

Report Part Title: Experiences of Muslim Communities: Education

Report Title: Muslims in London

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5. EXPERIENCES OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES: EDUCATION

Education, especially in schools, is one of the most important pillars of integration. Schools contribute to integration by providing opportunities for interaction between pupils and parents of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Ethnically and culturally mixed environments from an early age nurture good relations and mutual understanding and help prevent the development of prejudiced views. The educational system provides the necessary qualifications and interpersonal skills for effective participation in the labour market. It plays a formative role in the socialisation of young people in the unspoken rules and values of society. It is therefore crucial that all children receive a valuable, enjoyable and equal learning experience.

This chapter begins with an overview of the profile of schools in Waltham Forest, including a look at the types of schools in the borough and data on the diversity of the student population and educational achievement across different groups. The chapter then explores how issues that arise from the religious and cultural diversity found in schools is addressed in different ways through the curriculum as well as through measures taken to accommodate religious diversity in schools. The chapter then looks at measures taken to improve educational achievement, particularly in encouraging and supporting pre-school learning opportunities. The final sections of this chapter examines the issues of harassment and bullying as well as the extremism and violence that arise in the educational environment.

5.1 Schools and Students in Waltham Forest

According to data from the Department for Education, in 2010 there were 87 schools in Waltham Forest attended by 39,920 pupils. The majority of pupils attended one of the 52 state primary schools or 15 secondary schools.⁷³ These state-funded primary and secondary schools include some that have a religious character. Of the 52 primary schools, six are Roman Catholic and four are Church of England. There is also one Roman Catholic secondary school. There are no state-funded Muslim schools in Waltham Forest, although there are four state-funded Muslim primary schools in London overall.

There are no data on the number of Muslim pupils in schools in Waltham Forest. However, there are data on the ethnic diversity of pupils in schools in London and

⁷³ The other schools were four nurseries, five special schools, three Pupil Referral Units, seven private schools and one academy. An academy is a school directly founded by the Department for Education and is not controlled by local governments. Academies are mostly secondary schools (aged 11-16) and are usually self-governing. Academies also accept private sponsorship.

Waltham Forest: see Tables 24 and 25. All data was derived from the Department for Education Research and Statistics Gateway.⁷⁴

Table 24. Ethnic diversity of pupils in schools in London and Waltham Forest, by number of pupils

Ethnic group	Primary school		Secondary school	
	London	Waltham Forest	London	Waltham Forest
White British	158,370	3,541	161,690	3,798
Irish	3,770	82	4,130	92
Any other white background	50,640	2,264	38,160	1,825
White and black Caribbean	12,900	575	10,940	502
White and black African	5,570	213	4,200	132
White and Asian	6,670	195	5,150	156
Other mixed background	17,950	814	13,840	545
Indian	25,920	493	27,750	491
Pakistani	20,250	2,678	17,150	2,089
Bangladeshi	26,810	350	20,760	298
Chinese	3,240	70	3,560	70
Other Asian background	20,760	925	18,340	650
Travellers of Irish heritage	670	8	290	6
Gypsy/Roma	790	47	490	41
Any other ethnic group	25,340	610	22,510	360

Source: The Department for Education Research and Statistics Gateway, January 2010⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Department for Education Research and Statistics Gateway, available at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000925/sfr09-2010lat.xls> (accessed May 2012).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Table 25. Number and percentage of pupils by first language in primary and secondary state schools⁷⁶

	Number of pupils whose first language is known or believed to be other than English	% of pupils whose first language is known or believed to be other than English	Number of pupils whose first language is known or believed to be English	% of pupils whose first language is known or believed to be English	Unclassified	% Unclassified	Total number of pupils
Primary Schools							
England	518,020	16.0	2,707,240	83.8	4,830	0.1	3,230,090
London	218,150	44.6	269,580	55.1	1,460	0.3	489,180
Waltham Forest	8,417	50.7	8,043	48.4	150	0.9	16,610
Secondary Schools							
England	378,220	11.6	2,856,590	87.9	14,150	0.4	3,248,960
London	163,210	36.3	281,510	62.6	5,280	1.2	450,000
Waltham Forest	5,879	40.4	8,580	59.0	92	0.6	14,550

Source: The Department for Education Research and Statistics Gateway, January 2010⁷⁷

In addition to the ethnic diversity of its student population, Waltham Forest also has a large number of pupils for whom English is an additional language. The data from 2010 show that over half of the primary-school pupil population in Waltham Forest is believed to speak a first language that is not English, as compared with 44.6 per cent in London and 16 per cent in England. The secondary-school pupil population in Waltham Forest for this category is also higher than for London (36.3 per cent) and for England (11.6 per cent).

The percentage of pupils who receive free school meals is commonly used as an indicator to measure levels of poverty and deprivation. As Table 26 shows, the proportion of primary, secondary and special-school pupils that are eligible and receiving free school meals in Waltham Forest is on a par with London, which is considerably higher than for England. This is because two-thirds of all maintained

⁷⁶ Pupils of compulsory school age and above were classified by first language, this includes City Technology Colleges and Academies. The number of pupils by their first language is expressed as a percentage of the number of pupils of compulsory school age and above. National and regional totals and totals across each local authority have been rounded to the nearest ten. There may be discrepancies between totals and the sum of constituent parts.

