

**Summary Report on Community
Cohesion Initiatives in
Oldham Primary Schools**

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1. Background

This report needs to be set in the context of Oldham and the very real issues its communities face in moving towards a more tolerant, aspiring, accomplished and cohesive community. In recent years Oldham has suffered from increasing racial incidents, unrest and in May 2001 devastating racial riots. The reasons for Oldham's difficulties are well documented in the report entitled "Building a shared future for Oldham" written in response to the riots. In brief, there is a history of segregated housing partially responsible for segregated schools and unemployment which is exacerbated by the poor condition of much of the housing stock and concomitant health problems.

The racial mix in Oldham consists of 13% of the population from minority ethnic origins, which is predominately Asian heritage but with a small minority of African Caribbean people. This percentage is estimated to increase to 19% by 2011. In addition, this section of the community in Oldham has a growing number of young people and in the under 25 age group almost one in four are from ethnic minority groups (23%). This provides education with a huge challenge in preparing young people for a peaceful, successful and prosperous life in Oldham.

However, Oldham has many strengths not least of which is in fact its growing population of young, energetic people from all heritages. There are also some 600 voluntary organisations and a wealth of goodwill and commitment from many of its inhabitants to make the town work. The recent adoption of the logo of Oldhamtogether, (the outlook is bright) is a statement of desire to see Oldham's communities prosper in harmony.

2. The Brief

This report focuses on issues raised by the Audit Commission's recent findings during their inspection of Corporate Governance in Oldham Council.

In the summary of the Audit Commission report it details improvements required:

"The council must actively promote community cohesion through the way it delivers its key services."

One of the detailed improvements is the following:

"The council should evaluate the impact of all the different initiatives which tackle issues caused by the racial segregation of schools and use this to draw up a structured programme to roll out successful actions to support and link schools."

The task was therefore to undertake such an evaluation looking specifically at the impact of three main areas of activity by schools:

1. The Schools Linking Project
2. The Unity in the Community Project
3. Initiatives in schools which encourage greater links between segregated communities which are not covered by 1 and 2

In conclusion, recommendations have been made for the development of future initiatives based on an evaluation of the above.

In the body of this report the phrase “community cohesion” will be often used. The working definition articulated below is taken from the Local Government Associations guidance on community cohesion.

Definitions: What is meant by community cohesion?

“The broad working definition is that a **cohesive community** is one where:

- there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities;
- the diversity of people’s different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued;
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and
- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.”

3. Methodology

A range of methods were used to gather information relevant to the issues raised through the brief. These included, questionnaires to all schools plus sample interviews with Headteachers, Parents, Governors, members of the community and key personnel involved in the projects. In addition background papers and documentation were read and evaluated to support the findings and recommendations.

4. Findings

4.1. Schools Linking Project

The Schools Linking Project was started in 2000 as a personal initiative through the commitment and vision of the current EMSS project leader and two head teachers of schools in vastly different locations in Oldham and has now grown into a unique development encompassing many schools across the community. The initiative seeks to provide a partial solution to the geographical and cultural divide of many of our primary schools. It involves schools joining together to share, explore and learn about, with and from one another. There are currently 38 schools involved

The amount of work undertaken by the schools involved is breathtaking and the genuine commitment, involvement, time and thought given to the choice, quality and organisation of activities is a great credit to all of those involved, not least the Project manager herself.

The aim of the Project is given as:

“To bring together young people from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds in order to break down some of the barriers which exist between different communities in Oldham.”

Some schools have used the project as a way of developing a more holistic and exciting curriculum for the children. The best practice shows schools embedding the project within their on-going personal, social and health education work. Many schools in the project recognise and embrace their responsibility for helping to prepare children to face their future in Oldham and therefore place the initiative into their curriculum framework for citizenship.

