'Impenetrable systems'

School exclusion among Somali students in Camden.

Acknowledgements

This report could not have been produced without the contributions and commitment of all those who took part in and helped to facilitate this research.

Aleph Consulting

Editorial Note

This report has been produced for the purpose of identifying potential areas for improvement in the education of Somali children schooled in the borough of Camden. Aleph Consulting has been involved in the compilation and editing process of the report with a view to proposing positive next steps towards reducing the number of school exclusions amongst Somali children in the borough and enhancing the school experience for pupils affected.

Our response is based on the data provided in the report and includes proposed recommendations to alleviate the growing problem, but also acts as a model that can be followed and applied in other boroughs, in order to provide a more tailored and focussed multi-agency approach to tackling exclusions, lack of motivation and poor performance in particular communities across different boroughs. We believe the first step in addressing these issues must be the allocation of funds to commission a carefully researched study which can provide accurate and up to date data, indicating the full extent of the problem. Only after relevant issues have been identified and supported by accurate statistics, can we begin to look at producing an action plan to tackle these problems and consider implementing positive changes that will reap results over time and have an impact not only of the lives of the children affected, but also on entire families and communities.

In the past, it has been challenging to obtain the data required for such a study due to the way statistics are generally recorded in respect of particular ethnicities. With regards to this report, there was limited data specifically relating to the Somali community. It is Aleph Consulting's view that for the purposes of compiling these reports, it will be necessary for community groups or particular boroughs to start recording specific information about particular ethnic groups and their school performance, with a view to identifying any patterns of behaviour or other influential factors which may impact on children's school experiences and overall performance. More detailed information needs to be recorded in order to provide a reliable pool from which relevant information and inferences can be extrapolated. Further funds should be allocated for this purpose as this could prove to be a significant investment for Local Education Authorities. Further collaboration between parents, school staff and children are also required in order to provide a better understanding of cultural factors which can have an influence on children's schooling. A multi-disciplinary approach between community leaders, parents and teachers would further support pupils during their school journey and would also promote inter-cultural cohesion and personal development from an early age. These statistics cannot be looked at in isolation and must be considered as part of a much broader picture.

Aleph Consulting Recommendations:

After careful consideration of the data provided in this report, Aleph Consulting proposes the following:

- A yearly report to be funded and commissioned by the Council providing accurate and up to date data, not limited to school exclusions, but more widely identifying any concerning issues relating to the school experience of children from particular communities.
- An inter-disciplinary team and focus group be set up to discuss the finding of such reports and liaise with schools, parents and community representatives.
- An action plan be drafted with targets and timelines (to be reviewed and monitored periodically) with a view to addressing concerning issues.
- Ideas for good practice to be shared with other focus groups and teams across other communities and boroughs.
- The setting up of alumni groups to enable current students to hear first-hand from past pupils about their positive experiences. These students could act as mentors and role models.
- A Liaison officer be appointed at Camden Council to overlook the findings of such research and meet periodically with parent, pupil and teacher representatives with a view to implementing prevention and early intervention strategies for tackling any community-specific concerning issues.

Aleph Consulting's Conclusions:

Improving the school performance and educational journey for children from particular communities affected by external factors, as is the case with Somali children remains a Herculean challenge. Previous efforts by Local Education Authorities, parents, community leaders and children themselves should be recognised. Nevertheless, a much more focussed and collaborative approach is required if we are to see any significant results in this area.

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Foreword:
The problem

This qualitative report was commissioned by SYDRC following a worrying pattern of school exclusions among Somali pupils in the London Borough of Camden.

Despite over 13 years of improved school attainment and the establishment of annual achievement awards and other measures implemented to celebrate pupil's performance and behaviour, exclusion rates remain disproportionately high for Somali students. During the academic year 2017/18, Somali's exclusions represented 9.7%[1] of all school exclusions in Camden despite making up just 7.3% of the pupil population.

What is abundantly clear is that no solution can be successful without a multi-disciplinary approach with all parties coming together. Respect, trust and building a sense of shared ownership of the way forward require an investment in both time and money but are without question fundamental in ensuring all our children succeed.

This report also highlights the need for research that can provide reliable statistical data for Somali students in Camden. Accurate and readily available data that is consistently prepared over time will shed light on the true scale and patterns of school exclusion that this pilot is unable to capture.

This data alongside the awareness raised in SYDRC's report can guide Camden Council and schools to provide a learning environment that maintains educational achievement and guarantees that no child is left behind.

"Respect, trust and building a sense of shared ownership of the way forward require an investment in both time and money but are without question fundamental in ensuring all our children succeed"

1 This figure does not include Somali students who have been subsumed in the Other Black - African category (5.9%). As such the true figure may be greater. Data courtesy of Camden Council.

Executive summary

Education is highly valued by the Somali community in London. Somalis regard education as the key to a successful future and like many migrant communities the younger generations feels a sense of **'having to succeed'** and **taking advantage of the opportunities that had been unavailable to so many of their parents.** There are parallels here with the experiences of other refugee communities in the past, including the experiences of refugees from the Holocaust. It is estimated that the Somali community is around 9,000 (Camden), 70,000 (London) and 95,000 (nationally). However, these estimations are **speculative.**

"549 Somali students were attending secondary schools in Camden, accounting for 5.5% of all pupils"

Somali ethnicity is not captured as a discrete census category and is subsumed under the broad "Black or Black British - African" category. Hence, there is **no reliable official estimate of the size of the Somali population in Britain as a whole,** which shows **the need for future research** that gathers reliable statistical and qualitative analysis of the community and provides an accurate picture of the challenges that young Somalis are facing today. Such research would be a **key enabler for councils and schools to safeguard the educational rights** of their minorities and to guarantee that **no child slips through the educational net.**

The Somali community in Camden is concentrated in Kentish Town, Gospel Oak, Cantelowes, Kilburn, Camden Town and King's Cross/St. Pancras. The community forms the second largest ethnic minority group after the Bangladeshi community. In 2016, Camden Council identified that there were 830 Somalis pupils attending **primary** schools in Camden, and this accounted for **7.3%** of all students. With regard to **secondary schools**, 549 Somali students were attending secondary schools in Camden, accounting for **5.5%** of all pupils. See table right.

	Total Somali pupils	Percentage of all pupils	Total of which are Somali Camden residents	Percentage of all Camden residents
Primary schools Camden	830	7.3%	789	7.9%
Secondary schools Camden	549	5.5%	410	7.2%

This report stems from **concerns about how to maintain educational achievement levels amongst young Somali people in the borough of Camden**. Previous improvement patterns appear to be on the decline and their effect and impact is at present **diminishing.**

In parallel, there have been concerns raised in connection to the **level of school exclusions** amongst young Somali children. These concerns are shared by the **Somali Youth Development Resource Centre (SYDRC)** who compiled this report and **Camden Council** who have a long track record of working with communities to enable young people to achieve their full potential.

