families. This notion was reinforced by a youth worker who had also been on PREVENT training:

"We had a little bit of training via the police, I can't remember what it was called now, but it was to look at extremism and it touched on the fact that it is not only targeted at Islam, it is targeted to other forms of extremisms as well, so that was quite good that they gave you a general broad aspect of it. When it came to doing scenarios for some reason it was down to Muslim extremism so it was like an undercover thing... The scenarios were more around young Muslim men and I thought there is like a cover-up where they are not really targeting all the extremists groups and stuff. It turned out that the bottom line was that they were looking at mainly young Muslim men" (Interview 6).

Interestingly, a teacher working in a school across the road from the school of the other two teachers interviewed had no training on PREVENT:

“Her School is across the road from my School literally across the road, actually it is quite a different catchment, her School has got loads more Muslim children because they offer halal meals. So a lot of children do come to our School but if a space comes up at hers then a lot of the Muslim children leave ours. We have the low average children from different ethnic backgrounds, it is something like 8 or 11% of children otherwise were they are White British, but it is rising and in nursery at the moment it is about 30% who are coming with English as an additional language (EAL), where numbers are rising and changing, but at the moment it is mostly White British... We have had nothing about extremism at all. We have had awareness on the gypsies. We had some general Education Leeds training about tolerance to everybody, something like that, about what words you can and can't use if you are being racist, like a little quiz, but it wasn't about spotting extremism, it was just about being aware of other cultures, like being more culturally diverse and accepting” (Interview 8).

This is very interesting and extremely telling about the nature of the PVE training and its exclusive nature on Muslims whereby we can see from these cases that the school with a higher Muslim and BME population holds the training on ‘extremism’ whereas in the school with a higher percentage of white students, such training is absent. This begs the question that if as the toolkit states, it is concerned with all forms of ‘extremism’ and there is no ‘single profile’ of an ‘extremist’ as well as the notion that ‘extremism affects us all’, then why are schools with a higher intake of white pupils not also taking PVE training, and moreover where is the stress and concern of white pupils at the ages of 4-5 upwards entering far right ‘extremism’. This clear disparity is deeply disconcerting and extremely alarming as there is a blatant and specific focus on governing and regulating almost exclusively Muslim children and their behaviour and practices. Ironically the toolkit states the following:

“This toolkit is for all primary, secondary and special schools in England including independent schools...All communities are affected, whether directly or indirectly; and in an increasingly inter-connected world it is important young people are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need for the future regardless of where they go to school. It is therefore important that all schools are aware of the issues and consider what actions are appropriate, in conjunction with local partners”¹⁵

There has been much critique of the PREVENT agenda for the very reason it focuses primarily upon Muslims, thus works to isolate the community further. It has been criticised for the ‘fuzziness’ surrounding terms, concepts and implementation as Mirza argues:

“Despite the portrayal of PVE as a universal remedy, there are several debilitating problems. Firstly, PVE focuses exclusively on Muslim communities; therefore implying an innate connection between these communities and violent extremist ideology. While PVE measures do endorse dialogue and greater awareness it does not redress structural barriers such as institutional racism evident in schools, the job market, housing and provision of social services. It amounts to a form of deficit thinking whereby the attraction of extremist Islamist ideology, while seen as rooted in the marginalisation and social exclusion of many

¹⁵ See: Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), (2008) ‘Learning to be safe: A toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism’ pp6.

young Muslims, is thought best addressed through changing ideological threads rather than the structural nature of their isolation. In this way, those that are attracted or potentially so, to extremist views also become the problem themselves as extremism becomes constructed as something inherently embodied and much less to do with structures of power and domination which lead to marginalization” (Mirza 2010: 23).

Furthermore:

“The implementation of PVE strategies in many schools may lead to the co-opting of initiatives connected with ideals such as community cohesion, citizenship, democracy and human rights into a discourse on national security. As such, stakeholders within the school, community and local authorities may come to construct these initiatives firstly as vital components in securing Britain against terrorism, rather than building student capacity to ‘understand and appreciate others from different backgrounds with a sense of shared values, fulfilling their potential and feeling part of a community’. The impact of this may be to further isolate and germinate embattled sentiments of those to which PVE is directed. Similarly, PVE as outlined in the DCSF guidelines is fairly vague beyond statements such as those on social responsibility and inclusion. In terms of specific programmes and curricular activities that form part of the practical advice of the DCSF toolkit, it is admitted that these should already normally be part of schools ‘modus operandi, inline with initiatives such as community cohesion’” (Mirza 2010: 23).

Similarly critical of the PVE agenda for being unhelpful in the promotion of tolerance and diversity as well as failing to understand young Muslims and ‘extremism’ adequately, Thomas (2009) states:

“My fear is that PVE is neither making a helpful contribution to community cohesion, or effectively engaging with the political and doctrinal understandings that are attracting a small minority of young Muslims towards extremism” (Thomas 2009: 2).

As such it is important to critique the PVE agenda in relation to the unfair treatment of Muslims within the education system throughout the UK, as Mirza argues:

“The risk of PVE with what should be standard approaches in multicultural education such as social inclusion, participation and opposing racism, is that it becomes pejoratively linked with Muslim communities and tackling violent extremism and not promoting a more equitable and democratic Britain” (Mirza 2010: 23).

We have seen from our findings how the explicit focus on Muslims works to overlook and even dismiss other forms of ‘extremism’, additionally the training does not seem to take into account that teachers and staff in schools are likely to hold different perceptions, interpretations and biases, thus what one teacher may judge as ‘extreme’ behaviour another may not. Furthermore, the monitoring of Muslim pupils at such a young age is unwarranted, unjustified and unnecessary. The initiative seems to reinforce the Islamophobic discourse and constructs of the Muslim ‘terrorist’ rather than challenge it. The PVE agenda fails to account for the impact of state practices and structural inequalities, and seems to completely miss the point of promoting inclusion, diversity and tolerance. The implementation of such an initiative within schools through training and the toolkit is detrimental for Muslim pupils across Britain’s educational system.

2.2. Faith schools

In advancing the goals of community cohesion, schools are thought to be a crucial media for interaction and the prevention of different demographics leading 'parallel lives'. However, the discourse on faith schools and community cohesion, fuelled by acts of violent extremism has led to a situation where, 'debate about faith schools is often characterised by discussion of Muslim schools'. (Mirza 2010: 16-18, The Runnymede Trust, 2008, p. 4).

Since the beginning of state education in 1870, England and Wales have received funding for schools with a Christian foundation and in 1944 the Education Act provided state funding to some Jewish schools (Jackson 2006: 89). In recent years the previous Labour Government committed itself to developing and expanding the number of faith schools throughout the country as a result of demands and mobilisations from the Muslim community (Short 2003: 132). The decision to extend the range of faith schools funded by the state enabled the inclusion of Muslim, Sikh and Hindu schools along others (Jackson 2006: 89). As such, 'the state has funded currently 8 Muslim schools, a Sikh school and a Seventh Day Adventist school, a privilege already enjoyed by thousands of Anglican and Catholic schools as well as some Methodist and Jewish schools' (Modood 2009: 170). Such a decision provoked a varied reaction with unease surrounding the allegedly 'divisive' nature of such schools (Short 2002: 559).

Those who support faith schools argue that it is a collective right against the backdrop of a multicultural society and parents should be able to educate their children in accordance to their religious beliefs if they desire to do so (Short 2003: 129). Those in opposition to faith schools, largely in the form of right wing commentators and the British Humanist Association, argue instead that faith schools prevent the autonomy of children being able to chose their own beliefs, they argue that "young people in religious schools are denied both the option and opportunity to develop competencies in making informed choices, specifically because such schools are predisposed to indoctrinate and proselytise" (Meer 2007: 63).

It is also maintained by such critics that faith schools cause 'segregation' in mainstream society (Short 2003: 129). This notion was articulated by the Swann Report (1985), which held a number of 'reservations about religious instruction in schools' arguing that 'denominational schools were divisive' (Modood 1994: 62). Morevoer it was argued that the demand for seperate schools would evaporate if the existing mainstream schools offered a broader curriculum reflecting the diverse nature of British society (Short 2002: 565-566), however as Short (2002), points out, the

Swann committee “did not offer a view as to what should happen if existing schools failed to comply with its recommendations” (Short 2002: 566).

Schools are generally regarded as vital in the promotion of multiculturalism, diversity and tolerance. However, there has been a growing attack particularly focused upon Muslim faith schools as ‘damaging’ cohesion. There has been much debate surrounding the issue of specifically Muslim schools and the discourse tends largely to focus upon the negative impact they have in contributing to ‘extremism’ and ‘isolation’ from mainstream British society. Such objections emerged following 9/11, the Oldham and Bradford riots (2001) and more recently 7/7, as a result of these key international, national and local events critics have argued that Muslim schools ‘potentially create education ghettos, and develop a situation in which diversity is unhealthy’ (Parker-Jenkins 2002: 276), as such concerns around the compatibility of Muslim Schools with life in Britain have flourished (Meer 2007: 56).

According to Hewer (2001) the desire for the establishment of Muslim faith schools in Britain was due to four key concerns as follows:

Firstly, was the desire to provide a ‘safe’ environment for post-pubescent girls. Secondly, was the desire for an integrated education in which faith-based principles could be incorporated into the school so that they would educate the whole person in an Islamic environment. Thirdly, was the desire for establishments that would offer a specialist training in the Islamic religious sciences alongside general education so that boys, especially, might be educated to serve their community as potential religious leaders. Fourthly, and most recently, came the desire to set higher standards of expectation and achievement for Muslim pupils. In this regard it is noteworthy that there is a general concern that the attainment levels of pupils with Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage are significantly below the national average, thus leading to poor opportunities for employment or access to further and higher education. (Hewer 2001: 518).

Out of Britain’s 6900 (approx.) faith schools, Muslim schools only account for 8, (there are over 100 independent Muslim schools), in addition to this the process of obtaining state funding for Muslim schools has been a struggle spanning over 15 years in which applications were repeatedly turned down and refused, sometimes for spurious reasons (Parker-Jenkins 2002: 278). Their place within Britain’s educational system remains a contested area (Meer 2007: 55), as Mirza (2010) argues:

The consideration of faith schools and their role in fostering community cohesion is not necessarily conceived as a concern of the majority Christian schools; rather it appears to be subsumed within the overall discussion of violent extremism and integration of BME groups within a system of British core values. (Mirza 2010: 16).