⁷⁷ Department for Education Research and Statistics Gateway, available at <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000925/sfr09-2010lat.xls> (accessed May 2012).

primary and nursery schools in inner London have a higher proportion of their children eligible for free school meals, which is much higher than in any other region.

Table 26. Number and percentage of pupils eligible for and receiving free school meals in state-funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools⁷⁸

	Number on roll	Number of pupils taking free schools meals	% taking free school meals	Number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	% of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals
Primary Schools					
England	4,134,160	621,320	15.0	717,060	17.3
London	652,230	141,620	21.7	158,200	34.3
Waltham Forest	22,587	4,693	20.8	5,230	23.2
Secondary Schools					
England	3,278,490	364,070	11.1	464,670	14.2
London	453,460	83,880	18.5	104,140	23.0
Waltham Forest	14,818	2,998	20.2	3,791	25.6
Special Schools					
England	91,820	26,560	28.9	30,600	33.3
London	11,920	4,290	36.0	4,970	41.7
Waltham Forest	674	205	30.4	253	37.5

Source: The Department for Education Research and Statistics Gateway, January 2010

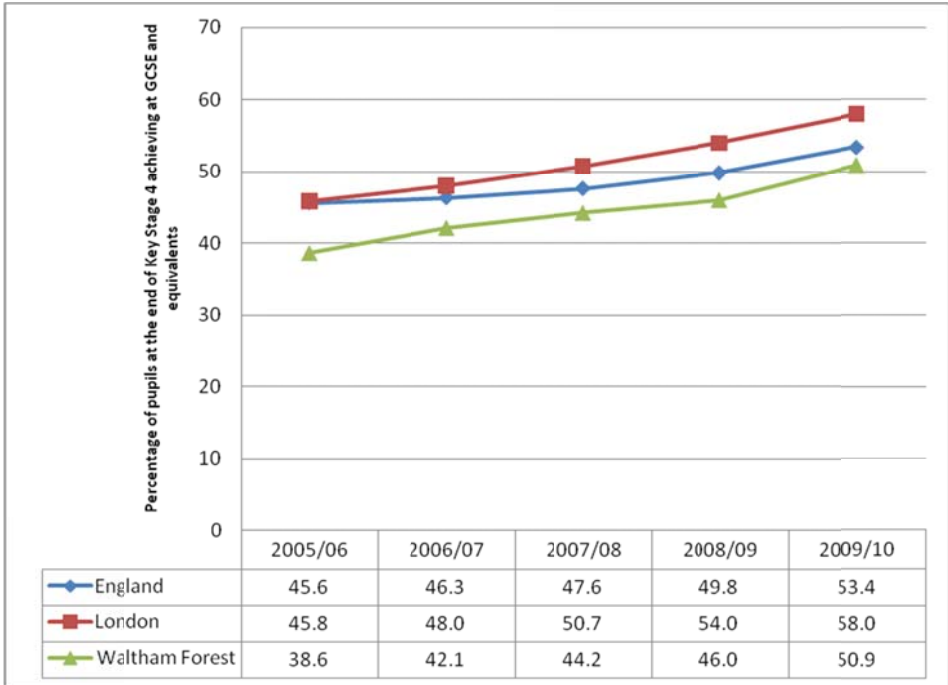
5.2 Educational Achievement

In England, school results are reported against a benchmark of the number of pupils that achieve five qualifications graded from A*–C in exams taken at the end of compulsory schooling called GCSEs. For the year 2009–2010, all schools in Waltham Forest achieved above the national floor target of 35 per cent of pupils attaining five or more A*–C GCSE (or equivalent qualification) grades, including English and

⁷⁸ Includes middle schools as indicated as well as full time and part time pupils who are sole or dual registrations, boarders, and students at city technology colleges and academies. The data excludes general hospital schools. National and regional totals have been rounded to the nearest ten. There may be discrepancies between totals and constituent parts. Number of pupils taking a free school meal is based on students present on the day of the census. Those eligible may choose not to take up their offer of a free school meal for various reasons, e.g., through preference or non-attendance on the day.

mathematics. No school achieved less than 37 per cent, with a Waltham Forest average of 50.9 per cent. Although this is below the national average of 53.4 per cent, this marks an increase in the achievement over the past decade and a significant narrowing of the gap with the national average. See Figure 2.