The Somali Youth Development Resource Centre (SYDRC) was **set up in 2000 to address concerns about educational underachievement amongst Somali youth**, who at the time were disproportionately at risk of leaving school with few or no formal qualifications. In its 20-year history, the organisation has seen periods of success and decline in the progress of Somali pupils and at varying degrees. Many trends have been amplified by public investment or the lack thereof, the commitment and leadership of individual schools and collaboration with parents and young people.

This report seeks to explore the problems related to these school exclusions, to understand the reasons for the disproportionate rate of exclusion and identify potential solutions for the future.

There are additional factors effecting the Somali community which create a particular sense of urgency. One such factor is that the Somali community in Camden has been significantly affected by **knife crime.** In the last 13 years, there are known to be 8 young Somali boys who have been murdered on Camden's streets. Education including formal, informal and the extracurricular are crucial routes to safeguarding our children and when combined with a joint community, government and public health approach this awful trend can begin to change. As an immediate life-saving intervention and due to the severity of the situation, some parents feel there is **no option other than to send their young boys to Somalia.**

Parents and practitioners also highlight 'off-rolling' where underperforming or problematic pupils are **expelled prematurely** to avoid effecting the school's league table position. The landmark *Timpson Review on School Exclusion* (May 2019), identified that school exclusions were disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups including those with special needs and those in receipt of free school meals. The government's publication of this report is welcomed and we look forward to seeing appropriate steps taken to make sure no child is left behind.

Whilst the focus of this report is on the Somali community, our aim is to research, identify and implement new strategies and ways forward that can be of **wider relevance for all students from a multitude of communities,** which may also be applied to improve school achievements amongst white working-class boys, rendering, thus, not limiting it to particular ethnic minority groups and expanding its scope.

"This report stems from concerns about how to maintain educational achievement levels amongst young Somali people in the borough of Camden"

Our findings have shown that there are 6 critical key issues that need to be addressed:

1 To improve communication between parents and schools and between teachers and pupils.

2 To encourage aspirations (including via positive role models).

3 To avoid negative stereotyping; intervening and providing support (including mentoring where appropriate) at early stages rather than when exclusion is already being considered.

4 To ensure that schools follow through on procedures to guarantee no young person slips through the educational net, whether as a result of short-term absences or long-term exclusions from the classroom.

5 To ensure equality issues, including issues relating to Islamophobic bullying, are addressed effectively and promptly.

6 To encourage and support parents to become actively involved in schools via classes, workshops and/or acting as school governors.

There are 3 key stakeholders involved in enabling young people to succeed in Camden, they are Camden Council, Camden Schools and Camden families. To see real change each party needs to work together. This report sets out key recommendations for each stakeholder to adopt in its Conclusions.

Introduction

This report emerges from current concerns about how to maintain educational achievement levels amongst Somali youth in Camden.

Previous improvement patterns seem to have been levelling off, if not declining. **There have, in addition, been parallel anxieties about the level of school exclusions amongst young Somalis.**

These concerns are shared by Camden Council which has a long track record of working with the community to enable young people to achieve their full potential.

The report has been compiled by the **Somali Youth Development Resource Centre (SYDRC),** working in collaboration with **Camden Council**, to explore the problems and their causes and so to identify potential ways forward for the future.

Whilst the focus is the Somali community, the aim of the report is to identify **ways forward with wider relevance,** including relevance for improving school achievements amongst white working-class boys.

Background on the Somali Youth Development Resource Centre (SYDRC) and educational attainment in Camden

The Somali Youth Development Resource Centre (SYDRC) was established in 2000 to address concerns about educational underachievement amongst Somali youth, who at the time were disproportionately at risk of leaving school with few or no formal qualifications.

Research commissioned by Camden Council, from the University of London's Institute of Education, indicated that in 1999, on average, only **3.1% of pupils of Somali origin were obtaining the target of five grade A* to C level passes, at GCSE level, compared with the local average of 47% of pupils achieving this level in the borough.**

Consequently, SYDRC set out to tackle the problem, working with schools, parents and youth concerned themselves. As a result, there were significant improvements; achievements that have been marked with an annual awards ceremony, attended by those concerned, including local MPs, councillors and other individuals from the local community, together with the young people and their families being commended for their achievements.

In 2013, however, the situation began to deteriorate. There were growing concerns as to whether educational achievements were beginning to decline, together with the increased number of school exclusions – with young people of Somali origin disproportionately at risk.

This set the context for discussions between SYDRC and Camden Council, from 2015, in order to develop collaborative approaches to these challenges. Camden Council undertook to analyse their data from 2013 to 2015, to identify the extent of these problems, exploring educational patterns for Somali young people,

compared with other communities in the borough of Camden. This data has provided the background for SYDRC's follow up study in 2016, using volunteers to interview Somali young people and their parents, including focus group discussions to explore the emerging findings.

In summary, Camden's analysis of their data identified that **young Somalis' attainment had actually continued to improve since 2013 – for Key Stages One and Two.** Somali children's performance at this level was slightly below the borough average, but very marginally so. The **problems were not significant at Primary School level at that point.**

There were, however, emerging problems at Secondary School level. The data for 2015 indicated that there had been **a dip in performance at Key Stage Four**. These dips had been reflected across all groups in the

borough and were not exclusive to the Somali community and could be explained to some extent by changes to the examinations system. These changing patterns were however more significant in some groups than in others.

Somali pupils in Camden schools were less likely to achieve 5 or more A* - C grades, including English and Maths (44%, compared with 54% in 2013), a dip that was somewhat greater than the regional dip for all Camden pupils (from 60% to 56%).

Somali girls were outperforming boys at every level, except at Key Stage Four**. Here girls' performance had dropped from 70% in 2013 to only 42% in 2015** –a much greater decrease than **the Camden average decrease from 68% to 63%.** This was a **very concerning finding**, given the significance of Key Stage Four **for young people's future prospects** for

continuing education, training and subsequent career trajectories.