This points to the growing anti-Muslim discourse embedded within society, whereby the focus of concern regarding faith schools is articulated as a Muslim ‘problem’, despite the fact they only make up a minor percentage of all faith schools in the country, which are majority Christian. Critics of Muslim schools blame multiculturalism for enabling and

facilitating what they regard as 'segregation' this is perhaps best illustrated by Trevor Phillips who in 2006 stated that we are 'sleepwalking into segregation':

Phillips believes that multiculturalism facilitates the maintenance of cultural paths incompatible with British core values and allows ethnic minorities to develop parallel separate lives. (Meer & Modood, 2009, Mills, 2007, Mirza 2010: 16).

As such discourses on multiculturalism and cultural diversity are increasingly blamed for 'allowing' Britain's ethnically marked communities to become 'segregated' from the national majority community (Mirza 2010: 16-18) a view recently cemented by British Prime Minister David Cameron in his attack on multiculturalism.¹⁶ In this opposition Muslims are often specifically singled out as main perpetrators of 'segregation', thus the focus on community cohesion and integration policies and initiatives are largely aimed at the Muslim population in attempts to push them into accepting and integrating into the values of mainstream British society (Mirza 2010: 16-18, Kalra & Kapoor 2009).

In our interviews the respondents were largely opposed to faith schools, only few supported them, those in favour pointed out the support and guidance provided by such schools, for example:

"I think faith schools have a major role to play not only in the education sector but also in eliminating extremism. All faith schools beyond any one particular religion are important they give a moral perspective. I think the idea of segregation does sometimes become an issue but think that's when all inter-faith schools and groups need to come together, Hindu, Christian, Muslim schools coming together to give a national recognition...I think Muslims do better in faith schools because of the targeted support they get there and not in mainstream schools" (Interview 9).

Although the respondent briefly draws upon the potential danger for 'segregation' he notes how such schools play a significant role in society and also in eliminating 'extremism'. Additionally the respondent talks about Muslims achieving better in faith schools due to the greater support they receive compared to mainstream education. Another respondent also in favour of faith schools, points to how the issue surrounding faith schools only becomes a 'problem' when 'other' faiths come into the equation:

"The issue of faith school as a problem only comes to light when we have other faith schools being developed for Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Jews. When there were only Christian faith schools it wasn't mentioned or discussed and seen as a problem, its only when you have other faiths developing faith schools that this becomes a problem" (Interview 3).

The additional learning of culture and behaviour found in faith schools was also picked up as something positive by a couple of respondents:

"I do think some of them have positive roles, especially the Hamara Centre because the children go before and after a normal school day so they learn about their culture separately to what they do in school... Being in a school anywhere has more of a positive effect and it teaches more routine and structure" (Interview 1).

¹⁶ See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12371994> Accessed Feb: 2011.

The next respondent talks about the stronger respect pupils from faith schools have:

“You can see the differences between the two schools in various ways; like their mannerisms and respect; the young people at the faith School have got a lot more respect generally, whereas, the kids at the mainstream schools are just being normal kids and are not as respectful” (Interview 6).

Arguments supporting Muslim faith schools maintain that they provide a positive response to racial discrimination, it is also argued that they encourage fairness and justice for pupils, parents and communities, they provide high quality education and important skills and promote diversity and integration (Jackson 2006: 90). In addition to this it is also argued that such schools, “...promote social cohesion, through encouraging participation by religious and ethnic minorities in democratic institutions and practices” (Jackson 2006: 93). However, recent years have also seen opposition to Muslim schools fuelled by the right wing press, and following a Channel 4 documentary entitled *‘Lessons in Hate and Violence’* by Dispatches filmed in 2011 critics of faith schools became more vocal.

The ‘undercover’ documentary filmed what ‘really’ goes on in Muslim faith schools showing teachers beating pupils and children being taught anti-western values, this programme fed the Islamophobic discourse of such schools as ‘segregating’ and ‘radicalising’ young Muslims in Britain. Following the airing of this documentary the tabloid press was splashed with headlines including ‘Shame of Britain’s Muslim schools: Secret filming shows pupils being beaten and ‘taught Hindus drink cow p***’¹⁷ The article goes on to state that *“Muslims can no longer sweep this under the carpet – they need to face up to what is happening behind closed doors. Many warn that if we don’t all tackle this toxic mix of hatred and violence head on, we will reap the whirlwind in years to come”*¹⁸. This account reinforces the arguments against Muslim faith schools in the claims that they teach hatred and violence as well as ‘segregation’, note throughout the article the stress was only on the ‘dangers’ of Muslim faith schools, as such Christian, Catholic, Hindu and other faith schools were immune from such attack.

From those interviewed similar concerns were expressed about Muslim faith schools:

“Faith schools have a place but it is what is driving it, the motive behind it, the agenda’s behind it that determines what is right and what is wrong and a lot of times it is wrong, because they are trying to force somebody else out and are not giving a child or young person a balanced perspective and that is the same with Muslims, but Islam is used to manipulate and to control a lot of young people and they are given an interpretation of what the Koran says and they have to adhere to that, based on the Imam’s view, and because they learn the Koran in that way without actually learning the interpretation of some of those things they know then they are not questioning it, it is a case of, ‘I am the Imam’, or, ‘I am the dad’, or, ‘I am the older person’, ‘And I am saying this is what the Koran says and this is what it means” (Interview 7).

¹⁷<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1356361/Shame-Britains-Muslim-schools-Secret-filming-shows-pupils-beaten.html#ixzz1V6JNACya> Accessed: Feb 2011.

¹⁸<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1356361/Shame-Britains-Muslim-schools-Secret-filming-shows-pupils-beaten.html#ixzz1V6JNACya> Accessed: Feb 2011.

Here we see clearly from this response the notion of the Imam as giving ‘dangerous’ interpretations of the religious text and moreover Islam itself is seen as ‘manipulating’ young people. Absent from this commentary is the range of activities taught in Muslim faith schools or the positive role they play, rather the emphasis is strictly upon the notion that young Muslims are being forced, misguided and brainwashed in these schools. This notion of the ‘danger’ of faith schools, and what goes on ‘behind closed doors’, was further illustrated by a teacher who said the following:

“The children who go to the mosques after schools you get different things from them, like if we say, ‘do you behave like this at mosque school?’ And they say, ‘oh no because you get the sticks’. And if they have said anything like that in front of their parents they recoil in absolute horror, so we get a really limited picture about what they do, their parents don’t want to tell you. So they say, ‘you can’t misbehave there’. So that is always a bit concerning, because you put it on a concern form but what can you do because Ofsted can’t go in can they, they can’t inspect, because it is not a mainstream school” (Interview 8).

Such a response reinforces the ‘scandal’ of ‘dangerous’ Muslim faith schools where children talking of getting ‘sticks’ is mentioned as well as the lack of ‘inspection’ from Ofsted, which is a ‘concern’ for this respondent. This view feeds the logic of Muslim faith schools as ‘unsafe’ and ‘threatening’, and here the respondent also seems to suggest that parents are ‘aware’ of ‘bad’ things happening in these schools but ‘don’t want to tell you’. This view seems to feed a scaremongering discourse similar to that of the tabloid press where fear is amplified to establish the Muslim ‘threat’. Considering there are thousands of faith schools across Britain and Muslim faith schools compose only 8 of these, it remains curious and somewhat remarkable that Muslim faith schools in particular are seen as the biggest concern. In addition to the ‘dangers’ lurking behind Muslim faith schools’ the ‘segregation’ argument was also expressed on a number of occasions from those interviewed as follows:

“Faith schools to me are not a good thing; personally that is what I think. I think that they cause segregation, and I stand for is communal cohesion. I think the only way to educate people from any ethnic group, even the Muslims themselves, is to get them to see the other side of the fence, you know that is why we go to church; we take the kids to the church, the Hindu mandir, the Sikh gurdwara, the mosque; the idea being that if you don’t know what they are doing in these particular buildings then how can you associate, you are just going to be ignorant to it, but the ones who have been they have learnt, they have actually been in somewhere where they would not have normally have dreamt of going in to. So for me faith schools are not what they are supposed to be, the official line is they are there to get teenagers or kids to become respectful, obedient and to be able to look after their elders as they get older, and that is fine, but to me it has, perhaps, gone too far in that direction” (Interview 10).

Another respondent echoed similar concerns:

“I don’t like the fact that there is a very strict girls-only Muslim school in Bradford for example, and it is only Muslims and no male teachers are allowed in it or anything like that and I think that is absolutely dreadful, because your girls are growing up in an environment where the only men they come in to contact with are their fathers, uncles, cousins and brothers and that is not real life. And I don’t agree with faith schools, I don’t agree with Christian schools, Muslim schools, Hindu schools, nothing. I think schools should be in the

local community and I think everyone in that community should be made to go to it” (Interview 4).

Additionally the following participant also voices her opposition of faith schools on the same grounds that that they ‘damage’ cohesion through exclusion:

“Personally I don’t think children should ever be segregated from their peers, whether it is do with race or religion. You know we have worked a long time in this country to try and include children with disabilities back in to mainstream education, whilst at the same time we seem to be allowing children from different religious groups to be educated in isolation and I don’t think that is healthy. I think there are plenty of opportunities for children to have extra curricular opportunities where they can congregate in whatever social groupings they want to, as long as they are not breaking the law obviously, but personally I don’t think schooling should be one of those things that should be segregated” (Interview 5).

This argument is perhaps the most dominant reason given for those against faith schools, however as Mirza argues:

“...It should be noted that by no means is the issue of segregated communities an unchallenged view. For instance, Simpson (2007) asserts that an increasing ethnic minority population has not in fact led to segregated communities and the creation of ghettos, but to more mixed areas and diversity. “Putting these results against the claims that motivate anxieties about the ‘colour’ of localities, there has not been increased segregation in the sense of more uneven distribution of ethnic groups across localities. Nor is there self-segregation in the sense of minority groups moving towards their existing areas of highest concentration” (Simpson, 2007, p. 420). The lack of empirical evidence in claims of segregated communities points to both xenophobic and journalistic (as opposed to empirical) mainstream approaches to multiethnic Britain” (Mirza 2010: 18).