Figure 2. GCSE and equivalent results of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 (5+ A*-C grades including English and mathematics GCSEs),⁷⁹ 2005/2006–2009/2010

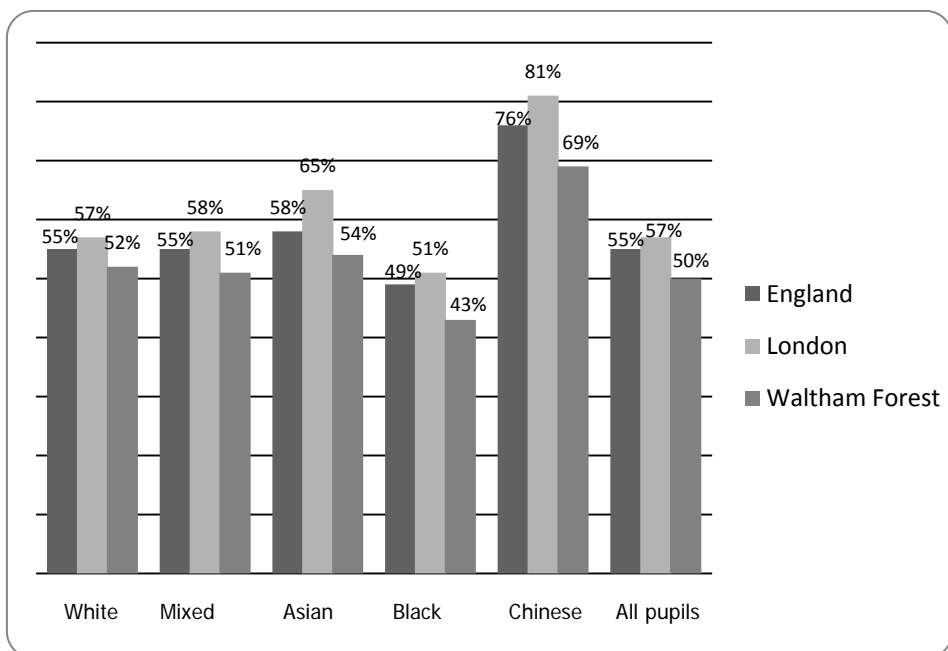


Source: Department for Education, Research and Statistics Gateway, January 2010

Data on educational attainment are not disaggregated by religion; however, there are data showing that the overall attainment data conceals differences across different ethnic groups.

⁷⁹ Department for Education, Research and Statistics Gateway. See table 17 of tables 7–17 at www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000985/sfr01-2011t7-17.xls (accessed November 2011).

Figure 3. Achievements at GCSE and equivalent for pupils⁸⁰ at the end of Key Stage 4 by ethnicity (state-funded schools, including academies and City Technology Colleges*(CTCs)), 2005/2006–2009/2010 (provisional)⁸¹



Source: Department for Education, Research and Statistics Gateway, January 2010

As Figure 3 shows, Chinese and Asian groups are performing better than other ethnic categories in England, London and Waltham Forest, and that all ethnic categories are performing less well in Waltham Forest in comparison with England and London. The Council's policy statements outline its plans to increase the educational achievement levels of pupils from ethnic-minority groups.⁸² The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted, a non-ministerial government department) annual performance assessment of Waltham Forest's service for children and young

⁸⁰ Pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 in each academic year.

⁸¹ Department for Education, Research and Statistics Gateway, available at www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000977/SFR37_2010.xls (accessed November 2011). Figures for 2005–2006 to 2008–2009 are based on final data; 2009–2010 figures are based on provisional data. In 2010, GCSEs, accredited at time of publication, have been counted as GCSE equivalents and also as English & Mathematics iGCSEs (internationally recognised qualifications for pupils aged 14–16). Includes pupils of any other ethnic group, also those pupils for whom ethnicity was not obtained, refused, or could not be determined.

⁸² Waltham Forest Council, *Corporate Equality Plan 2007–2010*, 2007, p. 8, available at www.walthamforest.gov.uk/corporate-equality-plan-2007-10.pdf (accessed November 2011).

people singled out for praise for the high numbers of 16–18-year-olds from minority groups integrated into education and training.⁸³

Interviews with stakeholders indicate that one of the groups of greatest concern in terms of educational under-achievement are pupils from gypsy and traveller communities. In 2002, a report for the London Borough of Waltham Forest by the Traveller Education Service identified a number of significant problems in the lives of gypsy and traveller communities, of which poor attainment and attendance levels in school and the large number of children dropping out of education in years seven and eight were important.⁸⁴ The 2002 report recommended that priority be given to developing the work of agencies involved with gypsy and traveller communities in Waltham Forest and the outreach work of the Traveller Education Service.

5.3 Satisfaction with Schools

The Foundations’ questionnaire asked respondents about their satisfaction with local schools and youth service provision. The majority of both Muslim and non-Muslim respondents were “very” or “fairly satisfied” with their local primary and secondary schools but were significantly less satisfied about youth service provision. See Tables 27–29.

Table 27. Satisfaction with primary schools

	Muslims	Non-Muslims
Very satisfied	19	16
Fairly satisfied	44	38
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	8	13
Fairly dissatisfied	7	2
Very dissatisfied	5	1
Don’t know	17	30
Total	100	100

Source: Open Society Foundations

⁸³ J. Winstanley, *Annual Performance Assessment of Services for Children and Young People in the London Borough of Waltham Forest 2008*, Ofsted, London, 2008, p. 5. Letter to Chris Kieran, London Borough of Waltham Forest. Available at <https://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=8263>.

⁸⁴ London Gypsy and Traveller Unit (LGTU), *An Assessment of the Needs of Children from Traveller and Gypsy Communities in Waltham Forest*, A report by the London Gypsy and Traveller Unit, commissioned by Waltham Forest Children’s Fund Partnership Board. Researched and compiled by Debby Kennett, October 2002, available at www.lgtu.org.uk/publications/Microsoft%20Word%20%20needs%20assessment%20final%20report%202.pdf (accessed November 2011) (hereafter LGTU, *Needs Assessment*).