There was also evidence of emerging problems in relation to school exclusions. **Since 2013 – 2016, 9 young Somali pupils were permanently excluded, with 95 fixed term exclusions of young Somali pupils (66% being boys and 29% being girls).** It did seem that there had been increases in the risk of permanent exclusions in Secondary Schools **where managed moves were facilitated** by schools for young pupils, who **would otherwise be facing permanent exclusion**. **Subsequent figures and data were not available in comparable form.**

Camden Council were already addressing the issue of school exclusions more generally, as well as developing a pilot scheme to support Somali young people and their families**.** More focussed work was carried out in one school in particular, and the findings would be shared and used as a baseline for strategic improvement in the coming year. **These findings, and the previous research on the educational achievements of minority communities in Britain, were the basis for SYDRC's research.**

There has been a long history of concerns on educational achievements amongst minority communities in Britain, including achievements within refugee and migrant communities. Coard (1971) had produced a report, arguing that the British educational system was erroneously defining too many West Indian children as '*educationally subnormal*' (Coard, 1971).

The problems were arising from racism in the educational system, which was reflective of the wider society. In Coard's view, this was rooted in **failures to communicate effectively across different cultures.**

Subsequent government inquiries identified similar problems of underachievement amongst black and minority ethnic children more generally (Rampton, 1981, Swann, 1985). There were concerns about the supposed failings of the Black Families – despite evidence of commitment to their children's education (Stone, 1981). Additionally, there were concerns about communication gaps between minority communities and their children's schools.

Summarising some of the evidence on Black children and underachievement in schools Benskin has also pointed to the self-fulfilling prophecies of low expectations, with **teachers labelling particular groups of children as low achievers and/ or troublesome** (Benskin, underachievement amongst BME children has been **exacerbated by educational reforms**. 1994).

In addition, there have been concerns about the **impact of wider social factors**. Low wages and poor housing have been identified as impacting upon parents' opportunities to engage with their children's schools, for example. These factors have also impacted upon the performance of young people themselves. Socio-economic disadvantages have been compounded by **cultural misunderstandings and stereotyping.** Although in varying ways and contexts these factors have continued to hold relevance over the decades and continued to impact Somali pupils' performance at school.

These factors have also been identified in more recent studies. There appears to be a complex play of inter-related socio-economic and cultural factors leading to low achievement, school exclusions and youth crime amongst African Caribbean boys (Scott and Spencer, 2013).

In consequence, there have been a series **of interventions to address these challenges**. These have included initiatives to **improve educational aspirations and achievements across all groups of pupils in schools** (Shedden. 2012), as well as studies on how to improve aspirations and achievements **amongst particular groups**, including

"Socio-economic disadvantages have been compounded by cultural misunderstandings and stereotyping"

Muslim children (Coles, 2008) and child refugees and asylum seekers (Rutter, 2003, Pinson et al, 2010). There have been other local initiatives, such as the use of **Home School Liaison officers**, for example, to improve communication between schools and families.

In Camden, the improvements in Somali young people's achievements testify the value of such initiatives. But these efforts have been taking place in an increasingly problematic context.

More recent research has pointed to the impact of **increasing pressures on schools**, as the title of Picower and Mayorga's collection of essays indicates: *'How current school reform policy maintains racial and economic inequality'*, in relation to the situation in New York for example (Picower and Mayorga, 2015). Similar arguments have been applied to the impact of educational reforms in Britain, pointing to the ways in which these reforms **can perpetuate inequalities in terms of both race and social divisions** (Gillborn, 2008).

The pressures of league tables have been a continuing theme, for example, linked to concerns about school exclusions and managed moves, when pupils seem unlikely to perform

category that display some if not all of the risk factors.

Meanwhile families have been experiencing increasing pressures themselves too, with growing proportions of the labour force employed in precarious situations. Too many have been working in jobs with zero hours contracts, for example - too often characterised by low pay - problems that have been compounded by changes in the welfare benefits system, resulting in pressures on parents to work longer hours.

In contrast with previous years, in 2016 a number of parents failed to attend the awards ceremony, despite the fact that their own children were due to receive awards. When contacted subsequently 15 of the 18 parents involved explained that they had been unable to attend because they were on zero hours contracts and found that they had to work – at short notice - that evening.

Families have also been affected by the housing crisis, especially in inner London. As a result, too many families have been forced to move from one insecure tenancy to another, thereby disrupting their children's education and/ or resulting in longer journeys to and from school.

Finally, there have also been pressures on families, especially those of Somali origin as a result of wider public debates on migration, together with wider concerns about the 'War on Terror' and increasing Islamophobia. These pressures have been mounting with increasing instances of hate crime in the aftermath of the Referendum on membership of the European Union in 2016. Young Somalis seem to have become increasingly alienated within this context.

well and/ or seem troublesome more generally. **The Communities Empowerment Network** has gone on to produce national research, recording parents' concerns that school exclusions were being applied in discriminatory ways, in response to these pressures, leaving the **most vulnerable young people, including young Black people, at greater risk of being excluded, rather than being supported and rehabilitated.** The Timpson report on School Exclusion (May 2019) also identified that those with special educational needs and in receipt of free school meals are disproportionately being affected by exclusion. It is not difficult to imagine then that some young people are increasingly vulnerable because they fall under group or

Developing SYDRC's research: methodology

The research set out to explore the reasons for changes in educational achievement together with changes in exclusion patterns amongst young Somalis in Camden. Having explored Camden Council's data, SYDRC **focused on exploring the perceptions of young Somalis themselves and their parents.**

SYDRC identified young people who had experienced various types of challenges at school and approached them and their parents to invite them to be interviewed. Explanations of the aims and objectives of the project were provided, together with guarantees of confidentiality. Those who agreed (and signed consent forms) were then interviewed.

In total **28 interviews** were completed, which lasted between **30 and 60 mins.** Parents typically gave fuller interviews than the young people – although some of the young people had plenty to say. Most of the interviews were recorded (although a few of those interviewed preferred not to be recorded, so these interviews were simply noted by the interviewer). The **recorded interviews were then transcribed**. Interviews with some Somali parents were conducted in Somali, and then had to be translated before being transcribed. The check lists of topics covered in these interviews is set out in **Appendix 1.**

Once emerging themes had been identified from these interviews, two focus groups were organised – one with parents and one with young people. These focus groups explored the initial findings, inviting further reflections in the ensuing discussions. The focus groups with parents included fathers and mothers with lively interventions from across the room. Several - but not all - of the young girls and boys were somewhat less vocal than their parents, although some of the less vocal did respond when encouraged, to contribute to the discussion in their focus groups.