Furthermore, critiquing the idea that Muslim schools in particular ‘segregate’ Hewer (2001) points out the following:

“A charge that is often laid against segregated schooling is that it does not prepare students for life in wider society after school years. Indeed, some make the claim that it promotes a fragmentation of society and reinforces ‘separate identity’. All religious schools are open to this charge, but perhaps Muslim schools are particularly targeted given the irrational fear of Islam (Islamophobia) within wider Western society” (Hewer 2001: 524).

In addition to this, Short draws upon the limitations of approaches against faith schools as he articulates:

“A further theoretical weakness in the argument against faith schools is the implicit assumption that the only opportunities children of different backgrounds have to get to know one another are those provided by schools. There seems to be no appreciation of the multiplicity of settings outside of the school where children are able to socialise under the conditions stipulated by Cook (1978) and, in the process, develop positive attitudes towards other cultures...it would seem that mixed schools are no guarantee of social cohesion and that a number of assumptions underpinning the case against faith schools are either invalid or of questionable status” (Short 2003: 132).

The idea that Muslim faith schools ‘segregate’ implies an explicit need for Muslims to ‘assimilate’ and ‘embrace’ the values of mainstream secular society, however drawing upon Bhikhu Parekhs’ work (2000), Meer (2007) points out the limitations of such an assimilationist approach:

“This is the argument made by Bhikhu Parekh (2000) when he contests the civic assimilationist approach which is based upon a neat separation of public and private spheres. Parekh’s argument is that such a view fails to take account of institutions that

encompass both: For example, the school educates future citizens, and has a political dimension. However, since children are not just citizens but also human beings and members of the relevant cultural communities, their parents and cultural community have a vital interest in their education, which makes the school a cultural institution that belongs to private or civic realm. If we stressed the former, we would have to treat the school as a public institution subject to the control of the state and ignore parental choices and cultures; if the latter we would reach the opposite conclusion” (Meer 2007: 65, Parekh 2000: 202–203).

Hewer points out that the education system must take into account our diverse and multicultural landscape if schools are to move forward:

“The state education system is challenged to rethink the shape of the curriculum and the role of another religious body within our common history. If education is about the development of integrated individuals and communities within society then this challenge must be accepted by the wider educational community in our increasingly religiously pluralist and cosmopolitan Western countries” (Hewer 2001: 524).

This section has examined the arguments for and against Muslim faith schools in Britain illustrating how the interview responses from our findings both fed and challenged the debates. We have seen that Muslim faith schools in particular are marked as ‘problematic’. Those who oppose Muslim faith schools tend to reinforce the wider political anti-Muslim discourse in which there seems to be a specific and hegemonic focus on Muslims as ‘self-segregating’ and ‘dangerous’. There appears to be a general lack of support or enthusiasm for the development of Muslim faith schools, as illustrated through political and Media discourses, as well as those interviewed for the research, the emphasis appears largely focused upon the ‘danger’ of such schools rather than the positive role they play.

Such accounts tend to dismiss the level of racism in mainstream schools affecting Muslim children. Research clearly shows that those from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds tend to have much lower rates of educational achievement compared to their white counterparts,¹⁹ as Peach (2006) points out, “Bangladeshis and Pakistanis have the lowest level of qualification of all ethnic minority populations...50% of Bangladeshis and 45% of Pakistanis lack any academic, vocational or professional qualifications” (Peach 2006: 171). However such children often perform better in faith schools,²⁰ yet this is often dismissed thus the problem of institutional racism in mainstream schools fails to enter such debates in relation to specifically the Muslim

¹⁹ For example a report by Ofsted entitled ‘Raising the attainment of minority ethnic pupils: school and LEA responses’ (1999), states that, “The performance of Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils in the early years of schooling remains depressed. Once they become proficient in English, however, their attainment often matches or even surpasses that of English first language pupils in similar circumstances. Nevertheless, their generally lower attainment in higher grades at GCSE remains a concern” pp7. For more information see: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/raising-attainment-of-minority-ethnic-pupils-school-and-lea-responses>

²⁰ For example it was found that “two Independent Islamic schools in Birmingham and Hackney achieved 100% A-C grades in five or more GCSEs” See: Shah, S (2009), ‘Muslim learners in English schools: a challenge for school leaders’, Oxford Review of Education, pp15.

population. This represents another manifestation of the paradox between the growing hegemony of the post-racial logic and the growing hegemony of Islamophobia across western plutocracies.

2.3. The promotion of diversity and teacher training in schools

A recent study in the UK conducted in July 2011 by an anti-racist charity 'Show Racism the Red Card' supported by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) found from a survey of 148 teachers, plus interviews, pupil observations and a research journal, that more than 84% of teachers questioned said that they had witnessed racist attitudes or behaviour among students, which included name calling, comment, jokes and racial stereotyping.²¹ Moreover, it was found that such attitudes were not only restricted to pupils whereby 31% expressed they had seen similar behaviour among teachers.²² Here it was noted that in some cases teachers used racist terminology or had lower expectations of ethnically marked pupils.²³ Additionally the findings revealed that 39% of those interviewed said that they had not received any training in tackling racism and "there was evidence of a lack of action against racist attitudes and behaviour and a lack of understanding of the mechanisms and reasons for reporting racist incidents".²⁴ Racism in some instances was seen by teachers as unintentional thus they were reluctant to report the incident, as such it was urged that teachers are provided with more training on racism and pupils must also be given the chance to discuss and learn about issues surrounding ethnicity and diversity. It was stated that the "research highlights that there is a huge gap in the current teacher training provision when it comes to preparing teachers to tackle racism and embed equality."²⁵

The findings of this study are not dissimilar from what our research found. This section will examine the weaknesses surrounding teacher training on ethnicity, racism and diversity, as well as the inequalities surrounding employment in the education system, additionally we will explore the commitment to the promotion of diversity in schools and the impact the national curriculum has in providing and preparing pupils

²¹ See: http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/at-a-glance/main-section/racism_still_an_issue_in_english_schools_1_3541101 July 2011.

²² See: http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/at-a-glance/mainsection/racism_still_an_issue_in_english_schools_1_3541101 July 2011.

²³ See: http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/at-a-glance/mainsection/racism_still_an_issue_in_english_schools_1_3541101 July 2011.

²⁴ See: http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/at-a-glance/main-section/racism_still_an_issue_in_english_schools_1_3541101 July 2011.

²⁵ See: http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/at-a-glance/main-section/racism_still_an_issue_in_english_schools_1_3541101 July 2011.

about different cultures and ethnicities. We will examine how these issues affect Muslim pupils in the education system.

In relation to teacher training surrounding issues such as racism, diversity and culture, all the respondents pointed out how weak (and in most cases absent) this was in the educational system, for example:

“Training is not compulsory so if the teacher wants to teach diversity it is up to them. I don’t think teachers have enough of an understanding of other cultures. Policies on diversity in schools are weak, but if the school has a diverse make-up then they will make more of an effort to understand, but in a school where the majority of pupils are white, they will feel why should they know about diversity when their pupils are white, and I think this is dangerous when the world is becoming more and more diverse it should be important for everyone to know about other cultures not just white European cultures... I think diversity training for teachers and understandings of other cultures needs to be much stronger and for all schools” (Interview 3).

Similarly another respondent pointed out the following:

“I think one of the most important things that has to be done is a change in the teacher training and it should be compulsory for all newly qualified teachers to work in a very multi-cultural school before they even begin to work in any other schools; that should be part of teacher training. One of the two schools where teachers are working should be a school with a majority of BME children, and it is not that hard anymore, it is completely possible, it is only four weeks. Also part of teaching training should include world cultures, the differences in the world, maybe it is far-fetched, but maybe if they could do some volunteering work in another country; that would be perfect. If the teachers are aware they would be more understanding and not get in to a vicious cycle of punishments and exclusions, they would be able to understand the behaviour of a child more and be able to deal with that better and be able to speak with their parents, rather than just sending the child out of the class for misbehaving who does not understand why they have been excluded and then think that they are being singled out and then go in to that cycle of misbehaviour” (Interview 11).

Additionally another respondent said:

“I think training should be compulsory and not just whilst teachers are training, it should be reiterated over the lifetime of being a teacher, because things change as well; you know the way that you perceive diversity or the way I did it in the eighties is completely different to the way I think about things now...So you can’t just say, ‘right race; we have done that, so let’s do this...’” (Interview 5).

Concerns surrounding the inadequacy of teacher training were highlighted throughout the interviews and those who had been on some training still felt it was not sufficient:

“I did a course here and they still do it, it is called ‘Educational and Professional Studies’ and when I did it a long time ago there were sessions on cultural diversity and also other issues like disability and poverty. Personally, I still don’t think it is good enough and I do think that needs to be pressed, in the same way as homophobia; being aware of homosexuality and being aware of poverty and children without parents, or children with one parent, or parents who aren’t looking after them very well, and all these sorts of things should be... I think not wanting to learn about it is to do with not thinking there is a problem. The trouble is if you are sitting in a lecture and you are talking about it, especially before you start teaching, I think the danger is that you just close your ears to it. I think it should be part of PGCE, I think it should be flagged up but I think it should be flagged up throughout every part of teaching... I think you need to re-train and I think there does need to be something later on and it needs to be from people who really know what they are talking about and really making a point...just being aware of where that child is coming from to a certain extent without pigeon holing them, ‘oh well their dad is going to be sexiest and their mum is going to have no power in the house’ and that sort of thing” (Interview 4).

For some it was just seen as a 'ticking of boxes' exercise, or there was a 'fear' about even discussing such issues:

"I don't think we have got diversity training sorted really. I think it is also something that is a little bit of a box ticking exercise at times, but that is not to say that all teacher trainers are like that, because certainly I know there were some teacher trainers here working incredibly hard to really discuss issues of diversity and make it meaningful. But I think there is a big reluctance, people are very fearful, because in discussing diversity to do it properly you have to recognise and acknowledge your own discrimination and when you do that; first of all you are fearful that you are going to get blamed for something, and secondly it has a sense of undermining who you are" (Interview 5).

