



# Action for Inclusion in Europe City Working Groups :

## Migrant Parental Involvement in Education

### Engaging Parents to Support Newly Arrived Pupils in Birmingham

Emma Leaman  
October 2016



## Plan Summary

### Context

42% (66,000) students on roll in a Birmingham school have English as an Additional Language (EAL), and there are significant attainment gaps for this particular group of young people in Birmingham. Significant work has been undertaken since 2010 to develop the education infrastructure and meet the growing demand for school places in the City. This work has been complemented by a focus on how we will equip our young people with the skills they require to participate and engage beyond school. Parental engagement has to date not been something that has been a key priority within our education improvement journey. The *Action for Inclusion* project and action plan that we have developed throughout provides an opportunity to raise the profile of parental engagement and introduce it as a strategic focus to reduce the attainment gaps for significantly underachieving groups both in our newly arrived, EAL and white working class populations.

### Brief description of action plan

The plan aims to help newly arrived pupils by welcoming and supporting families first and foremost, equipping parents with skills and knowledge of school systems, while also overcoming their potential distance from and distrust of schools. This will be achieved by a variety of methods, including:

- 1) **Acquisition of skills through adult learning:** We aimed to design a new programme of adult learning classes with a focus on developing adult skills. This would work in parallel to helping newly arrived parents better understand the school system and processes, in order to better support their children;
- 2) **Development of a toolkit** for teachers and schools specifically helping schools to consider how best to engage parents of newly arrived families;
- 3) **Establish a partnership board** to further develop ideas and opportunities to enhance parental engagement in newly arrived families from early years through to post-16 education pathways. This would include actors including third sector partners working with refugee and newly arrived families, e.g. City of Sanctuary, Adult Education and Libraries.

At present, there is no coordinated approach to parental engagement. Individual schools develop their own programmes and there has been little opportunity to share best practice or build tools and partnerships for a system-wide approach. The *Action for Inclusion* project affords significant opportunities to develop partnership-working in a time of diminished local authority resources, by coordinating new collaborations and supporting these key partners to secure wider engagement of schools. The reach into schools has become increasingly challenging as the education landscape has become more fragmented and the partnership board approach aims to knit together a system-wide approach.

### Theory of change

The expectation behind the action plan is that by implanting adult/family learning programmes in partnership with Adult Education services, libraries and schools, this will help secure improved parental engagement and equip parents with key skills to help them help their children succeed in education. The programmes are to be designed to both increase parent's key skills in areas such as literacy, digital literacy and numeracy but use a contextual focus on the education system to deliver. This approach intends

therefore to engage parents directly in their children's learning and break down barriers between home and school by ensuring parents are less intimidated by schools.

Our work partners with the *Schools of Sanctuary* programme, a broader programme designed to help schools adopt a wider approach to supporting newly arrived families, promoting a range of cultural activities designed to enable children and families to grow a sense of belonging and again break down barriers as families engage with new and different educational requirements.

## **Objectives**

Research evidence provided at the outset of the project demonstrated unequivocally that parental engagement is a significant factor in children's educational attainment. Our priority in Birmingham is to ensure we meet the needs of the most vulnerable and close attainment gaps. In particular, by creating greater opportunities to engage parents likely to be marginalized and/or unfamiliar with the system used in their children's education, we would expect to see benefits not only for the children and families but also for the wider school community as a result of growing understanding of their families and sharing of best practice across schools.

### **Objectives for small scale change:**

The action plan aimed to achieve the following:

- Engage up to 8 schools in delivering pilot adult education programmes to assist up to twenty migrant parents with English language acquisition, digital literacy and tools to support their children at school;
- Development of a toolkit module for school leaders and class teachers specifically on parental engagement to help schools know how to engage parents of newly arrived children.

### **Objectives for large scale change and beneficiaries:**

- Direct policy and implementation of policy on parental engagement, emerging from within a school-led school improvement system;
- Wider implementation of an Adult Learning programme with newly arrived parents, delivered across all school networks to support a wider range of families;
- Have clear routes for newly-arrived parents to get support from a range of partners from early years settings through to post-16 pathways in order to support their children and improve outcomes;
- Identify wider opportunities to engage parents in adult learning in order to narrow the gap where inequalities in outcomes are most evident.