In addition, SYDRC identified a group of young high achievers. This was to address the potential biases inherent in focussing upon young people who had experienced problems in their schooling. But more positively, **the purpose was to identify the crucial factors which had enabled other young people to overcome challenges**, to succeed at school and in their subsequent education and training for the world of work. The lists of topics explored in both sets of focus groups are set out in **Appendix 2.**

There were few **challenges** to be faced in completing the research:

There were problems in obtaining consent for the interviews in a few cases. Some of those who were approached were reluctant to participate, due to their **concerns about confidentiality**. These anxieties were evidently compounded for some of them as the result of their previous experiences with authority, and the negative effects of being seen to be critical of authorities elsewhere. As a result of these concerns, this report does **not** identify particular schools or provide details that might lead to the identification of any individual young person or their parents.

Some parents also found the **interviews upsetting**, as they were reflecting upon experiences that had been painful for them. These painful emotions need to be set in the context of Somali refugees' experiences more generally. There were some mental health issues for those parents who had undergone traumatic experiences back in Somalia and subsequently, with family members still at risk of continuing violence.

These traumatic experiences could in turn, impact on second generation Somalis. Like many communities, mental health has been something of a taboo subject in Somali communities and it would appear that the effects of painful feelings have not generally been openly acknowledged. However, this is not to say that these emotions have not been affecting families in a variety of ways, including having an impact on parents' aspirations for their children.

There was a general consensus about the next generation **'having to succeed' and taking advantage of the** opportunities that had been unavailable to so many of their parents. There have been parallels here with the experiences of other refugee communities in the past, including the experiences of refugees from the Holocaust.

There were also important **ethical issues here for the research**. The parents' feelings had

to be respected, and interviews cancelled or shortened midstream in the few instances where parents expressed anxieties - even if that meant losing data for the research on a few occasions.

Additionally, there were expressions of **disbelief** from those approached for interviews – would this research actually make any kind of difference? Parents were assured that Camden Council *would listen* and they were given assurances that opportunities to discuss the research findings **together** with any resulting recommendations for change would become available.

The process of transcribing and translating research materials was also challenging, as we were relying on voluntary contributions of time and expertise. Research timetables had to take account of the pressures on volunteers' time, including those associated with Ramadan, as well as those relating to University commitments.

SYDRC is extremely grateful for all these voluntary contributions of time, energy and commitment. The volunteers will have an opportunity to comment on the final draft of the report and to reflect upon their learning through participation.

Total Interviews

Interviews: 28	Focus Groups: 3 with 34 participants in total	
11 Mothers	Parents: (20)	16 Mothers, 4 fathers
13 Young people	High Achievers: (7)	5 Girls, 2 boys
4 Fathers	Other Young People: (7)	2 Girls, 5 boys

Further background information about the Somali community is provided for context in Appendix 3.

Findings from our Interviews

This research started from the Somali community's commitment to ensuring that young people should aspire and achieve their potential through their education in Britain. This commitment emerged most powerfully, constituting a continuing theme, both amongst the parents and amongst the young people themselves. This was illustrated, for example, by the extent to which Somali parents were prepared to pay for extra tuition to improve their children's performance.

'Extra tuition classes can only enhance the child's progress and further support the school's efforts'

Whether or not extra tuition achieves these aims (and doubts have been expressed as to the quality of some of the tuition on offer), **parents are evidently prepared to make considerable financial sacrifices to provide this for their children.**

Others referred to sending their children to Somalia for a limited period of time, in order to break patterns of negative behaviour and encourage higher aspirations and achievements. Several of the young people who were interviewed referred to having spent some time in Somalia for the above-mentioned reasons. In each case, the consensus was that this break had indeed had a positive effect, making children more committed to taking advantage of the opportunities available to them, back in Britain, when they returned. As one young person reflected,

'It was hard for people to go to a good school' - recognising that some of the cousins' educational experiences in Somalia were being constrained by financial pressures.

'I was upset because I go to school for free'.

With the benefit of hindsight, one young person who had experienced challenges, including a school exclusion, explained that the change in setting helped him.

'I am the better for it. I now enjoy going to school and I feel attendance is key. I enjoy Maths, which I find a fun subject'

Indeed, Maths, Science and IT emerged as favourite subjects amongst a number of the young people who were interviewed, often linked to particular career prospects. One young person was aiming to pass his GCSEs and then plan his future.

'Children are aware of the importance of learning and the relationship between their education and future prospects'

In summary, the interviews and focus groups illustrated the extent of the Somali community's commitment to educational aspiration and achievement and this applied even when young people had experienced particular challenges within the educational system.

Children and families are making personal sacrifices, using the resources they have at their disposal to ensure their child has the best possible start in life. None of them expressed disinterest or alienation from education per se. However, there was also evidence of a number of criticisms and concerns which the following sections illustrate in more detail.

The detrimental impact on our children: What are we doing wrong?

Identifying problems within schools

There are key communication barriers, which include parents' confusions about procedures and practices.

'I didn't know what is going on in the school. The teacher just says that my child is doing well, he is fine. I didn't know how he fitted in. It was a big surprise to me when he failed all his GCSEs', Somali mother quoted in Rutter, 2003, 153.

This comment was published back in 2003. There were more **contemporary echoes in some of the responses from the parents** who were interviewed for this particular study. In fact, communication problems emerged as a major factor across the interviews and focus groups. Many parents felt unclear about school procedures, in general. There were references to **'impenetrable systems'** in one of the focus groups and specific comments about the lack of communication in terms of young people's academic progress and behaviour – until these had become major problems.

One parent explained:

'One of the key requests I made as a parent to the school was the need for the school to inform me of every incident involving my son so I can talk to him. However, the school will only write to me when is the final incident, probably the 5th having not been informed of incidents 1,2,3 and 4.During the meetings to discuss my child's exclusion, the school will list dates of incidents as if they are preparing a narrative for his exclusion. When I ask why was I not informed of the previous incidents – the room would be quiet – I felt here, the school was not proactive or responsive, lacked effective reporting system of incidents – and forget to consult the most relevant people in child's behaviour and development, which are the parents of course. They had tendency to react after issues have already festered to extreme circumstances such as final exclusion'.

Another parent reflected:

'People like us (i.e. Somali parents) are facing lots of problems, which is because our Somali community consists of people (including some new arrivals) who are not familiar with the language or the education system', going on to suggest that teachers treated them with less respect as a result.

There were even expressions of the view that Somali parents were 'easy targets' because they were so often less able to pursue issues with their children's schools'. Parents clearly stated that they would rather be informed as soon as problems with their child began to emerge, and not have to wait until the situation had reached crisis point, with the threat of exclusion. They also mentioned they would like to hear positive as well as negative feedback about their child.

The need for better communication overall was regularly commented on. These were not only views, though. Some of those interviewed **felt that schools were actually recording too many details, building up logs that effectively labelled the young people in question, stereotyping** them as troublesome and/ or poor performers academically – with negative outcomes for their subsequent progress.