Another respondent similarly stated:

"It is a tick-box exercise, it is just a case of, 'at the beginning of the academic year we did diversity training'; ok yes but what do your policies say? What do your strategies say? How do you monitor? What support do you give to the staff? Because the problem is, once you challenge somebody from a mainstream position about equality and diversity they get defensive because they haven't been equipped... So it is not a case of, 'oh diversity is about this, equality is this and that is it'...diversity training is rubbish" (Interview 7).

These concerns reflect the poor measures in educating teachers around issues surrounding diversity and ethnicity. Also critical of the training programmes in place for teachers Mirza argues:

"There are approximately 120 providers of primary and/or secondary initial teacher education (ITE). Their programmes range from university based postgraduate and undergraduate programmes to school based initial teacher training or the graduate teacher programmes that offer 'on-the-job' training. Whichever route is chosen all student/trainee teachers in England must meet the Training and Development Agency's (TDA) requirements by the end of their training phase before they can be awarded the Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). The QTS standards range from having knowledge and understanding about the subjects to understanding the needs of individual learners. It is in this domain that the QTS standards loosely associated with preparing new teachers for teaching in a multicultural society and preparing their pupils to live in one can be located. For example, Q18 Understand how children and young people develop and that the progress and well-being of learners are affected by a range of developmental, social, religious, ethnic, cultural and linguistic influences. Q19 Know how to make effective personalised provision for those they teach, including those for whom English is an additional language or who have special educational needs or disabilities, and how to take practical account of diversity and promote equality and inclusion in their teaching. Q20 Know and understand the roles of colleagues with specific responsibilities, including those with responsibility for learners with special educational needs and disabilities and other individual learning needs" (Mirza 2010: 39).²⁶

She goes on to argue that "in light of the directives of the QTS standards one would surmise that all teachers should know about and be able to cater for the needs of children from diverse backgrounds in a multicultural society" (Mirza 2010: 40), however she found the following:

"The initial preparation of teachers with respect to teaching in an ethnically diverse society occurs within the taught aspects of the initial teacher education courses and their school placements. Initial teacher education providers in less ethnically diverse areas find this aspect a challenge. On the taught aspects of the programme training to teach in a multicultural society can be limited to 2-3 hours of the course, or it can be an integrated element with providers in urban settings. However, the majority of providers are sited in less ethnically diverse areas, working with schools that have a predominantly white pupil

²⁶ Source: http://www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/q/qts_itt_guidance_tda0497.pdf, Mirza, 2010: 39.

population and teachers who may themselves have limited knowledge and experience of working with BME and English As additional Language pupils. As such, any fundamental weakness in teacher training is compounded through school placements and limited knowledge of existing staff that train the student teachers, either in schools or within the Initial Teacher Education provider itself" (Mirza 2010: 40).

This seems to concur with our findings whereby from the teachers interviewed it was expressed that they were not actually specifically trained on these issues throughout their careers in education, it was implied in such responses that teachers already know about different cultures and ethnicities and that in itself is enough, for example:

"Diversity and different ethnicities and cultures is not really something you get trained on; I think it is just as you go you meet different people. I did a GCSE RE I think so you learn bits from that, but as far as I can recall we did a little bit of RE on the PGCE but it wasn't something that we really got trained on" (Interview 8).

It is somewhat alarming that this teacher gained her knowledge around such issues from her GCSE in RE and coming into contact with 'different' people, with such poor awareness it is frightening that teachers are able to teach young children of diverse backgrounds when their knowledge about their needs remains so limited. Another teacher also talked of her limited knowledge and training in the area:

"I think in general, you go to university and you do your teaching course and you do your degree and you do go out on placements but a lot of the time you learn to become a teacher once you have finished and you are actually put in that situation. So obviously depending on which school you choose to go to will depend on your whole knowledge and training that you have had. I mean I did my training in Liverpool so I was put in to a lot of different schools, but a couple of them were White British schools, they had their own problems within the schools but there wasn't a lot of different cultures and races in there, so when I moved back to Leeds it was easy to go back in to a different school which has lots of different cultures and races in. I think your understanding as a teacher would just be from your own personal experience teaching children of different ethnicities" (Interview 1).

She goes on to say:

"I think a lot of the time there is an assumption that you already know about different cultures and ethnicities, you might not ever have been taught it at university but you hear about it every day in the news, you hear about everything when you read it in a newspaper and just from things you have learnt along the way. I don't know if they would ever put on training just to teach you about different religions, but when you are doing your own teaching and if that is what you had to teach to other people then that is when you yourself would have to learn it, you would have to go online and you would have to speak to different people; it is up to you to learn about what you are going to teach someone else" (Interview 1).

This seems to suggest that there is a lot of discrepancy when it comes to teacher training and awareness of different cultures and ethnicities. It is clearly not compulsory or formally taught to teachers and as the respondent points out there is an assumption that teachers will already know these issues and furthermore it is up to the teacher if they chose to understand such issues. This respondent states her only information surrounding different ethnicities is drawn from the Media, newspapers and personal experiences. There is clearly not enough (if any at all) training on diversity, ethnicity,

racism and culture for teachers in the education system, with such limited awareness of such issues it is worrying how ethnic minority pupils are actually understood by their teachers. The assumption that teachers will already know these issues is inadequate and illustrates a huge weakness in the education system in providing knowledge, training and awareness of multicultural society. Similarly examining the implications and limitations of such training Mirzas' research found the following:

"In a 2006 report commissioned by Multiverse, which surveyed ITE providers in England as regards their provision for issues of diversity, found that 97% of providers had policies relating to equality. While these policies were not specific to student teacher preparation, the coverage of diversity issues related to six areas defined as Race and Ethnicity, Social Class, Religious Diversity, Bilingual and Multilingual Learners, Refugee and Asylum Seekers, and Travellers and Roma. Nonetheless coverage was very variable and providers interpreted the terms very narrowly; in most cases the term race and ethnicity was seen to relate specifically to English As an additional Language pupils and there was scant examination of racism and its impact on the lives of children. In addition, the education of refugees and asylum seekers, gypsy traveller pupils and the intersectional affects of race, social class and poverty were often omitted. The main constraints cited by ITE providers were the lack of time, geographical location and the lack of commitment, knowledge and expertise, both within schools and the provider" (*Mirza 2010: 38-40*)²⁷

She goes on to conclude that "the qualified teacher status standards are interpreted in a narrow way and there is very little consistency in the approach adopted by providers in terms of preparing future teachers to teach pupils from ethnically diverse backgrounds as well as to prepare all pupils to live in a multicultural society" (*Mirza 2010: 38-40*). Training thus does not appear to be a priority in schools and it is both alarming and worrying that the same teacher in this case had received intense PREVENT training but nothing on diversity or racism and ethnicity. This presents an extremely depressing picture where teachers are not trained on diversity, different cultures, religions, ethnicities and race equality, yet in schools with a particular high Muslim and BME populations they are trained on 'how to spot a terrorist'. This is perplexing as surely schools with higher rates of BME pupils the priority should be focused on training teachers in understanding cultures and difference rather than 'extremism', which as we pointed out in the earlier section fixes an image of the Muslim 'terrorist'. This seems to link strongly with the notion that race-relations and race equality is no longer a problem for contemporary society, a manifestation of the post-racial, it is the figure of the Muslim however which remains increasingly 'problematic'.

We already saw from the study conducted by 'Show Racism the Red Card' that 31% of people interviewed noted racist attitudes in teachers, and it can be argued the lack of training in this area does not particularly help matters. Perhaps one of the most disturbing cases of racism in school was reported earlier this year (Feb 2011) when a

²⁷ See <http://www.multiverse.ac.uk/attachments/80812ad2-6f70-4470-b632-f65c10a70b3b.doc> Mirza: 2010.

teacher was banned from classrooms after spraying young children of Asian origin with air freshener if she said she smelled curry. This is a despicable case and it was noted that the teacher Elizabeth Davies aged 48 would say, "there is a waft coming from paradise" before using the air freshener. She was accused of having a "smug look" as she sprayed children in the class, where half the pupils were of Bangladeshi origin.²⁸ It was also alleged the teacher occasionally used the words 'black bastards' when referring to ethnically marked children. The disciplinary panel found her guilty and she was removed from the teaching register. Worryingly however, one of the respondents interviewed for our research recalled a similar experience:

"There was one teacher he was racist; he used to clean the desks after Pakistani children had been sitting there and stuff like that... some teaching staff referred to Muslim kids as 'they' in a way that they didn't refer to White kids as 'they', it was like 'they do that'... Sometimes I got the impression that sometimes in the staff briefing in the morning when the senior management would say, 'there has been an incident and a child has been involved in a fight', or, 'there has been an incident and a Pakistani child has been involved'. So when it was White kids it was 'a child' and when it was not White kids it was...I can't remember how he phrased it, it was perhaps 'Muslim' or 'Pakistani', but the fact it was named..." (Interview 4).

These cases may (or more disturbingly may not) be exceptional, however they do highlight racism in the teaching profession and the lack of training on such issues may not entirely prevent such practices however it would at least facilitate some understanding of issues surrounding race, culture, diversity and so on. Moreover, what stands out in these cases is the fact that whilst Muslim children of 5 years of age are monitored for 'extremism', teachers do not appear to be subject to the same level of scrutiny for racism despite the fact that there are clear cases of racism in teachers, but not of 'extremism' among Muslim pupils at 5 years old.

Reinforcing the post-racial logic some respondents claimed there was no racism in their schools, for example:

"I don't think anyone in this School in a professional role is racist; no member of staff would ever be racist towards another member of staff or a child. I think no matter what school you go in to there is always going to be some racism between pupils, but a lot of the time I don't think they understand that they are doing it or they don't understand the effect that they are having, but I think you could get that from any school that you went in to that had different ethnic minorities in. I don't think that we have a particular problem with it, but when children are arguing with friends they might be allowed to use certain words at home but obviously they are not allowed to say it in school and that is when problems would occur" (Interview 1).

Similarly another respondent stated that:

"I have never really encountered anything racist whatsoever. What I have encountered are questions like little kid questions like, 'why is that child Black? Can't she wash her face?' And all of that kind of stuff but it is not racist it is just innocent questions; they are just questioning why people look different. But no, it is certainly not something that has characterised our School" (Interview 2).

²⁸ See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/feb/15/teacher-banned-air-freshener-asian> Feb 2011.