Table 28. Satisfaction with secondary schools

	Muslims	Non-Muslims
Very satisfied	16	14
Fairly satisfied	46	29
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	11	17
Fairly dissatisfied	7	3
Very dissatisfied	5	3
Don't know	15	34
Total	100	100

Source: Open Society Foundations

Table 29. Satisfaction with youth services

	Muslims	Non-Muslims
Very satisfied	1	4
Fairly satisfied	27	14
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	20	17
Fairly dissatisfied	18	24
Very dissatisfied	18	21
Don't know	16	20
Total	100	100

Source: Open Society Foundations

5.3.1 Curriculum Content

A senior teacher emphasised that the curriculum "has a huge effect on the ethos around school, the way that our school community bonds and gels". In the UK, local authority maintained schools work within a prescribed national curriculum. Reflecting the national approach to state education in the UK, state-funded schools in Waltham Forest try to teach classes and activities that are inclusive and which treat all pupils as equals. The teacher explained:

We don't particularly focus on any one group. A lot of our projects and other activities that we run, and opportunities for kids, are not based on one particular ethnic or religious group, but we do run things which will involve a majority of those groups at one point or another as well as those things that are across the board and involve everybody.

Community cohesion and diversity topics form part of the study of Religious Education (RE), History, and Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE). The

national school curriculum is able to include the contributions from different cultures and faiths to maths, science and the arts. Different faiths, ethnicities and cultures are examined in the subject of citizenship. An experienced senior teacher described the aims of the citizenship course:

It's about awareness of different cultures, different religions, different ethnic groups. It's about awareness of what pupils' families actually go through, what refugees and asylum seekers will go through in terms of coming into the country; it's about the democratic process in our country and how they can have an impact on that; it's about knowing your rights and what to do if you feel that something is not being done properly by the standing government, how to get in touch with your councillor; and yes, it's absolutely huge in terms of what they actually learn about, all really relevant aspects of your place in society.

Those working in schools in Waltham Forest feel that community cohesion, diversity and mutual understanding are issues that are considered "on a regular weekly if not daily basis within school". The majority of Muslim parents in the focus group discussions welcomed teaching about different faiths.

The Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)

Interviewees pointed to the instrumental role of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)⁸⁵ and the Faith and Values Framework in supporting schools in the inclusion and study of different faiths and cultures in the delivery of the national curriculum.

The SACRE is responsible in UK law for advising local education authorities on religious education and collective worship. There are over 100 SACREs in England and Wales. Each SACRE is composed of four representative groups (three in Wales): Christian and other religious denominations, the Church of England (except in Wales), teachers' associations and elected councillors. In Waltham Forest, SACRE has representation from all major religious groups, including humanists. Interviewees felt that the SACRE in Waltham Forest was very active and effective:

Our SACRE has been really good in terms of relations, and relations between the different communities and how they are transferred into the schools, resulting in a really good syllabus around religious education that reflects all of the different groups.

In Waltham Forest, the SACRE developed a Faith and Values Framework, which is considered to demonstrate "excellent work with faith communities", that is, informing understanding between various religions, sex and relationships work as well as

⁸⁵ See www.walthamforest.gov.uk/index/education/schools-colleges/sacre.htm (accessed November 2011); www.babcockwf.co.uk/templates/ld_templates/layout_300126.aspx?ObjectId=301665 (accessed November 2011); and www.faithcommunities.org.uk/new/Links.html (accessed November 2011).

contributing to community cohesion.⁸⁶ As part of this framework, SACRE produced a statement that was agreed to and signed by its key local representatives from each major faith group in order to guide schools on delivering religious education, and for challenging prejudice in all its forms. The statement gave permission for parents to involve their children in sex education and stated the universal rejection of any form of discrimination against any group in terms of learning in the curriculum:

So when parents were coming in to say that “We don’t know how the mosque deals with this,” teachers are able to respond by saying, “You don’t need to feel that you should take your child out of this education programme because the mosque has signed up to this statement of values.” It has been really well received by schools as a tool for understanding.

The guiding principles document, accompanied by a DVD, is a support tool for parents, and it is used at parents’ evenings at schools. It represents a series of interviews with children speaking about the consequences of not being able to learn about these subjects, and highlighting the outcomes of not having a good grounding in Sex and Relationship Education (SRE).

Overall, it was felt that much parental concern could be remedied by clearly communicating to them what SRE actually involved:

There was also an issue in that there are so many myths around what was being taught. So I think that there were lots of families who thought that kids were going to see porn in year two, so it was about saying exactly what is taught in sex education and relationship education, putting an emphasis on the relationships element rather than the sex element, because before secondary school, they are not learning about intercourse so much, they are learning about puberty, how to develop as a person, so it was really highlighting that to the groups.

However, there are always conflicting moral outlooks, as these two focus group participant responses illustrate:

If you ask regarding primary school education, it is not like it used to be. Their focus is on other types of education. Even little children will talk about pregnancy and periods. I mean they are so advanced!