The section on labelling and stereotyping provides examples of the views that were expressed on this topic. Anxieties about labelling/ negative stereotyping were seen as affecting Somali boys, in particular. Some girls, however, also felt affected by these processes. As one girl explained:

'Most of the teachers didn't like me'. This was because she had a reputation for messing around. They knew too much about me personally like, what I've done in the school. They can look on the school computer because they knew too much. They thought they knew how to handle me'.

This made her feel that they had made up their minds beforehand – she would be blamed whatever, a view that led her to detach from the situation.

'I didn't really care what happened.'

This young person was excluded subsequently, for a variety of reasons, which in turn, led to change of schools, with more positive outcomes, as a result.

'This felt like a new start, a new environment, new people, teachers don't know nothing (about her previous record)*. 'I like going to school (now) knowing I'm going to do well'*.

The low expectations of staff within the school system **also** affect Somali boys One parent commented on her child being told that *'I can't believe you've managed to achieve this grade'* when he performed better than his teacher had anticipated.

Another parent spoke of the views underpinning comments: *'as a black refugee how are you able to master the English language and achieve this'* adding that *'the assumption is that as parents we're illiterate and slow,* with correspondingly *'low expectations for our children'*.

> **One parent commented on her child being told that 'I can't believe you've managed to achieve this grade' when he performed better than his teacher had anticipated.**

The **low expectations held by staff within a school system undermines pupil's confidence** and counters the very messages relayed by parents at home, that they can and are expected to succeed. A child's school years are formative and crucial to their personal, academic, physical and emotional development. At a fundamental level, **labelling** and **undermining** a child in this way can have far **reaching detrimental effects for their future.** This labelling also **erodes any trust and respect that children and their families may have built with the school institution.**

Some of those who were interviewed speculated on the possible reasons for schools' apparently increasing concerns with young people's academic performance and their behaviour more generally. **There were increasing pressures for schools to perform well** in league tables - and pressures on teachers more generally, it was suggested.

These pressures could be leading to **increasing school exclusions and managed moves just before GCSEs** – although this was a particularly difficult time for the young people concerned, with potentially very damaging effects on their future prospects.

'Schools don't want to damage their reputation by keeping average or below average pupils – they only want the best achievers'

'I don't know why you are still here; your friends have gone'. 'Don't you get it? I don't want you here. You shouldn't be here' - a teacher was reported as having said to one young person.

Another young person added that he had experienced particular changes in his school, such as tightening up processes that he thought might be due to the school's aim of improving results.

The teachers were trying to *'boost academic results in the school by like, putting in, like behavioural sanctions in place'*. This took him time to adjust, he explained, which was *'when I started getting into trouble'.*

In his view, the result was that instead of behaviour problems decreasing, the more the sanctions that were imposed *'the more behavioural logs that were coming in'; 'I can understand where they are coming from' he* continued. '*They're trying to like, put everyone straight before their GCSEs because the earlier you are ready for it, then the better results you'll probably get'.* He concluded that the situation was improving and added new intakes accepted the sanctions more readily anyway, because they didn't know any different.

Fairness/ unfairness issues also featured in the responses. Some parents felt that their child had been unfairly targeted. For example, one of the mothers explained that her son had been unfairly excluded, after an incident.

'He said he didn't do it' and she believed him. As it turned out, when she finally persuaded the school to re-examine the case, this had indeed been a mistake. But she felt that her son was being unfairly targeted – assumed guilty until proven innocent. *'I felt my son was targeted once I made a complaint ... it made the situation worse and felt like the school was against me'. Always trying to make my son feel like the aggressor'. 'He was accused constantly. His name followed him'.* Her son was subsequently excluded for another reason,

These issues emerge from other studies too. Young people can become caught up in cycles of disruptive behaviour, resulting in them becoming excluded from school altogether. Scott and Spencer's study examined the data on exclusions from state-funded schools in 2011/12 and 2013 (Scott and Spencer, 2013) showing that persistent disruptive behaviour was the most frequent cause, followed by fights with other pupils.

Whilst disruptive behaviour and fighting were issues of concern for parents and pupils alike, there was also recognition that particular forms of behaviour were really unacceptable. As one of the young people explained, he had a reputation for *'normally being a bit silly, messing around in class'*.

He was not trying to justify this behaviour, on the contrary. Others referred to the unacceptability of fighting, for example. Exclusion for fighting was seen as fair, in fact, according to a number of young people interviewed. The question was **whether or not the young person in question had actually behaved badly and whether or not there were extenuating circumstances, NOT** whether some forms of behaviour merited punishment in the first place.

Young people could become caught up in downwards spirals of negativity, feeling stereotyped and then becoming more rather than less involved in disruptive behaviours. Once out of the classroom, whether temporarily or for longer periods, their education would become affected, leading to further problems in their turn. Some parents were particularly critical of schools' failures to follow through on their own procedures, so that young people were missing out on their learning – from **being left in corridors, having been sent outside the classroom at one end of the spectrum, through to being left outside the educational system altogether for months at a time, at the extreme end of the spectrum**. There were

shortly before his GCSEs, which she felt had an extremely negative effect**. *'They ruined his life'*, in her view. Whilst she felt strongly that her son was being unfairly targeted though, she added that this did not apply to all the teachers.

Several young people expressed similar views. As one of them summarised this *'I feel I am not fairly treated'*. In his view, teachers would make assumptions of guilt without investigating what had actually happened and who had instigated the incident in question. This was a theme that emerged from a number of interviews – the view that some teachers assumed that it was the Somali young person's fault, even if there had actually been some provocation (such as a fight having been started by another pupil).

Whilst there was much evidence of **concern about targeting**, this was generally attributed to Somalis being Muslims, (particularly when it came to instances of bullying) rather than to Somalis being black. It was generally accepted that some Somali young people had acquired a reputation for disruptive behaviours.

some very serious concerns here but there were also positives upon which to build.

Making a positive difference - what are we doing right?

There *were* examples of **schools working effectively with parents and young people** to address issues **collaboratively**. These included examples where communication had improved significantly. For instance, a young person had experienced difficulties due to a health problem of which his teachers had been unaware. Following discussions, the teachers in question had become fully briefed, and the young person expressed confidence that the problem had been resolved.

There were also examples of teachers being prepared to 'go the extra mile' with struggling and/ or misbehaving pupils. Young people spoke of their appreciation of teachers who were **firm but fair**, recognising **'***some care'. O***ne mother recounted how a teacher had *'treated my child like her own',* in the way that (s)he had provided support. Another parent recounted how a teacher had sat down beside her child, when he was having problems and / or misbehaving, calming him down and encouraging him to focus on his work.