Interesting here, a child saying 'cant she wash her face' in reference to a Black child is seen as an 'innocent' question, and doesn't seem to be problematic or challenged in this instance. In a similar vein another teacher said:

"When I was in class I taught littler ones and one of them came up to me and was like, 'I know what a Chinky is'. So I said, 'ok what is a Chinky?' And he went 'this' and pulled his eyes to the side and I said, 'right ok we don't do that because that is really rude and people do look different'. So it is more like ignorance rather than being mean. One of them said that her dad calls their dog a rude name, and so I said, 'well what does he call it?' And she said, 'I can't tell you, it's rude'. So little lad went, 'I will tell you, he calls the dog Paki', so I said, 'right do you know what that word means?' Then this other little one said, 'I think it means a Spanish person'. I said, 'ok would it be funny if it was a Spanish person?' And they said, 'no'. So it just arose through ignorance, they knew it was something rude and that it was something they shouldn't say, but did not even know what it meant" (Interview 8).

Once again the trivialisation of the examples given by the teacher is remarkable, 'Chinky' and eye pulling to illustrate what the child means is seen as ignorant and the response was to say that the child was being rude. Moreover, when a child spoke of someone's father calling their dog 'Paki' this was also referred as a 'rude' comment, and was legitimised as ignorance. This is extremely problematic as none of the incidents were seen as examples of racism. One respondent alarmingly suggested that teachers do not receive enough support and actually sympathises with teachers who stereotype:

"I don't think we particularly support staff in schools very well, I don't think we acknowledge the stresses on them. I mean they face a huge, huge battle to deal with behaviour, parental attitudes and all sorts of things, and it is no wonder that sometimes when people are tired they slip in to laziness, which is what stereotyping is; it is a form of laziness, because you can't be bothered to identify people on an individual basis. I think if we really want to change things in schools we also have to be looking at; how do we reward our staff? And is it good enough to allow them to be in a situation where false claims are made against them and they are suspended for a year at a time or they don't get promotions and they are not very well paid; there are lots of issues" (Interview 5).

The respondent equates stereotyping with 'slipping in to laziness', and justifies this 'laziness' due to the lack of support teachers receive where on occasions they are 'tired' and 'stressed' as a result. This is unacceptable, even if it is the case that teachers do not receive adequate support it certainly does not legitimise any form of stereotyping and it is remarkable that the respondent even suggests so. Another key factor in this toxic mix is the fact that the actual BME make-up of professionals in schools is poor, there are clearly not enough BME teachers in schools even those with high proportions of ethnically marked children:

"In the majority of the Schools in Leeds the majority of the teachers are White. And I think there needs to be more BME School Governors, it is a hard role to play, but I do definitely think they need to try and attract more BME members to Governors of the School, and I think that would probably have an impact... I am sure they are applying, I am sure they are applying, because there a lot of BME adults out there that can do those kinds of jobs and I think it boils down to racism, maybe at interview level or maybe when they hand in their application form in and they see an Asian name they put them on the reject files straight away, it could be down to favouritism; that they may favour their own culture in the school. But I do find that there isn't enough BME staff" (Interview 6).

However when BME staff are successful in entering the system they are isolated by their white counterparts and made to feel invisible, this was expressed by two people interviewed:

“In my experience, at my school in Bradford I was the only BME staff out of 85 teachers, the head teacher never even acknowledged me I was invisible and made to feel different, in the staff room I was made to feel very isolated, no one really talked to me. I know admissions for teaching places for BMEs is high but acceptance is low, perhaps BMEs are perceived as troublesome, or demanding too much support and time for their particular needs” (Interview 3).

The second respondent also recalled the following:

“When I finished teaching at the Islamic School in 2001 I started working as a teaching assistant in a mainstream School in Leeds. And the staffroom had three sections and the middle section was where all the Muslims sat and one side of the staffroom was where all the teachers sat and all the senior teachers, and in one section of the staffroom all the teaching assistants. I just went in to the staffroom and sat in the wrong section and they were all talking and I felt so invisible and I didn't know what to do. And then all the Muslim teaching assistants came in and they all sat in the middle section, which was a sort of narrow section and then one of them signalled for me to go over there and I was so grateful that they were there and that somebody was signalling. So I went and sat with them and I made friends over there, so that was the first couple of days. And then there was one day, it wasn't lunchtime yet, I had a free period and I decided to go sit in the staffroom and have my early lunch, and the section of the staffroom where all the senior teachers were was full, it had about 15-20 people in there of teaching staff and they were all having a good chat and I went and sat by myself in the middle section because I was out of habit and I felt that I could not go over there, that was beyond me, and I was there completely alone, they were having a chat and nobody said to me, 'come and join us'...I still felt invisible after such a long time” (Interview 11).

However, there were those who felt that the under-representation of BME teachers in schools was not due to racism; it was for them due to the reason that ethnic minorities were simply not applying for these jobs:

“I have been there for the last three years and I have seen people who apply and I don't think there has really been an ethnic minority apply, so whether that is part of who is training to become teachers or who is applying in our area I don't know, but I don't think it is a fault within the school because I think they would love to employ somebody who can be seen as more of a role model and who is of an ethnic minority group but you just don't often get that chance” (Interview 1).

The respondent here maintains that there is no fault with the school in hiring BME staff; it is more to do with them not applying. Another interviewee gave a similar response:

“I am the only ethnic minority member of staff, apart from one teaching assistant who works part-time and she is Muslim...I think people aren't maybe applying. I mean it is a point I have raised with the senior management and they are aware of it but at the end of the day they can't discriminate in the interview process and if they are not getting the applicants they just go on the best quality applicants for the job. I just don't genuinely think they don't have any ethnic minority applicants for teaching jobs full stop” (Interview 2).

Here the respondent says 'at the end of the day they can't discriminate in the interview process', however data shows that discrimination in the employment sphere is rife, for example, in October 2009 a report carried out by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) found in a 'sting' operation that, 'of the 987 applications with a White

name, 10.7 per cent received a positive response. This compared to 6.2 per cent of the 1,974 applications with an ethnic minority name - a net difference of 4.6 percentage points. That is, 74 per cent more applications from ethnic minority candidates needed to be sent for the same level of success.²⁹ As such, the superficial and simplistic argument presented in both these statements boils down to ethnic minorities 'not applying' for jobs, rather than practices of institutional racism.

The overall commitment to promoting diversity in schools seems rather poor, from those interviewed diversity awareness seems to be higher in schools with a larger BME intake, however majority white schools tend to celebrate diversity less as respondents pointed out:

"We made a link with a School in York, who is just White British, so they could come over to our School to see other cultures, just to see what it was like because they have never seen a school which has so many different cultures and faiths, all of their pupils were all White British and all either Christian or had no religion, so we were completely different" (Interview 1).

There were complaints by those interviewed that the celebration of diversity was weak and schools needed to do more in that respect:

"I don't think schools across the UK reflect diversity enough. It may be part of Ofsted to show how the school has encouraged diversity, so some schools will do maybe a diversity week where they show dancing or share different foods and they think that that is enough. Not enough however is done to show the contribution other cultures have made" (Interview 3).

Another respondent similarly stated:

"A vast majority of the schools, particularly high schools have no clue, they don't even bother to understand where it is all coming from, for example, for Eid there is a huge issue about Eid every year, there are so many people who celebrate it. The High School that I was talking about, which is under special measures, have a huge population of Muslim young people and yet it would not have anything about Eid, they don't even bother to understand what it is all about. And then in my daughter's School they would have some sort of celebration around Eid, but it completely lacks understanding. Whereas, there is a very good High School in Alwoodley, where they celebrate Eid and they seem to understand it, because they have done a little bit of research behind it and they understand why Eid is celebrated. Having said that there is a lot more understanding of the Diwali and other festivals for some reason, I don't know why, probably because they are more colourful, I don't know but it is celebrated more in my experience" (Interview 11).

One respondent however felt that White Christian diversity was not celebrated enough in schools arguing that Christmas is no longer regarded as notable being replaced with winter festivals instead, the respondent also feels diversity in school is merely 'tokenistic':

²⁹ Source: Department for Work and Pensions Research Report, No 607, (October 2009) 'A test for racial discrimination in recruitment practice in British cities' Martin Wood, Jon Hales, Susan Purdon, Tanja Sejersen and Oliver Hayllar, See: Equanomics UK (2010) 'The Price of Inequality: The Black Manifesto 2010', London, pp20.

"Well my children go to a predominantly all White school and it is quite interesting actually because I think that...I am not sure they get the balance right; first of all they don't 'celebrate', White Christian diversity, despite the fact that schools are supposed to be technically Christian in nature, Christmas is no longer mentioned for example, it seems to be a bit of a dirty word in a lot of schools because although it is the culture...and in fact I would argue that kids from whatever background enjoy aspects of Christmas, whether they believe the tale of Jesus being born and all of that type of stuff, I think it is just a festival that everyone can participate in. But schools seem to be very reluctant now; it is all about winter festivals... If you are going to talk about diversity then you have to include everybody's diversity and not just certain groups. And at the same time I get really concerned with some of the tokenistic ways that diversity is done, like I can't bear Black history week or month or whatever it is, because it is almost like; 'well we will do it in that month and then we don't need to do it at all for the rest of the year because we have done being Black and we will have Irish day next week'" (Interview 5).

This is contradictory, as on the one hand the respondent argues that diversity should be about including everybody, but on the other hand she complains that the specificity of White Christian culture is excluded because Christmas has been subsumed under winter festivals, when in fact the development of winter festivals in schools is precisely there to ensure the inclusivity of all cultures and religious celebrations including Diwali, Eid and Hanukah as well as Christmas, but not specifically Christmas. The lack of diversity and celebrating 'other' cultures in schools was also expressed to be manifested throughout the national curriculum which many respondents felt was too white/English/Euro-centric. For example:

"I worked as a science teacher and you only see the contribution of white people in science and not from other cultures, so BME children are not given many role models in these fields because they are missing in the curriculum, so from a young age BME children only see that it is white people making all the contributions" (Interview 3).

Another respondent stated the following:

"A few of us at school were talking about the curriculum recently and we were saying, 'isn't it really weird that when you think about science and history all we learn about is European contributions'...But there are always other things that have happened in other countries that we are not always aware of because that is just what we get taught going through school" (Interview 8).