## **Timing**

During the last year, within the *Action for Inclusion* project period, a number of steps were expected to be taken to achieve progress on the small scale plans:

Dec 2015	Project group established and outline plan adopted.
Jan 2016	Pilot schools confirmed.
Feb 2016	Adult learning programme co-designed.
Mar-July 2016	Pilot adult education programmes in delivery in up to 8 schools.

Feb-Apr 2016                      Sharing best practice to increase school-based parental engagement and third-sector involvement.

After the Action for Inclusion project period, it is expected that the following steps will be taken:

Sep 2016-July 2017              Roll out of wider web of adult education programmes in schools.

Sep 2016 -                          Mechanism for sharing schools' best practice (development of a digital platform).

## Consultation

In developing the action plan, a range of actors have been involved, including:

- 1) A number of **secondary schools** have already created and are implementing programmes of support for parents. The intention has been to spread awareness of these and to build on these, where possible engaging parents as well as teachers in the design of programmes to be delivered in the pilot schools;
- 2) City of Sanctuary, a third sector partnership working with newly arrived families. In particular, the Schools of Sanctuary is a programme that operates under the umbrella of City of Sanctuary and offers schools the opportunity to gain accreditation for work to reach more vulnerable families and support newly arrived children and families through specific education-focused work;
- 3) Schools will be asked to develop routes for children to be engaged in the design and development / delivery of the parental skills programmes, particularly to promote opportunities for children to help create some of the materials and digital tools.

## Achievements and Experiences

### Achievements

Our objectives, as set out above, remain only partially achieved. As of April 2016, we have hosted three workshops to provide briefings on the initiative and provide schools the opportunity to share best practice and examples of the programmes that they have designed and delivered to engage newly arrived families.

During this initial period, we engaged with 35 different schools across the sessions, which led to unexpected levels of sharing at an early stage of the project. Following this:

- A number of schools reported finding the workshops extremely useful but did not subsequently wish to remain involved in the adult education project;
- 15 schools sent in Expressions of Interest in developing a brand new course with adult education.

However, staffing changes in adult education have delayed progress and there is a current risk that this will impact on take-up and school confidence in the programme. As a consequence, we intend to re-launch from September 2016 when staff are in place to deliver the objectives within the adult education service.

From a wider strategic viewpoint, we have now agreed a new education Delivery & Improvement Plan for 2016/17, which includes the objective to maintain or improve the performance of disadvantaged children relative to the core cities, statistical neighbours and national average, from our school-led school improvement contract with the Birmingham Education Partnership. We continue to work with our Adult Education service to promote the opportunities for schools to deliver other courses to newly arrived adults,

and are looking to streamline our adult education offer by co-locating linked services, to allow for families to access more services in one place.

More significantly, new channels of work have emerged as key priorities resulting from increased numbers of families being housed in immediate and temporary accommodation through the asylum seeker process. An increased focus on children missing out on education is leading to some new focus work on the education offer for our most vulnerable newly arrived families, including unaccompanied children seeking asylum. A further strand of vulnerability has been identified relating to families whose legal status with regard to asylum claims is undetermined. As a spin off from the work initiated within the Action for Inclusion project, there is an emerging direction to bring adult education, schools and legal support together to support vulnerable families in securing resolution to asylum claims and swift access to education for all children in the temporary accommodation.

## Impacts

The work has generated some direct and indirect impacts:

- Our workshops have provided an open dialogue between schools, and we have encouraged schools to collaborate and submit jointly developed courses where possible. Schools tell us that being made aware of other programmes and processes in other settings helps them understand and better address any issues they may be facing with parents who will not engage with them.
- Alongside this, a small handful of schools in Birmingham take the bulk of newly arrived young people and this can affect a child's learning if the school in which they are placed struggle to cope with a high in year influx of admissions. As a result of our focus, we are looking to change our current policies relating to In Year Admissions, to promote a fairer distribution of newly arrived children across a larger number of schools. Coupled with the delivery of the newly developed courses, we expect to see an increase in child attainment by also tackling these issues from a school's point of view.

Monitoring and evaluation for the impact of activity to date have been predominantly qualitative feedback from workshops. The intention is to monitor and report outcomes of adult education family learning programmes both in terms of numbers of families engaging in the courses but also by tracking of attendance and progress for the children whose parents engage.