"There were also examples of teachers being prepared to 'go the extra mile' with struggling and/ or misbehaving pupils"

As another parent explained in similar vein, he appreciated the way that his son's teacher had worked with him and his son.

'She was very supportive and was the only one who comprehended that sending child out of the class would not contribute to his learning and made a decision to keep my son in class'.

The role of mentors emerged as another positive factor, with evidence of the ways in which mentors could intervene to support young people and their families. This could involve negotiations with the school, including negotiations concerning alternatives in the case of managed moves. Moreover, this could involve working directly with the young person, in some cases sitting alongside them to encourage them to focus on their studies, avoiding temptations to mess around.

As one young person explained, in his case the **mentor had supported his parent** at a meeting with the school, following an incident for which he risked exclusion. As a result, he **avoided a more serious exclusion,** and there followed a meeting to explore ways of moving forward in the future. He was clear that having a mentor in school as well as outside school was really making a difference.

'When I get in trouble I have them (the mentor) and they work with me'.

As the mother of another young person explained in a similar vein, *'the mentor listens to him rather than accuse him',* which was making a positive difference to his behaviour.

The importance of **peer groups** emerged as a very significant factor too. The focus group with young achievers provided evidence of the importance of friendship groups in which young people shared a commitment to achievement: *'Having peer groups and friends who have similar aims and taking control of our own destiny with like-minded people...'* as one young person expressed.

Being *'set in a higher group of achievers really pushed me into stepping up as my peers were not at a level where they stood still and admired what they achieved but constantly pushing themselves to higher grades'*, as another young person put it.

Young people also referred to the negative effects of being part of a disruptive set. '*I found through friends in lower sets who cared, actually cared about their results had to deal with classes being constantly disrupted'. 'I think it would be personally difficult to focus and learn with classrooms being constantly disrupted'* this young person added, concluding that once young people were placed in particular sets, it was difficult for them to move out of them.

Family support and encouragement to study was a similarly significant factor, and especially so amongst young achievers. Young people referred to the support of their parents, from very practical forms of support, to enable them to do their homework, through to more emotional forms of assistance and encouragement.

One young person explained, s/he didn't want to let their parents down, being well aware of the importance that their parents attached to educational attainments. *'I feel sorry for my mum'* as another young person expressed, explaining how his mother's support and encouragement to behave well was helping, as he wanted to make her proud of him.

Some parents are described as having been inspirational. *'My parents always push me as they want me to grasp any opportunity there is'*, although such pressure could also be described as *'overbearing at times'.*

In addition, young people spoke of the influence of siblings, several referring to the role models provided by older siblings who were going on to university.

And conversely, *'learning from siblings'* negative levels of achievements *'spurred me on to do a lot better in school and achieve higher grades'*, as another young person commented in the high achievers' focus group.

Findings that relate to wider policy issues

The pressures on schools have already been identified. Both parents and young people recognised that these pressures could impact on teachers' abilities to respond to pupils' needs.

Pressures on parents were identified included zero hours contracts/ irregular working hours and benefits cuts, making it difficult for parents to communicate with teachers and schools.

This was a continuing dilemma at the time of interview. Young people showed they were aware of these pressures. As one young person explained, when his mother got back from work, she would be too tired to check his homework rigorously.

'I'll just say "yeah" when she asks and show her old work or something'.

Housing problems are an additional pressure on families, which result in frequent moves and consequent disruptions including varying travel patterns and/ or longer journey times. As one mother explained, she had needed to move across two boroughs due to her lack of access to secure housing. Her day started at 5am every morning to in order to be able to juggle getting her children to different schools.

Overcrowding also emerged as a negative factor impacting on young people's educational achievements. Parents recognised that it was very difficult for children to study in these circumstances.

Wider social pressures have also emerged, especially since Brexit, with increasing anxieties about racism and particularly about Islamophobia, impacting on girls' confidence and ambitions for the future.

One of the mothers spoke of bullies pushing girls around and pulling off their headscarves, for instance. It was emphasised that schools should be safe places. There had however, in some parents' views, been incidents of bullying that had not been taken sufficiently seriously at the time.

These pressures also had an impact on the ways in which parents could support their children. Parents emphasised the value that they placed on their children's' education but also spoke of the difficulties of combining work and family life, difficulties that were particularly significant for single parents. In one single parent's view, it would have been desirable for mothers to stay at home for their kids as they return from school.

'But due to financial pressures of life, that is not always possible, meaning we have to commit to employment. In my case I work full-time. But recognising that such an absence from my children will have direct effect on my children in the long-term, hence I decided to reduce my work hours to part-time'.

This was however a problem as she recognised herself: Working full time had been enabling her to provide for her family.

'And when your children see you working, they actually see a role model and make them aware there is some purpose to life.'
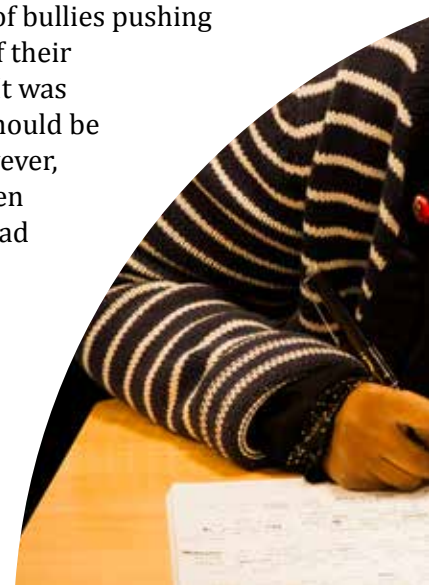
Lessons learnt – ways to ensure no child is left behind

There is evidence concerning the positive factors that were enabling young people to cope with challenges and achieve their educational potential.

Strong family and community support, including the impact of direct encouragement and the less direct influence of positive role models amongst parents, siblings and other community members.

Positive peer groups, a factor that was identified as being especially significant by the young achievers' focus group. Conversely this group also emphasised the reverse – the negative effects of getting in with a group of demotivated and/ or disruptive pupils.

Good communication and trust between schools and families, with clear - and clearly understood –procedures, consistently applied.

With positive feedback as well as feedback on problems as these problems arise, rather than at the points at which exclusions are under consideration

Teachers and mentors who are prepared to listen to pupils' concerns fairly, working with colleagues to provide support and avoiding negative stereotyping of particular pupils/ groups of pupils.