Similarly:

"It is very Eurocentric, if not sort of UK-centric, no it is Eurocentric probably and White-centric actually. There is this rhetoric that when people talk about history; 'oh it should be an English history'; I think that is rubbish, I think world history is much more important. Take English and modern foreign languages; I mean the modern foreign languages taught in schools in Bradford are French and German and maybe Spanish and the majority of children in the centre of Bradford are very rarely going to go to France or Germany; it is not like popping across the continent from the South of England nor have they got the money to do that sort of thing or possibly not the inclination or the cultural capital to do things like that, but lots of them can speak Urdu and Punjabi and you think, 'you could get a GCSE in this', so why don't we have an Urdu class and encourage White children to take it, you know modern foreign languages; why are we teaching bloody French?" (Interview 4).

The next respondent also points out the weaknesses and narrow focus of the curriculum, she points out the value such knowledge of world cultures actually has on children in terms of achievement, particularly BME children:

“I don't think the curriculum is fair at all. At Reemap there is a programme called the 'Junior Fellowship Programme'. The Junior Fellowship Programme is a two-year programme and it takes young people when they are in Year 10, it is BME specific, it is just BME young people who can be on the programme, although it is expanding now, but I don't think it will be suitable for the wider community because of the content. The Junior Fellowship Programme sort of fills in the gaps of what is not in the education system and one of the key things that it does is that it celebrates the Black achievements, achievements from different sides of the world, so Africa is not just a continent of starving people, it has got history and it has got culture that dates really far back, so young people are made aware of that side of it as well, so that they don't think that they have migrated from starving countries and that it is a big favour that they are living here and if they go back they will go back to starvation, they see that it is not just that, that is just one sided. The difference it makes to the grades and to the general achievements to the young people is amazing and it is a paid programme; schools have to pay for it and they do because they see the difference. But the main thing that comes out of the programme is comments from young people constantly like, 'I didn't know that, I didn't think that I could do that, I didn't think that Mandela had done this'. So this part of education they get from there and it makes a huge difference. So I think the education system is completely unfair in terms of world awareness. I think it is unfair for every young person, because we are living in a world now, not just a country anymore and anybody who is not aware of the world would, for example, go to Turkey and say, 'oh I didn't like this hotel because nobody spoke English there', because they are not aware” (Interview 11).

This programme is put on by Reemap, a BME education support organisation, such a programme clearly helps young BME children who are often underachieving in schools, and provides them with a broader world understanding which they do not receive in schools as part of the curriculum. Similarly observing the implications of the school curriculum, Brah (2006) points out that:

“Asian parents were becoming increasingly aware that the ethnocentric nature of the educational curriculum and racialised practices in schools and other educational institutions could seriously undermine their children's intellectual aspirations and sense of belonging. Many parents began to make a conscious effort, albeit an unsystematic one, to teach their children about their background and history” (Brah 2006: 48-49)

Knowledge and understanding of other cultures and ethnicities is clearly missing in the education of pupils (and teachers), and as the respondent above pointed out engaging with such issues has enabled BME pupils to achieve better grades. This seems to demonstrate the value of broadening the curriculum to include contributions and understandings of the world outside Europe, it is thus unfortunate access to such knowledge is only available via external BME support organisations, or through the family, rather than within schools as a compulsory part of the curriculum.

This section has highlighted the weaknesses surrounding teacher training and the promotion of diversity, tolerance and anti-racism across schools in the UK. Racism in school should be formally reported as a code of good practice, however the findings are rather depressing in that the lack of understanding in the area means racial discrimination is largely a grey area open to interpretation, misunderstanding and

subjectivity. The research has illustrated that teachers appear to be ill equipped in dealing with issues surrounding racism, diversity and tolerance with very little formal or compulsory training in place, as such their understanding is poor which can lead to potentially dangerous results, as illustrated by the example of the school teacher spaying Asian children with air freshener. The overall picture seems to indicate a lack of commitment in schools to understand or raise awareness about such issues, which enables racist practices to flourish between both teachers and pupils. In addition to this the lack of BME staff representing schools in professional roles is also problematic as such schools across the UK fail to represent the diversity of society not only in the teaching via the curriculum, but also through the very structures and make-up of the educational system. As such the sphere of education appears to have weak and limited measures in challenging or preventing racism as illustrated through a clear lack of commitment and engagement with the promotion of diversity and tolerance.

2.4. Racism, Islamophobia and Barriers: Muslims in education

“It is unfortunate that for many academics and educationalists ethnic minorities in Britain continue to be more associated with educational underachievement than success. This is specially reinforced when it comes to Muslims and especially Muslim men, about whom there is so much fear and demonization at the moment. The latter is not just to do with terrorism but also about religious fanaticism and closed, inward-looking communities. These associations are a very partial-in both senses of the word-picture of how things actually are” (Modood 2006: 247).

The final section drawing upon our research findings will examine the challenges Muslim pupils experience in schools, including practices of Islamophobia and racism, as well as low levels of support and access for both pupils and parents. Approximately a third of non-whites in the UK are Muslim, and around two thirds of Muslims are South Asian (Modood 2006: 249). In terms of socioeconomic status figures show that ‘South Asian Muslims are the one of the most disadvantaged ethnic minority groups in the country’ (Modood 2006: 249). Statistics shows that over ‘60% of Pakistani and Bangladeshis are in poverty compared to 20% of whites, moreover they have the largest percentage of school leavers without any qualifications.’ Those who do enter into higher education from these groups are ‘more likely to be found in less resourced institutions’ (Modood 2006: 249). Muslims in Britain are thus at a clear disadvantage in society, we will examine how such inequality is manifested throughout the education system.

From our interviews it was expressed that it is more difficult for Muslims to achieve their full potential in schools which as this respondent points out is due largely to a lack of educational support, for example:

“It more difficult for Muslims in schools, there is an issue of pushing Muslim students to achieve their full potential, that we have to fill in our evening courses on a supplementary basis... The lack of support comes in high schools, Muslim kids are sidelined, if their grades aren't up to scratch it isn't dealt with in terms of targeted support, they don't get the same level of support to achieve their potential. These children need targeted support, which isn't available for them in high schools” (Interview 9).

This respondent works at a Muslim college and notes how Muslim pupils are often failed by the education system in terms of raising their aspirations through weak support offered to both them and their parents:

“I think Muslims have a lack of support from schools and from home. They first come to us with little aspiration; they just want to get through school. I think schools need to target the support to get more Muslim students through university and broaden their horizons. A lot of Muslim children are very talented but they are not supported. A lot of parents do want their children to achieve, even if they are not very educated themselves they will go out of their way to support their children. From what I've seen teachers still hold preconceived ideas about children of different ethnicities and it's a shame” (Interview 9).

This was echoed by another respondent who also felt support for Muslims and BMEs in terms of preparing them for further education and career guidance was particularly weak, again not only for the pupils themselves but for the parents too:

“A lot of Pakistani children do not even know English, they are not taught English so that can lead to many difficulties for them. I think it's a lot to do with the parents; they need more support to understand how to work through the system, they need more networks and need to encourage their children to integrate. Some of the children's parents at my school didn't even used to come along to parents evening, and the children who were keen ended up coming to parents evening on their own because their parents didn't come. Some Muslims that I taught didn't really plan for higher education, they often thought oh my dad is rich as he owns a taxi rank, so why do I need to go to university when I can just take over his business, so many of them were not thinking about going into higher education. But I think careers advice is very weak in schools, I remember for BMEs we used to be pushed into careers like hair dressing, never higher professions and it may be changing but I don't think BMEs are supported enough by these advisors, they don't tend to bring in people from universities to talk to children about university and what grades you need, they only do this at white schools, not schools where there are more BMEs, so BME children never know about what they need to be doing to get into university” (Interview 3).

Similarly another respondent pointed out:

“I feel that there is still a lot more that can be done and again, my colleague and I work in the Bangladeshi community and at the Bangladeshi Centre we would push these kids and they would come to us for jobs and skills like interview skills; we would give them all that, whereas they wouldn't have got that at home. And again, in the schools the teachers would not have had the time to do that with them, so they used to come to our drop-in and we used to support them in CV writing and all that stuff because they need the extra support” (Interview 6).

This points out a weakness in the schooling system in supporting Muslim pupils and parents through school and their later career paths, advice is not sufficiently provided for by the school rather such preparation tends to come from external BME organisations. However lack of support was not only cited as the main reason for underachievement, many claimed it was also due to difference of culture and fault of

parents and family practices rather than discrimination or structural problems within system, for example:

“Going to Pakistan every two to three years and missing school is not my idea of bringing up kids, but that is what this particular ethnic minority tends to do; they have this route in Pakistan, and there is nothing wrong with Pakistan as a country, but I believe if you are going to live in this country then you have to know and be respectful towards the values and practices of society” (Interview 10).

Here we see the discourse of ‘lack of integration’ and failure to assimilate being articulated, the same respondent goes on to say:

“The parents have their routes back in Pakistan and because of that they seem to think; ‘it doesn’t matter how you earn the money, as long as you have got a good living here and, perhaps, money to go back home then that is all we need and all this educating and whatever level you are going to educate them it will be a burden because at the end of the day they are not going to get a good job anyway, so what have spent all this time and money for?’ So unfortunately because of that blinkered vision means that they are falling further and further behind... it does not help when you are forever going back to the place of your origin because it means that you are always drilling in to them that this is a superior country to whatever your country of origin is, so then that link breaks down and you don’t do very well educationally, which means then you are not going to do very well career wise and you are not going to get very good jobs and radicalisation will take place; it will tap in to it by saying, ‘look you are not getting good jobs, the good jobs are reserved for the other people because you just happen to have a different religion’” (Interview 10).

The respondent feels ‘going back and forth’ to Pakistan is to blame for not only educational underachievement, but also for ‘radicalisation’, remarkably he does not offer reasons such as institutional racism and discrimination as problematic. Travelling to Pakistan in the next interview was seen as parents ‘punishing’ their children and debilitating to their success in school:

“I did one-to-one this term, so I teach four children about maths intervention and one of my children last term his family live in Pakistan and he took six months out in Year 1 to go to Pakistan and I did seriously intense maths intervention with him and he made 12 months progress in 3 months, and I was so pleased for him and so delighted. And I went to see him the next day after he had finished and his class teacher said, ‘he has gone to Pakistan again, he has gone for another two months’. And it was like, ‘this is heartbreaking and we were chatting about him and she was saying, ‘oh he is like the prize boy in the family, lots of aunts and uncles all have girls and he is this prize boy, they absolutely adore him’. And I felt like saying, ‘well why are they punishing him, why are they denying him of his education? Take him in the summer holiday by all means, take him for a month’. Then we were talking about; obviously you have got the benefits which are it is such a strong heritage and such a strong culture that you don’t want to deny them of their routes and he has got family and grandparents still in Pakistan, but then equally this poor child is being denied an education by his parents taking him left right and centre in the most vital years of his life he is missing so much school” (Interview 8).