We were raised in Pakistan and according to our religion, we learn everything too but we learn according to our age, step by step. For example, under-age children discuss such big things in front of adults. There is no more respect. They don’t even feel like it’s a bad thing; the school should teach them

⁸⁶ Ofsted, *Joint Area Review (JAR) Report for Waltham Forest*, 2008, p 8, available at http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/waltham_forest/007_Joint%20Area%20Review%20-%20Main%20report%20as%20pdf.pdf and www.walthamforest.gov.uk/wfsacre2009-annualreport.pdf (accessed November 2011).

according to their age. They show us that they are teaching according to their age but they don't do it how we want it.

In Waltham Forest, two Muslim school governors launched a campaign accusing SRE of sexualising children.⁸⁷ Their report called for SRE to shift its emphasis from preventing teenage pregnancy and STDs to disbursing moral guidance which sought to deter early sexual relations in the first place.⁸⁸

An Independent Review launched in consultation with faith groups following a government proposal in 2008 to make PSHE a statutory component of the curriculum detailed the tensions and moral ambivalence here. Although it advocated that it be made mandatory for all students, it also reaffirmed parents' rights to withdraw their children from the SRE programme and suggested that the curriculum should be tailored to suit the ethos and the values of the individual school at the governing body's discretion.⁸⁹

The complexity and challenges of teaching sensitive subjects were emphasised by an incident at one primary school where a number of parents (not exclusively Muslim) withdrew their children from a series of lessons on, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) history. "We prefer to teach the children these issues ourselves and it is too early to learn about these issues," explained one parent, who continued:

We didn't know how detailed the lessons were going to be and were merely given some information about what the terms of sexual behaviour involved between these groups of people (is called), so that's even more concerning as it's a bit more detailed than we'd thought.⁹⁰

However, a council spokesperson emphasised the efforts made to consult and inform parents:

Parents were invited to meet with teachers and governors several weeks ago to discuss what work would be taking place throughout the national LGBT History Month, and how this work would be delivered.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Available at <http://sreislamic.wordpress.com> (accessed November 2011).

⁸⁸ F. Khodabaksh and Y. Patel, *Sex and Relationship Education: a Muslim Community Perspective*, 2009, p. 6, available at http://sreislamic.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/sre_v3_january_new.pdf (accessed November 2011).

⁸⁹ London Borough of Waltham Forest, Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, minutes of meeting on Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) in Waltham Forest Schools, 2009, p. 21. Available at <https://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=9445> (accessed April 2012)

⁹⁰ BBC News, "Action on Tolerance Class Absence", 7 March 2009. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/7930063.stm> (accessed November 2011).

⁹¹ BBC News, "Action on Tolerance Class Absence", 7 March 2009. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/7930063.stm> (accessed November 2011).

The incident illustrates the challenges for any school and particularly for schools in such multicultural and diverse communities as Waltham Forest, in seeking to ensure the equal inclusion of a broad spectrum of identities, views and values. The efforts made to accommodate the values of all communities and groups were recognised in the nomination of Waltham Forest for the Public Service Awards operated by the national newspaper *The Guardian*.⁹²

5.4 Accommodating Religious Diversity

Schools in Waltham Forest also respect diversity through customised school uniforms for different cultures and religions as well as marking different religious and cultural holidays and events:

We have a policy of closures for each of the main religious holidays for the significant communities within the population. So there is closure for Eid, because obviously Eid is not a fixed date, and is determined by the locality of the mosque, and so within that, there is some flexibility for them to work with their mosque leader to determine the actual dates of closure for Eid. So it's further differentiated even within the Muslim communities in this borough.

At the time of the research interviews, new guidance for this through SACRE (see below) had been drafted and agreed, but was not yet publicly available.

There is also closure for Guru Nanak's birthday and Diwali, and all students get those days off, because yes, they are religious holidays, but they are actually also community celebrations in our view. And many of our schools actually celebrate each and every one of those holidays in a way that the whole school community celebrates it together. The students who are believers then have the opportunity to do their religious observance separately within their family and community, but it is also celebrated within the school community.

Schools and colleges across Waltham Forest demonstrate a number of other examples of good practice in respecting the needs of Muslim students, including the provision of *halal* food and dedicated facilities such as prayer rooms.

The positive impact of these measures accommodating religious diversity was reflected in the results of the Foundations survey, which show that the majority of both Muslim and non-Muslim respondents felt that schools did respect the needs of different religious groups; 68 per cent of Muslim respondents felt that schools sufficiently respect religious customs although 17 per cent felt they do too little. See Table 30.

⁹² Regarding London Borough of Waltham Forest's strategy on LGBT, see London Borough of Waltham Forest, *LGBT Study: Priority Outcomes and Action Plan*, February 2011 Update, available at www.walthamforest.gov.uk/lgbt_study_response_plan_jan_2011_update.doc (accessed November 2011).

Table 30. Do schools respect different religious customs?