Clear and effective procedures for ensuring that young people's learning is safeguarded, even when they are out of the classroom, rather than being left in educational limbo, when excluded, whether temporarily or more permanently, or when involved in managed moves.

Schools having clear procedures for identifying and addressing bullying, including Islamophobic bullying, effectively and in timely fashions.

Conclusions: How to work in partnership and recommendations for Schools, Camden Council and Parents

The research has identified many positive **factors to build on in partnership** with Camden Council.

The Somali community is strongly committed to their children's educational success and so are many Somali young people, including those who have experienced difficulties at school. By working together, school achievement can be enhanced and school exclusions reduced over time.

The 6 key areas for cooperation are:

1
Increase and improve communication between parents and schools and between teachers and pupils

2
Encourage aspirations (including via **positive role models**)

3

Avoid negative stereotyping, intervening and providing support (including mentoring where appropriate) **at early stages**

4

Ensure that **schools follow through on procedures so that no young person slips through the educational net,** whether as a result of short term or longer-term **exclusions from the classroom**

5

Ensure that **equality issues,** including issues relating to **Islamophobic bullying, are addressed effectively and in a timely fashion**

6

Encourage and assist parents to become actively involved in schools, including roles as school governors

The following section sets out more specific suggestions for discussion that need to **build on the trust** that has already been developed. It will be of utmost importance to provide feedback to those involved in the study and to parents and community members more generally, as part of on-going processes of dialogue, **co-design of initiatives for knowledge sharing, upskilling and collaborative** development of policy and procedure.

Recommendations

## To enhance communication

Schools need to

Develop strategies to strengthen their communication with Somali parents and communities including:

- Providing clear information about school procedures before pupils enrol

- Encouraging parents to become involved in the school, from informal coffee mornings to information sharing, through to encouraging parents to become school governors

- Providing positive feedback as well as making parents aware of any problems at an early stage

- Taking account of the pressures on parents such as those related to work, which impact on their availability for meetings, and any language barriers such as the need for interpretation.

- Providing appropriate training for Governing bodies to enable them to act as effective evaluators of headteachers' decisions
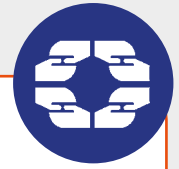
Camden Council needs

- To share examples of good communication practices amongst Camden schools

- To ensure the provision of English language courses to enable parents with limited knowledge of English to communicate with schools more effectively.

- To ensure Mentoring and coaching roles are offered as a support package for those young people in transition from year 7-9 and further, if more intervention is needed.

- To implement robust systems to give young, permanently excluded children the opportunity to return to the education system within a short period. This is particularly important in KS4, so as to get an opportunity to complete their GCSE's. (The education of pupils should not be interrupted and/or permanently damaged by exclusion. Students should be able to continue to study the same subjects at the PRU as their mainstream school), keeping disruption to a minimum.

- To share good practices between schools across the borough that continuously work hard to reduce exclusions levels, year on year. What is the different about their work?

- To look into role that Camden Council can play in tackling the rise in School exclusions across all LA Secondary schools. Working with youth organisations in assisting or preventing school exclusions.

- To support and widen community-based advocacy work around education in North, Central and South of the borough.

- To implement and circulate a Newsletter at Camden schools to promote potential training or free courses available to parents whose children attend Camden schools. i.e. dealing with low levels of bad behaviour traits, adolescence or coping mechanisms for bullying.

- To arrange counselling and psychologist services to carry out assessments, with a quick turnaround to help identify any shortfalls that young people and their families are facing.

- To arrange for Camden appeals panel to have a greater influence on solutions based outcomes rather than providing recommendations to schools.

Parents need to

- To take up opportunities to engage with schools, whilst making schools aware of any difficulties they have in doing so, such as pressures from work commitments or language barriers, and the consequent need to bring an interpreter to meetings.

- To take up opportunities to enhance their language skills in cases where there are language barriers.

- To ensure that schools are made aware of any particular issues affecting their child's education, such as health issues at the earliest opportunity.

To raise aspirations

Schools need to

- Encourage the use of positive role models, including inviting councillors and others, such as former students into the schools to encourage pupils with stories of their own successes.

Camden Council needs to

- Continue to support events such as the Annual Achievements Awards.

Parents need to

- Continue to encourage high aspirations in their children.

- Support children with their studies, including assisting them with their homework.

To avoid negative stereotyping

Schools need to

- Identify issues and develop holistic support strategies at the earliest opportunity.

- Share relevant plans with parents and include ways for parents to reinforce positive interventions

- Provide mentoring as appropriate, as well as educational support workers, home school liaison workers, sports coaches, pastoral care who are reflective of the diverse student population it seeks to serve.

Parents need to

- Share any concerns with schools at the earliest stage

- Collaborate with schools in developing strategies to address issues, encouraging their children to engage with these strategies and action plans.
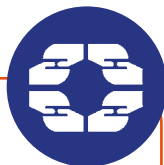
Camden Council needs to

- Share good practice amongst Camden schools, with examples of strategies that have succeeded in addressing issues such as disruptive behaviour, at an early stage, rather than resort to permanent exclusions.

- Provide incentives for schools to adopt performance improving measures including staff recruitment.

> **To ensure that no child slips through the educational net**

Schools need to

- Implement adequate procedures and ensure these are followed through and effectively monitored.

Camden Council needs to

- Ensure effective monitoring at both school and borough levels and provide intervention as necessary.

Parents need to

- Communicate with schools as well as with their own children, identifying any issues and taking these up, drawing on support if necessary, to explain their concerns to schools.

> **To ensure that equality issues, including Islamophobic bullying are effectively addressed**

Schools need to

- Ensure that policies are monitored, effective and adopted by staff and pupils.
- Respond to parental concerns in a timely fashion.

Camden Council needs to

- Ensure that equality issues are effectively monitored, both in terms of educational attainments and school exclusions as well as addressing bullying, including Islamophobic bullying.

Parents need to

- Listen to their children, identifying issues and concerns.

- Take up any issues with the school, drawing upon support, if necessary, to explain their concerns.

Working in partnership to address wider issues

The above recommendations relate to practical steps for schools and Camden Council, working with parents/guardians and the Somali community more generally.

These **steps could also benefit other communities in the borough**, including white-working class communities and other children and young people who have been identified as being hardest hit by socio economic conditions.

Whilst these recommendations could make a significant difference, there are also wider issues that require changes beyond local authority level. These include the financial pressures on local authorities and schools, as well as those arising from national education policies. Local communities could be working actively alongside Camden Council for the purpose of making representations on these issues. Similarly, Camden Council could work alongside local communities with regards to making representations on wider problems that can have a potentially detrimental effect on **all children's education**, such as the impact of the housing crisis.