The blame is rested largely on the culture and family practices, as another respondent noted:

“I don’t think being Pakistani puts you at a disadvantage at all, but I think possibly being from a family where either you don’t go on trips or your parents don’t speak good English, you haven’t got books at home, the parents haven’t got the confidence or knowledge about things, the same sorts of things actually that keep back travelling children and White working class, you know really poor White children actually. I don’t think it is inherently being Pakistani, unless there is some racism in the school which might compound it and there might be” (Interview 4).

Here there is some brief acknowledgment of racism as a barrier for Muslims, yet we see the same tropes being reinforced of 'parents not speaking English' and not being able to participate in school trips as problems. To be fair, the respondent seems to be aware of socioeconomic disadvantage also affecting pupils and the capacity of parents to support their children. The following respondent also takes into account socioeconomic barriers, however similarly places emphasis on the parents 'lack of knowledge':

"I think again, in the Pakistani community are doing very well but I think there is all this class system and again the ones from a rich or wealthy backgrounds them Muslim kids are doing quite well, again, it is the ones whose parents or their family backgrounds have quite low income or are not educating themselves that they find it difficult to push their kids in to education. I find the Bangladeshi community are still quite a new community in this country so they are still learning quite a lot, but the kids who I have worked with recently are doing quite a lot better, but I find it is again, lack of understanding and lack of knowledge on their parents part" (Interview 6).

The same respondent stresses 'family restrictions' as a key reason in preventing young Muslims from achieving:

"In all the time that I have worked with young people, especially with the Muslim kids, and a lot of my work is with the Muslim girls as well, and when I first came in to this job I felt that these kids are only at school because it is law of the land, had it been their parents choice they wouldn't have sent them to school, for some of the girls, but as time went on the support I was giving the young girls you know like; 'education is important so focus on that, try and forget what is happening at home', because the restrictions are always there and always are going to be there, for particular groups, especially Asian girls. And a lot of them have said to me, 'if it wasn't for the law of the land we wouldn't be coming to school, we would still be sat at home learning the chores and getting ready for marriage, so that does still go on. When I first started a good eighteen years ago it was low-level education and they weren't as interested but now they really are moving up the ladder education wise... Some of them are still facing restrictions to pass college and get in to university, especially the Asian girls and the Muslim girls; they are still having to fight a battle to get to university, but the boys are more free and they are allowed to do a bit more than the girls" (Interview 6).

We are able to see from many of those interviewed there is a stress on the notion of the 'backward family' and 'insular family units' as well as different values deemed 'incompatible' with the British 'way of life'. These generalizations feed the logic of the immigrant imaginary (Hesse and Sayyid 2006), which locates Muslims as 'unable' and 'unwilling' to adapt from 'backward practices'. The blaming of parents came up a number of times, there was a clear incapacity of the majority interviewed to understand the difficulties for socioeconomically disadvantaged Muslim parents, who also suffer from poor education, additionally the lack of support provided for them restricts their access to engage with the school system as a study entitled, 'Seen and Not Heard: Voices of Young British Muslims', by Ahmed (2009) found:

"The research shows that attitude, language, poor education background and feeling insecure with systems of school governance can turn parents away from helping children with their homework, coursework and other assessments, remembering that many parents of the first generation didn't attend school in the UK and in fact have a generally poor track record of education themselves. This also discourages them from gaining closer contact with their child's teachers through parents' evenings, meetings with teachers and award

ceremonies. If the parent is not fluent in English, or finds it embarrassing to speak in English, then frequent changes to the syllabus, examination methods, assessment criteria, and the choice of subjects and courses serve to further isolate parents³⁰

Critical of the finger pointing and blaming of ethnic minority parents for the educational underachievement of their children, Crozier (2001) argues:

“The blanket assumption that all parents are the same, with the same needs, and that their children can be treated in the same way continues to prevail in parental involvement policy and discourse. With respect to ethnic minority parents, specifically, such an approach obfuscates the importance of tackling the nature and consequences of structural racism. This 'one size fits all' approach masks the complexity of needs, the roles that ethnic minority parents are playing or the constraints that impede their involvement” (Crozier 2001: 329).

Such reductive assumptions articulated in the interviews stressing cultural practices fail to identify the impact of structural racism embedded within society and as Modood points out these approaches remain unhelpful:

“We must be careful in making any generalizations about Muslim cultures encouraging separatism, incapable of motivating youngsters to aspire to horizons beyond the ghetto or failing to encourage participation in British institutions. Islam in Britain is finely poised between a religion of a ghetto and a religion of social mobility- a kind of 'Protestant ethic'- capable of sustaining the hope and discipline that the taking up of opportunities requires. For the latter trajectory to be actualized, mainstream Islam requires encouragement not demonization” (Modood 2006: 250).

Of all those interviewed only one respondent noted that in fact religious and ethnic affiliation actually strengthens young Muslims and their aspirations, rather than hindering them:

“Religious and ethnic identity bears strongly on how students can achieve, and what their potential is, without that they can't achieve their full potential they can't reach that. Only when they are given their religious and cultural heritage can they go on to achieve” (Interview 9).

The importance of faith for Muslims in helping them reach their potential can further be supported with research by Modood who also found that:

“For many young Asians Islam is appealed to-both by girls and boys-as a source of educational aspirations and the motivation to improve oneself and lead a disciplined, responsible life. It is particularly used by girls to justify and negotiate educational and career opportunities with conservative parents, often of rural backgrounds with little knowledge of the scriptures; and by boys to distance themselves from the temptations of street youth culture, a primary obstacle to an academic pathway” (Modood 2006: 250).

There were examples from those interviewed of Muslim pupils being isolated in schools, by fellow pupils as well as the culture of the school itself, as the next respondent points out:

“I will give you an example of my daughter; she tried really hard to fit in with everybody and make friends with everybody and not stick to her own colour and race and religion, but she is in Year 5 now and she is still struggling to make any White friends even though we have

³⁰ Ahmed, S (2009) 'Seen and Not Heard: Voices of Young British Muslims', Policy Research Centre: Leicestershire, pp40.

invited her friends over and at her birthday party when she was in Year 1 we invited the whole class so that we could meet the parents and they would see us and they wouldn't see us as threats and we invited them over to our house so that they can see that we live as anybody else does. But still she has a group of four friends who are all Muslims and all girls and all Pakistani origin... Now when I am looking at her high school, I was looking at a couple of High Schools, which don't have a very good majority of BME people and I was a bit apprehensive because she is not making friends with any White people, she has very good friends but not best friends and she won't be comfortable in a school that is majority White because she thinks that she can't fit in" (Interview 11).

Here we see a conscious effort of the Muslim parents and child making an effort to 'integrate' with other pupils, this parent invited the whole class for her child's birthday party and the child was also encouraged to mix with all pupils, however, within this school it appears that the child was still not accepted by her white peers, only by her Muslim peers, thus the argument that Muslims are deliberately choosing not to fit, and thus 'segregating' must be challenged as in this case it seems that the white children were actually 'segregating' themselves from this Muslim pupil, rather than the other way round. This sense of not being accepted in society was also echoed by another respondent who picked up on the way in which racism and Islamophobia impacted the aspirations of young Muslims:

"I have been in Leeds for seven years and we work with children from Bangladeshi and Pakistani Kurdish backgrounds and sometimes I get a chance to talk to them and I will never forget in 2004 when I first came I started talking to the young people and I said, 'so what is the plan after high school?' And they said, 'what is the point?' I said, 'well the fact that you can go to university, finish that and either get a job or start your own business, but then be in a position to influence what happens to your community'. And they said, 'well listen, my dad came here with a degree but because he couldn't speak English very well, he never got a decent job and so he ended up working in restaurants and driving taxis and that is what he did and that is what he has always done. My older brother who was born abroad and was raised here from the age of about five went to school here and got a degree in engineering and now works as an administrative assistant, as he can't get a job; now that is not because he is not British, that is not because he can't speak English, but that is because he is Muslim and has a different colour of skin'" (Interview 7).

The impact of racism and Islamophobia in schools was also illustrated by the following response:

"One day in a Primary School where my sister-in-law works as a teaching assistant for Year 6 and Year 5, they were talking about Osama Bin Laden and the extremist Muslims and how the Muslim faith undermines women in the School; and that was teachers discussing it with the young people in Year 5 and Year 6. There is a good majority of Muslim young children in the School as well who are coming from different backgrounds, some are from Sudani backgrounds and some are from Pakistani, Bangladeshi; all different backgrounds, and they have conflicts within them as well, so they couldn't quite understand why they were being sort of picked out and it was all under religious education and social education and what is happening in the world at this point in time...there are no aspirations from the teaching staff because there is such a huge proportion of BME young people particularly from the Bangladeshi and Muslim backgrounds. And there is so much going on within the School in terms of politics that the teachers have shoved them aside as failures anyway" (Interview 11).

This is worrying, the attack on Islam in this school is unacceptable and this was being articulated to children still in primary school, the singling out and discussion on Islam as 'undermining women' and 'extremist Muslims' is bound to isolate such children at a

young age in the education system. Muslims in the education system clearly encounter a number of barriers to achievement in schools, the lack of support for them as well as their parents puts them at a disadvantage, moreover, the Islamophobic and racist attitudes, practices and structures marginalise young Muslims further in the sphere of education, as Shah (2009) points out:

“Studies and surveys have highlighted that Muslim learners, educated through the British state system are suffering academically, culturally and linguistically as a high proportion of Muslim learners are leaving British schools with low grades or no qualification (Abbas, 2006; Ahmad, 2002; Archer, 2003; Coles, 2004; DFES, 2004; Haque, 2000). Furthermore, they are exposed to the expressions of racism, Islamophobia and bullying (Bagguley and Hussain, 2007; Richardson and Wood, 2004; Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006). Many schools are either not fully aware or not doing enough to combat racist attitudes amongst pupils to tackle racism and promote race relations, for either lack of resources or other pressures. In this context of discrimination (Parekh, 2000), policy directives such as equal opportunities agenda, Race Relations (Amendment) Act, Widening Participation, Every Child Matters Agenda, or Building Schools for Future cannot fully respond to the specific needs of Muslims.” (Shah 2009: 3).