	Muslims	Non-Muslims
Too much	2	7
About right	68	59
Too little	17	7
Don't know	13	27
Total	100	100

Source: Open Society Foundations

Focus group participants were also positive about efforts made by schools to accommodate the religious needs of Muslim pupils in relation to food, uniform and religious holidays. According to a participant in one of the older Muslim women's focus groups, schools allowed volunteers to provide RE classes during the lunch period for students who were fasting during Ramadan.

I personally think this area is very flexible because there are prayer rooms everywhere and the staff respect you. I also like the fact that they accommodate religious dress codes into their uniform.

However, another commented:

I don't agree with schools giving so many holidays for every religion. It gets to be too much.

A similar concern was highlighted by a non-Muslim survey respondent:

All religious customs should be treated the same. A Muslim boy gets an extra holiday for Eid and also on Christmas. But the Christian students only get Christmas holidays and not for any other special days of different faiths.

This parent's concern was also echoed by other school staff members in the borough, highlighting the lack of guidance or response from the council about the approach to marking religious holidays such as Eid. Other schools, however, did not regard this issue as problematic and exercised discretion in how they marked such events.

The reduction in educational funding that schools are experiencing was inevitably having a knock-on impact on the range of extracurricular activities that schools are able to offer and engage in, including the celebration of the ethnic and cultural diversity of schools:

Next year, I really have no idea whether the Eid project, the Eid Festival will run because I don't know whether it can be funded. The groups that come in and do the black history month workshops, can we afford to fund them next year? I don't know. But these are the kind of things that we are going to have to start to look at, and that's a real shame.

A main concern in education centred on more general worries about the need for more resources for all pupils.

5.5 Pre-school, Early Learning and the Home Learning Environment

Research demonstrates the importance of the combined impact of good pre-school, early learning and home learning environments.⁹³ These are particularly essential for children from minority or marginalised groups, especially where English is not their first language or the first language of their parents. Such children can find themselves at a disadvantage from the start of their schooling, with language difficulties affecting their ability to gain as much from education as other pupils. It will also have a detrimental impact on their ability to integrate into the school community. However, in the right educational environment, additional languages skills can be an asset. The Effective Pre-school and Primary Education 3-11 Project (EPPE 3-11) emphasises the need for national and local policies to support parents in providing a rich home learning environment, with sustained opportunities for learning during everyday family activities.

In stakeholder interviews references were made to measures taken in Waltham Forest to ensure that children in marginalised and deprived communities gain these benefits. It was argued that this requires good outreach work combined with initiatives that can encourage the consent and participation of parents. Parents from marginalised and new communities may need to be educated about the importance of pre-school and early learning.

One initiative that has been highlighted in interviews is the Community Learning and Skills Service (CLaSS),⁹⁴ which is said to have developed the trust of local communities and played an important role in encouraging the inclusion of parents in the education of their children, as well as encouraging participation in adult learning courses in marginalised communities. Such adult learning is integral to the ability of parents to help their children with their education and helps parents share in the educational experiences of their children. It can also open the way for better employment opportunities and inclusion in the broader community.

Local nursery and primary schools work closely with CLaSS to run free courses in their schools which help parents help their children with their homework and support their learning. The key to success in the outreach work of CLaSS is considered to be the close support of community centres, teachers and home-school liaison officers. For example, one local school and children's centre, with a high proportion of pupils from

⁹³ The Effective Pre-school and Primary Education 3-11 Project (EPPE 3-11), *A Longitudinal Study Funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (2003–2008)*, Principal Investigators Kathy Sylva, Edward Melhuish, Pam Sammons, Iram Siraj-Blatchford and Brenda Taggart, available at <http://eppe.ioe.ac.uk/eppe3-11/eppe3-11pubs.htm> (accessed November 2011).

⁹⁴ See www.walthamforestclass.gov.uk (accessed November 2011).

ethnic-minority backgrounds and of pupils who speak English as an additional language, has worked with CLaSS to "open parents' minds, promote and recruit, and open new areas of learning". The EPPE research suggests that involving parents in the education of their children is particularly important in schools with such a demographic, and will help both parents and their children develop English-language skills. To reach such parents, representatives of CLaSS put up information stands in schools to promote and provide CLaSS taster courses for parents, shared activities for parents and children at the school's fete, diversity day and at culture-related events.

One stakeholder explained that parents' involvement in one class can lead to enrolling in others, thereby developing their learning and inclusion. For instance, a parent may initially be interested in a non-accredited course or activity, such as sewing, but once involved and part of the learning environment, may move on to accredited courses. The activities, workshops and courses facilitate parents meeting each other, and information feedback to neighbours, colleagues and other family members. An example of such progression to further learning was the introduction of ICT level 1 computer classes with qualification for parents, provided free through "Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities" (NLDC) funding for a centre which is also a venue for a broad range of other courses, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Level 1 beauty and nail art, food and safety, money management, strengthening communities, and digital photography. The centre's services include the Every Child Matters (ECM) programme and positive parenting, pre-employment and family workshops, a parents' and carers' forum, a free advice surgery, a community forum group, a knit and chat group, a sewing group, and a cafe where mothers can breast-feed.⁹⁵ Classes such as those in free digital photography may not seem directly related to education or employment, but they are seen as useful for encouraging and helping parents to share experiences and learn with their children.