Working in partnership is crucial, and may be even more relevant, in face of the forthcoming challenges envisaged by austerity measures, Universal Credit and Brexit.

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Appendices

Appendix 1a: Topics guide for the interviews with parents

1. The school: How has your child come to be in this school? Did you choose this? If so, what made you choose this particular school for your child? Are you happy with your child's progress?

2. The school's policies and procedures: Has the school explained their policies and procures? Do you feel well informed about these?

3. Communication with the school: How does the school communicate with you? (e.g. by letter, phone, email, text?) How do you feel about the ways in which the school communicates with you – and how do you communicate with them?

4. Support systems: Has your child encountered any problems at school? If so, have you been offered support of any kind? If so, what type(s) of support? Did you find this/ these helpful?

5. Other issues: Are there any other educational issues for you as a parent?

6. Future aspirations: Where would you like to see your child/ children going for the future-in terms of future education and employment?

7. Are there any other issues that are affecting your child's education? (Prompt list: e.g. Housing issues, Work related issues e.g. long hours / irregular working patterns? Benefits pressures, Language barriers, Wider social attitudes such as Islamophobia)

8. What else? Is there anything we haven't covered that you would like to add?

9. Thank you and explanations of next stages of the research

Appendix 1b. Topic guide for the interviews with the young people

1. School: How do you feel about school? Do you enjoy school? Favourite subjects?

2. Any challenges? Have there been challenges? If so what types of challenge(s)? Have you been offered any kind of support? If so, was this useful?

3. Feelings about issues and how these are handled: Generally, how do you feel you are treated at school?

4. Aspirations: What are you hoping to get from going to school? Where would you like to see yourself in the future?

5. Other interests: Apart from school what else do you do, e.g. sports, hobbies?

6. Any other issues? Are they any other issues that are affecting you? (Prompt list; e.g. Family pressures; Housing/ moving house; Wider attitudes such as prejudices about Muslims)

7. What else? Is there anything we haven't covered that you would like to add?

8. Thank you and explanations of next stages of the research

Appendix 2a - Suggested topics for the focus group discussions with parents

Welcome and Introductions (including explaining the process, focussing upon emerging findings from the interviews with parents and young people).

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Pressures on families that affect children's education e.g. parents' irregular working hours and/ or having to move because of housing issues). These issues haven't emerged very strongly so far, although there is evidence that such pressures are significant for some/ maybe a number of families. What is the group's view?

2. Pressures on schools (e.g. schools being so concerned about their results that they move on/ exclude young people who they think may not achieve). This issue has arisen. What does the group think?

3. What has been going wrong? Problems with schools and teachers more generally (e.g. lack of communication – until there is a crisis - feelings of unfairness, teachers picking on particular young people, especially Somali boys, labelling them as 'trouble' and treating them unfairly, teachers having very low expectations). These issues have emerged very strongly. What does the group think?

4. What has been going right/ making a difference? (e.g. mentors working with young people and families, particular teachers supporting young people and believing in their capacities to do well). There have been examples of these types of factors. What does the group think? What / what else makes a difference in the group's view?

5. What else makes a difference, whether positively or negatively? (e.g. wider concerns about discrimination and prejudice, such as issues with girls' headscarves, particularly since the referendum). There have been some references to such wider issues. What does the group think? Are there other issues that need to be identified?

CONCLUSION

What next and thanks to the group.

Appendix 2b. Topic suggestions for focus group discussions with young achievers

1. Introductions and explanations

2. Interviews and focus group discussions have identified a number of problems/ reasons why young Somalis do less well than they could/ become excluded including:

- Pressures from outside the home, including work pressures/ housing pressures and moves for families and wider prejudices / e.g. girls' headscarves being pulled off

- Pressures in schools, including targeting young Somalis, assuming that they are troublesome/ disrupters, not listening to their sides of the story

- Schools relating to parents' directly without giving young people the chance to explain their side of the story

- Low expectations of young Somalis

Have you experience of any of these types of problem? If so, how did you manage to deal with the problem(s)?

3. You yourself have done well at school/ college. What, if anything has made a difference? E.g.

- Family support

- Support from teachers

- Mentors

- Positive role models of other young Somali achievers?

- What else makes a difference in your view?

4. What else?

5. What next? Explanation of what next

Appendix 2c. Topics for the focus group discussions with young Somalis who have experienced issues/ problems

1. Introductions and explanations

2. Interviews and focus group discussions have identified a number of problems/ reasons why young Somalis do less well than they could/ become excluded from school.

   These issues include:

- Pressures from outside the home, including work pressures/ housing pressures and moves for families and wider prejudices / e.g. girls having their headscarves pulled off

- Pressures in schools, including targeting young Somalis, assuming that they are the troublemakers/ disruptive ones, not listening to their side of the story

- Schools communicating with parents' directly without giving young people the chance to explain their side of the story

- Low expectations of young Somalis

   Have you experienced of any of these types of problem? If so, how have they affected you?

   Have there been any other problems, in your experience?

3. So, what could be making a difference? e.g.

- Family support

- Support from teachers

- Mentors

- Positive role models of other young Somali achievers?

What else could make a difference in your view?

4. What else? e.g. different policies in schools, challenging negative stereotypes more widely?

5. What next? Explanation of what next

Appendix 3: Background information about the Somali community

The Somali diaspora has a long history in the UK. Along with Yemenis, Somali seamen in the late 19th century were among earliest immigrants to Britain during the period of the Northern Somalia British protectorate.

They were followed by post-WW2 economic migrants and refugees late 1980s and 1990s following the war in Somalia. In the 2000's, there were secondary refugee migrations from European Union nations such as Holland and Sweden to Britain. Many of these second wave refugees settled in London including Camden.

The homeland remains strongly present in everyday and imaginative lives in the diaspora. Diasporic networks circulate remittances, videos, internet and phone communications, ideas and information about social and political life. Intercity or transnational networks have stimulated entrepreneurship, savings groups, a new generation of marriages among youth, the building of mosques and Somali language media.

Somalis enjoy very strong social networks shaped by the Muslim religion and kinship. A strong self-reliance ethic has built female entrepreneurship, an emerging middle class and loyalty to home. Like many migrant communities, a vibrant ceremonial life of family and religious celebrations is rebuilding strong traditions of solidarity, visiting, gifting and cultural expressions that operate via inter-city and transnational networks. Still, maintaining cultural identity is a deep preoccupation and intergenerational tensions are prevalent in families as youth drift from their origins.

"By working together we can ensure that all our children have the tools to succeed."

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