Our findings throughout this section have examined how Muslims within schools are subject to a number of challenges in the education system whereby they are increasingly excluded and alienated, thus their under-achievement combined with an absence ‘of a sense of belonging’ are detrimental for both inclusion and engagement within education (Shah 2009: 12). As such, professionals in the field of education need to show sensitivity and understanding of different religious and ethnic groups, such pupils need ‘a pride and confidence in identity and heritage’, additionally schools need a renewed commitment to equality measures and practices (Shah 2009: 18). The particular needs of Muslim pupils must be addressed in a supportive capacity, which does not undermine or isolate them. In terms of socioeconomic status Muslims are largely disadvantaged, thus Muslim pupils and their parents require a stronger support network between the school and the family to ensure that obstacles can be overcome such as underachievement and feelings of exclusion. Furthermore, the institutional racism embedded within the education system needs to be addressed with a stronger practical and cultural emphasis focused upon the promotion of diversity, difference, tolerance and anti-racism.

Conclusion

“At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word. And yet, being a problem is a strange experience, - peculiar even for one who has never been anything else...” (W.E.B Du Bois 1996: 4).

This paper has examined Muslims in the education system in the context of the UK. We have seen a number of key problems and weaknesses emerging from our findings

which impact upon Muslim pupils unfairly keeping them in a position of disadvantage. Firstly the monitoring of 'extremism' in schools must be addressed. We identified here how the implementation and training of teachers surrounding 'extremism' had a specific focus upon targeting Muslim children, beginning at the age of 5. Far right extremism in the form of the EDL for example, was merely referred to throughout the discourse as 'other' examples of extremism, as such the specific marking of extremism is only carried out in relation to Muslims. This level of monitoring at such a young age is disturbing and reinforces the wider public and political discourse surrounding the Muslim 'threat'. Our critique of such draconian measures highlighted that the monitoring of young Muslims in schools is simply unfair, unacceptable and unnecessary. In the wake of the war on terror, the governing of Muslim bodies has heightened across western plutocracies, from tighter airport measures, and increased domestic security, to the banning of the Burqa in many European countries, but to see this manifested in the educational sphere is frightening, as schools should offer a safe and open platform to challenge such ideas and promote tolerance. The monitoring of Muslim 'extremism' undermines inclusivity and reproduces the Islamophobic discourse of Muslims as 'dangerous' and 'problematic'.

Secondly we examined the debate surrounding Muslim faith schools. Once again the 'problem' of faith schools only seems to emerge with the development of Muslim faith schools, despite the fact they only constitute such a small percentage of all faith schools. The same tropes of such schools as 'dangerous', 'unsafe' and promoting 'segregation' and 'extremism' furnish the 'threat' of the Muslim 'other'. We critiqued such opposition surrounding Muslim faith schools by demonstrating the positive role they play in multicultural Britain. In a society where Muslims are subject to increased racism and Islamophobia, faith schools provide a safe environment from such attitudes and practices, such protection is often not provided in mainstream schooling. Moreover, in terms of educational achievement young Muslims often perform better in faith schools than they do in mainstream schools, this is significant and extremely encouraging as statistics maintain that Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils are more likely to be failed by the mainstream education system, in light of this evidence the fact that Muslim children are achieving higher grades and pass rates in faith schools can only be positive. Our research has shown that faith schools offer Muslim children the targeted support they do not receive in mainstream schooling. As such it is important to challenge the stubborn Islamophobic position, which attempts to fix the 'threat' and 'danger' of 'segregated' Muslim faith schools, and instead celebrate the positive role they play for all children in a diverse and multicultural society.

Thirdly we explored the lack of teacher training in issues surrounding anti-racism, tolerance, difference and diversity. We found that racism in schools was prominent through attitudes of teachers and pupils and also within the very structure of the system. We drew upon key cases of illustrating racism and demonstrated that it was a very real problem in schools throughout the UK. What is remarkable is the lack of commitment and measures instituted within the system to challenge such practices and more worryingly the inadequate training in place for teachers and staff surrounding these issues. The knowledge and understanding of teachers surrounding racism, tolerance, difference and so on is extremely weak and this must be addressed:

“The initiatives and strategies adopted over the last few decades to achieve inclusion in educational institutions (Doyle, 2006) have lacked full cognizance of the ethnic cultures and their value systems. This has often resulted in confusion and tensions at the implementation stage, adversely affecting the outcomes of the plans conceived with the best of intentions” (Shah 2009: 12).

It is somewhat astonishing that the training is so poor in this area, yet the training surrounding ‘extremism’ is prioritised in schools with a high Muslim/BME population, this despite the fact that there are many more cases of racism than there are of ‘extremism’ in schools. This is perhaps the most clearest manifestation of the wider political and social context; the neglect of anti-racism and diversity training seems to point to the notion that schools have seen ‘an end’ of racism (despite incidents which show the opposite), thus such training is no longer necessary, however, when it comes to the Muslim ‘problem’ training on ‘extremism’ is prioritised. This reflects the paradox to be found across western plutocracies where post-racial logics enable societies to declare themselves as non-racist, however this non-racism does not extend to include racism against Muslims, thus Islamophobia is ‘acceptable’, this can be articulated by Zizek (2011) who articulates further this paradox:

“Fortuyn was a paradoxical figure: a rightist populist whose personal features and even opinions (most of them) were almost perfectly “politically correct”. He was gay, had good personal relations with many immigrants, displayed an innate sense of irony – in short, he was a good tolerant liberal with regard to everything except his basic stance towards Muslim immigrants. What Fortuyn embodied was thus the intersection between rightist populism and liberal political correctness. Indeed, he was the living proof that the opposition between rightist populism and liberal tolerance is a false one, that we are dealing with two sides of the same coin: ie we can have a racism which rejects the other with the argument that it is racist” (Zizek: 2011).

In relation to the school context, training for teachers surrounding racism, diversity and tolerance needs to be prioritized, rather than the monitoring ‘extremism’. If schools are to represent a place of inclusion, the system itself needs to be inclusive, at the moment this is not the case, the small proportion of BME staff in schools is not an example of inclusivity, the lack of training and poor commitment to the promotion of diversity through the curriculum, is not an example of inclusivity, recurring incidents of racism by

teachers is not an example of inclusivity, and the increased marginalisation of Muslims (and other BME groups) is not an example of inclusivity. All these examples present a depressing picture of the current state of the British education system and need to be addressed if we are serious about challenging structural racism and inequality:

“(Teachers) have a responsibility not only to deal with racist incidents but also to prepare pupils for life in a multicultural and multiracial society and to improve their own knowledge and understanding of the communities of students they are responsible for (Parker-Jenkins, 2005; Coles, 2004). As majority of Muslims continue to be educated in non-Muslim state schools, it is important that the government and the schools make practical decisions to ensure accommodation of religious needs. An improved understanding of Islam and Muslim values among staff, governors, and school community in general can enhance mutual accommodation of needs and tolerance...The educational leaders, including both the policy makers and practitioners, might deprive the future society of its huge potential if they fail to fulfill their responsibilities to ensure inclusion and engagement of Muslim students or any other group.” (Shah 2009: 16).

Finally the paper examined the specific obstacles Muslim pupils encounter in the education system. We found that Muslims, both the pupils and their parents, have an extremely weak support system which works to alienate and marginalise them, thus debilitating their potential to achieve in the education system. As a largely socioeconomically disadvantaged community (particularly Pakistanis and Bangladeshis), more targeted support networks need to be established between the school and the home to enable access and understanding on both parts. The needs of Muslim pupils must be considered outside the framework of assimilation. Our findings suggest that Muslim pupils are simply neglected by teachers in terms of encouragement and help, and parents are often blamed for their children’s underachievement rather than the impact of structural racism. The very culture of schools tends to reinforce a racialised discourse which stresses that Muslims are ‘incompatible’ with the mainstream values of British society, and the barriers and obstacles they encounter are often blamed on their religious customs and cultural practices. These damaging assumptions ‘other’ Muslim pupils and restricts their ability to participate fully within the education system, and as Shah points out:

“In the case of Muslim students, faith emerges as a significant factor in their identity formations, and therefore recognising its role and significance should underpin future policies regarding education and inclusion” (Shah 2009: 19).

The paper has examined the weaknesses and limitations of anti-racist measures in the sphere of education. In the current climate of muscular majoritarianism and economic instability we have seen how Muslim pupils suffer from a number of disadvantages in the education system with a poor commitment to the teaching, promotion and understanding of tolerance, difference, and diversity. This reflects the wider social and political discourse which is largely constituted by a paradoxical interplay between post-racial logics and Islamophobia. This is not to dismiss the important and positive role

many teachers play, nor do we take for granted the incredible pressure many teachers are under, however, at the same time we can not ignore the fact that institutional practices of racism in the education system are prominent. Our paper has exposed the depressing reality that Muslims are being failed by the education system. In multicultural Britain young Muslim pupils (and other BME groups) should be supported and encouraged, rather than marginalised and excluded, if they are to achieve their full potential in education.

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Glossary of Acronyms

BME: Black and Minority Ethnic.

BNP: British National Party.

DCSF: Department for Children, Schools and Families.

DES: Department for Education and Skills.

DWP: Department of Work and Pensions.

EAL: English as an Additional Language.

EDL: English Defence League.

EMA: Education Maintenance Allowance.

EMAG: Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant.

GCSE: General Certificate of Secondary Education.

ITE: Initial Teacher Education.

NUT: National Union of Teachers.

OFSTED: Office for Standards in Education.

PGCE: Postgraduate Certificate in Education.

PVE: Preventing Violent Extremism.

QTS: Qualified Teacher Status.

RE: Religious Education.

REEMAP: Raising Educational Ethnic Minority Achievement Project.

TDA: Training and Development Agency.