To support outreach and participation, CLaSS works with schools and community organisations. Details of individuals who may be interested in courses are sent to the curriculum adviser for each course. Information about courses is disseminated through education and children's centres websites, and regular advertisements in the free Waltham Forest newsletter that all borough residents receive. Brochures and prospectuses are also placed in community centres, councillors' surgeries and the refugee advice centre. CLaSS representatives also attend key borough events, such as Leyton Day (an event organised by the LB of Waltham Forest), the Car Free Day and the Waltham Forest Mela (festival). Demonstrations by tutors have also been given at the Priory Court Family Day and the Beaumont estate local family fun day, organised by London Quadrant Housing.

⁹⁵ See www.barclaychildrencentre.org/events.htm (accessed November 2011).

5.6 Involvement in School Governance

The importance of parents' involvement in their children's education was also one of the key points raised by many young people in the focus groups. Schoolteachers felt that stronger engagement from parents would have a positive impact on their children's achievement. Both focus group participants and stakeholder interviewees noted the difficulty of achieving diversity on governing boards. Some of the reasons advanced for the low levels of engagement by parents included a lack of confidence, limited English language and a poor understanding of the educational system in general.

In the borough you will find more than 60–70 per cent of the children are Muslim. But if you look at the governance of the schools maybe 10 per cent of the governing body might be Muslim. I personally have been in the governing body of a school for over 10 years, I have tried so hard to bring in Muslims and do the work on behalf of the school governance to make life easier for the children but they always try to withdraw from that.

While older immigrant Muslims' lack of familiarity with the educational system was a barrier, others noted that the number of British-born Muslims on school governing boards was still very low. The difficulty of achieving diversity was also expressed by another stakeholder:

We do everything in our power to encourage people to step forward and become governors. Actually it's very hard to get people to step forward and become governors in many cases. I am a head teacher myself, and I am struggling to get representation from a good cross-section of the population on my governing body, and that's simply because there is not perhaps as much collective will as we would like.

Despite this difficulty, it was felt by others that many schools in Waltham Forest managed to achieve a good representation of the local community in their governance structures:

I would say that in the governing body meetings that I go to, there always appears to be a cross-section of ethnic parents represented. I don't think we collect data on the ethnicity of governors on governing boards; we just try and get good governors. I go to quite a lot of governing body meetings and I can honestly say that they always appear to be quite mixed as far as I can see.

What was uncertain was whether this reluctance to volunteer as a governor was particular to people of Muslim background or just something which one might typically find in more deprived areas. There is some evidence to suggest that "if you are in a more deprived neighbourhood, you are less likely to volunteer for posts that are perceived to be around education". One suggestion was for that the diversity data of school governing bodies should be collected and examined to explore whether people from certain minority or faith backgrounds were not participating.

5.7 Harassment and Bullying

The LB of Waltham Forest has put a great emphasis on clamping down on all forms of harassment at schools, including religious harassment.⁹⁶ The council collects data from schools on all reported incidents, which are recorded and categorised according to different types of bullying, including bullying based on ethnicity, faith, special education needs, sexuality and hygiene. After the anti-terrorism arrests in the area in 2006 there was particular concern about the potential for anti-Muslim bullying and many schools paid attention to signs of this occurring. However, very few instances of anti-Muslim bullying were picked up by parents in focus groups:

I think after we had the arrests in Waltham Forest, there was a perception among young people that there was Islamophobia in the borough, and we did a lot of monitoring around that. It doesn't come up in the same way now. I also feel that in Waltham Forest, we have a really strong mobilised Muslim community; I don't feel in any way that in schools, Muslim kids are marginalised. In fact, in some of the schools, they are a very strong voice.

There was however a recognition that further efforts may be needed in identifying particular forms of bullying.

Even if it is faith related, it may not manifest itself in that way. So it could be that a young person is being verbally attacked because he is Muslim, but you know, it's packaged in another way. It's really difficult for schools to actually identify what type of bullying is happening.

Interviewees who were involved in bullying and issues of safety in Waltham Forest considered instances of bullying relating to faith to be low. They found other forms of bullying such as those based on homophobia to be more frequent. As one interviewee explained:

In the last two years, we have done a lot around homophobia because a lot of schools have felt that's a big issue for them. I think so many schools in London would say that their school is not a safe place for kids to come out before the age of 18. Unfortunately, that is still where we are at in society.

In response to this, a number of LGBT projects have been developed. For example, schools in Waltham Forest have performed drama productions which have focused on homophobia. At the suggestion of pupils at one school, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* was reworked to feature two male lovers.⁹⁷ The production attracted the attention of the English actor, Sir Ian McKellen, who came to the school for the dress rehearsal and became involved by providing a small workshop for the pupils to help them with their performance. This alternative version was performed as part of the Shakespeare Schools Festival. At this event, pupils from four secondary schools in the borough also spoke

⁹⁶ London Borough of Waltham Forest, *Waltham Forest Community Cohesion Strategy*, p. 5.