## Measuring

Initial engagement has been strong in the first 6 months of the programme. This has been evidenced in attendance and take-up of workshops. For the reasons outlined above, timescales for implementation of the adult education projects in individual schools have been delayed due to staffing changes and challenges. However, beyond the life of the *Action for Inclusion* project, by December 2016 we are expecting:

- a minimum of 5 schools per year becoming *Schools of Sanctuary* and engaging with parents of newly arrived children as part of their work;
- At least 5 schools delivering adult education programmes reaching a minimum of 10 families each and impacting on outcomes for a total of up to 75 children;
- Inclusion of adult education programmes in the EAL Toolkit module on parental engagement, with an increase in the number of schools collaborating and sharing best practice through the EAL toolkit.

We would expect to see an increase in attendance and attainment figures for children from newly arrived families following the delivery of the combined impact of these initiatives. However we have not managed to unlock a mechanism for tracking progress of newly arrived children or the impact of parental engagement across the system, due to the difficulty of gathering information of this nature from across the schools. In particular, data on progress from point of entry is collected in different ways in different schools and there is no central resource to gather specific data from schools on impact of parental engagement. We will continue to explore how this might be done.

## Experience

The experience has allowed learning on several issues. In particular, we have found that although initial interest has been high from many schools and the appetite for schools to share best practice remains high, the reality of dedicating resources to co-designing and delivering adult education courses remains a barrier to school engagement in the work.

We have also found that the changing role of the Local Authority and the increased fragmentation of the education landscape have made it more difficult than expected to get a system-wide approach. This has been exacerbated by the timing of this initiative with the simultaneous launch of the Birmingham Education partnership and the non-alignment of programmes at critical points of their respective development.

However, more positively, there have been positive spin-offs for engagement of adult education and libraries with some individual schools. There have also been unplanned new directions resulting from engagement in the action for Inclusion project, in particular to target advice guidance and support to families in the asylum system and/or those with no legal status. While this was not part of the original plan, the strategic partnerships and insights from work in other European Cities have inspired new approaches and thinking for how we might best meet the needs of these vulnerable children and families.

## Challenges and Modifications

### Challenges

A large challenge that we confronted in setting up the project was ensuring that the initiative gets promoted to the right people in each school. We have had a repeat campaign through the weekly Citywide Schools Noticeboard, and requested teams that are regularly interacting with schools on a local level to raise awareness of the Initiative wherever possible.

Engagement of the Birmingham Education Partnership has also remained a challenge due to the clashing timing of respective key priorities. The Partnership is the new delivery partner for the city council's school improvement function and was in its mobilisation phase at the start of the *Action for Inclusion* project. As a consequence, they were unable to commit resources to the project while setting up new and powerful networks of schools to work on school improvement. The BEP is in essence a school-led partnership in which it is recognised that school leaders are best placed to bring about improvement and change across our schools' landscape. As such, the role of the Local Authority is no longer to define and deliver the priorities and programme of work. BEP is extremely keen to work on issues of EAL and parental engagement but not necessarily in the way originally envisaged in our Action for Inclusion project. However as the BEP becomes more established, we will look for an opportunity to re-engage and consider whether the adult-education family learning programme is something BEP will consider taking forwards with schools.

## **Modifications**

A combination of factors has meant that our original delivery plan has had to be modified. As well as looking at a different timescale for extension of family learning programmes, there are pressing priorities for increasing numbers of newly arrived families which are leading to a different direction of strategic work, in particular to shape the education offer for asylum-seeker families in immediate and temporary accommodation. The awareness of the need to engage parents to support their children is recognised in the development of some new provision and we are likely to reposition the support from adult education to target those families in greatest need.

## **Further Plans**

We are still in the launch stage of the adult education courses, so will look to move to co-design and roll out with schools that sign up in September 2016. On the back of the course delivery, we will then develop the materials for inclusion in the EAL toolkit, which is available to schools that subscribe to a traded service.

As a new and exciting initiative, we intend to develop links to secure a stronger education offer for children in newly arrived asylum seeker families in immediate accommodation ; as well as to focus our adult education / schools of sanctuary parental engagement work on areas where there are known to be increasing numbers of families in temporary accommodation. A further extension of this work will be to bring legal and education support together to support families whose legal status is undetermined, again prioritising a secure education offer for all children with wrap-around, integrated and holistic support to those families in recognition of their vulnerability.

## **Follow up**

A further report will follow in Autumn 2016 updating on developments. However, the achievements need to be contextualized since our work is taking place in the context of the Education White Paper which is redefining the role of Local Authorities in education. Realistically, there are likely to be continued resource challenges and implications as we focus on re-shaping our services to a significantly reduced breadth of statutory duties and responsibilities.