⁹⁷ See <http://news.pinkpaper.com/NewsStory.aspx?id=242> (accessed May 2012).

about the work that they were doing to promote inclusion and prevent and tackle all forms of bullying. The event and the work of the schools in promoting equality and diversity was acknowledged by the LGBT advocacy group, Stonewall.⁹⁸

Several schools in the borough were also involved in working on a production of the *Laramie Project*, which is a play that uses a series of interviews to depict the reaction of the community in the town of Laramie to the murder of Matthew Shepard, a young, gay student at the University of Wyoming in October 1998. The play follows the events leading up to Matthew's killing and the trial of his killers. It mixes real news reports with actors portraying friends, family, police, perpetrators and other Laramie residents in their own words. The school's production was eventually performed in one of London's West End theatres after a theatre, the Drill Hall,⁹⁹ provided their venue free of charge. One of the production's organizers said, "It was great. These kids who were really excited to be performing in a community hall, ended up going to the West End."

One interviewee closely involved in the project considered the significance of the involvement of Muslim pupils in the production:

I just feel that was quite ahead of its game in so many ways. We have young Muslim kids who have spoken about their involvement, and I felt that was really positive. We sold 300 tickets for that performance. The most amazing thing was that three of the kids were Muslim. That was something that we would have never expected, because it is so easy to say that Islam and sexuality, and especially homosexuality, are not compatible in any way. But there is this new generation of kids who are actually saying it's about human rights and we are going to be involved.

5.8 Extremism and Violence

Violent extremism and terrorism became a significant problem for schools in Waltham Forest after the arrests of a number of young people in the borough in 2006. As one interviewee noted:

There were so many kids who knew the people who were arrested, the people arrested were so young, they were 18 to 19, early 20s. The schools had their cousins, their sisters, their brothers in their classes. There was a perception that we needed to do something quite sensitively.

Most of those working in schools in the local area felt apprehensive about implementing policies in such a sensitive area. There was concern that the focus on

⁹⁸ Waltham Forest Magazine (*WFM*), issue 44, 23 February 2009, p. 7, available at <http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/wfm44.pdf> (wrong name of school used, apology given in later publication) (accessed November 2011).

⁹⁹ See www.drillhall.co.uk/pl374.html (accessed November 2011).

Muslims as a group would add to tensions and alienation. It was feared that the “Prevent” focus on Muslims could reinforce perceptions that they were a homogenous (and threatening) group, which could be counterproductive for developing community cohesion, and impossible when delivering the national curriculum and seeking to provide education for all. Several interviewees indicated that there was now a recognition that the work on extremism needed to move beyond a focus on Al-Qaeda extremism to include far-right and other forms of political extremism.

There was so much emphasis put on inclusion of Islamic groups after the arrests, and with all of the “Prevent” funding coming through. A couple of our schools, when they got their Ofsted for cohesion, it was a case of the inspector saying, “Fine, but what are you doing for white, British groups?” Because you have so many initiatives here for inclusion of other groups, but the white working class seems to have been completely neglected, so its swings and roundabouts, isn’t it? I have felt a difference this year in terms of focus.

When teachers were consulted about what they thought were the contentious issues that needed to be dealt with in a really safe environment in schools, many felt that this new generation of post-9/11 children were affected by different concerns, such as the far right:

The real interest from the teachers was on the far right. And I think that the issues at that time were particularly around immigration-based comments, such as “Why are all these people coming to our borough? How can we do something about it, my parents hate that, all of these Polish people are here.” Those are the comments they were struggling with rather than anti-Western comments. The whole PVE (Preventing Violent Extremism) ethos seemed to be suggesting that there is a massive anti-Western pro-Islam movement. There are elements of that of course, but I don’t think it was infiltrating into the classrooms as much as there was evidence to suggest. It didn’t feel that way in our borough. I had kids in year 7 asking “What was 9/11?” It was really interesting because it almost felt like we have a new generation, because it was 10 years ago. So you have got eight- and ten-year-old kids, for whom 9/11 is probably something they have heard of, but they didn’t live through it. I may as well have been talking to them about the troubles in Ireland.

More recent work on supporting teachers in addressing issues around extremism appears to be responding to these concerns. For example, the project “Learning Together to be Safe” trained staff to address a range of different forms of extremism, including not only al-Qaeda related extremism but also far-right extremism.

Local concern over violent behaviour is increasingly related to gang culture and knife crime:

From a borough priority point of view, we are very keen on tackling extremist behaviour, but not necessarily of a religious disposition. Our extreme behaviour

in the borough is gang-related, and that again involves predominantly young men from many faith backgrounds. It's actually defined by postcode as opposed to who you believe is your god. The real issues here are actually much more to do with tribal identifiers, and I say that advisably, around gang culture, and that does involve Muslim boys.

Interviews with practitioners indicate that gang and knife crime have been the focus of youth-led projects that mobilise young people to work on what are considered to be contentious issues or matters of local concern.

One project was with young primary-school pupils identified as being vulnerable to gang culture and knife crime. The eight- and nine-year-old pupils interviewed a youth who had been stabbed, the father of a victim of a stabbing and an A&E doctor who had dealt with knife crime victims. Informed by these interviews, they produced a series of documentaries that highlighted all the consequences that they felt their peers needed to know about. This project has now been introduced into all of the primary schools in Waltham Forest, providing teachers with a booklet for six weeks of material that they can teach.