Activities have been grouped under headings to demonstrate the type of activities that have been taking place with some examples (but these are not exhaustive)

- **Class based work**
- **Trips**
- **Theatre Groups**
- **Secrets are the Same** -This is a drama project with the Oldham Theatre Workshop,
- **Joint residential**
- **Joint outdoor days** at Castleshaw undertaking such activities as orienteering .
- **Working with Artists in Residence**
- **Shared Assemblies**
- **Joint musical workshops** at the Lyceum
- **Sharing special days** – for example two schools joining together on a Health and Fitness days
- **Sharing sessions** - Music and Physical Education, book making days, bulb planting
- **Story sessions** – at one another’s schools
- **Cultural visits** – visiting mosques and churches
- **Banner making day** at the Peoples Museum
- **Community Paint Project** at Spindles centre
- **Writing** to each other, using e mail
- **Sharing “Territory”**

Many schools have embedded the work into other initiatives that the schools are involved in, for example, joint schools council and staff training. Physically moving children from school to school is a huge financial commitment and the project manager has responsibility for managing this budget. All schools say

that they could not take part in the Linking Project without financial support for transport, particularly given the geographical location of the schools.

4.1.1. Impact of the Schools Linking Project

A core purpose of this report was to evaluate the impact of the projects. Impact is very hard to quantify and define but appears to fall naturally into two distinct categories – short term impact and long term. It would be easy to make value judgements that long term impact is the more valuable. It is difficult to discern which experiences make a short or long term impact, for some children and adults one experience can stay with them for a life time, for others many short term experiences build up to produce a lasting change of attitude or behaviour. Providing evidence of attitudinal change is difficult and schools have not evaluated impact in a systematic way or with a prescribed methodology. Sometimes schools have given examples of behavioural change, but whether this change is long term and sustained would need a structured and academic piece of research to determine.

4.1.2. Impact on Children

Much of the impact has been initial, i.e. the children's first meetings with someone of a different culture. The level of knowledge and understanding amongst some of the children is very low as illustrated by a quote from one of the children at the outset of the project:

“Do pakis play football?”

However, examples of impact can be evaluated by individual stories of widening children's views and experiences. This project has enabled children to cross the geographical, emotional and cultural divide, if only for a short while. Head teachers interviewed (14) unanimously say that the project has had a very beneficial and immediate effect on the children who are participating, although the longer term impact is less certain. There is a wealth of anecdotal evidence that children have been positive in their opinions of the project during circle time and in their writing - but in terms of determining a way to judge and quantify impact this anecdotal evidence needs to be re-framed and put into a statistical basis.

4.1.3. Impact on parents and governors

This is again very hard to judge without a systematic and comprehensive survey undertaken by schools. Schools have dealt with this issue very delicately, some have kept the issue very low key and judged the way in which to involve parents, others have been able to tell parents from the beginning. One school started off very low key with parents, then those who complained were tackled one at a time. Some children did not want to go to another school and they were not forced to go, but they naturally took part in

the linking because half of their class was swapped with children from the partner school. Soon after this experience the children who were reluctant to swap themselves were happy to go to the partner school.

Several schools have had to deal with very unpleasant comments from parents. Some parents (both Asians and white) initially said they did not want their children to go on visits or events but schools have worked through this. Some schools are in their third year of the project and have built up a good degree of trust with parents and on the whole parents have been very keen to see their children foster links. This has thrown up an interesting factor, that one head commented upon which was the fact that it has highlighted for Asian parents their desire to send their children to schools with a more mixed community. This was borne out in interviews with the wider Asian community, all of whom wanted to send their children to more mixed schools. However, many said they did not know how to and would like more information from the council on how and where they could send their child to such schools. They also said they would like 'white' schools on the periphery of all Asian communities to be more proactive in encouraging Asian pupils to attend and informing about their schools.

Most Governors are supportive of the growing links. There is a wonderful example of a parent at one church school becoming a Governor at an all Asian school and vice versa. Where the linking project is well developed, training has taken place with Governors and this has been very successful. Some schools have involved their staff and Governors in joint cultural awareness training and where this has happened it has again been extremely successful and a positive learning experience for all.

4.1.4. Increasing the impact

Possible reasons for more schools not becoming involved include:

- Not enough schools to make up pairs of Asian and white
- Not knowing where to start with issues
- Fear of involving parents in a backlash
- Not accepting the issues of community cohesion as central to purpose of education
- Parochialism
- Lack of knowledge about the project

The LEA needs to have a structure for supporting, encouraging and involving more schools to join the project. Logistics are very difficult given the number of Asian schools, so there is a need to look at broader clusters and more imaginative ways of linking schools.

The Linking Project does not extend into Secondary Schools – a most exciting and appropriate challenge would be to extend this project so children could further develop their friendships.

Although there has been some very positive reporting in the national press and on national Radio about the Oldham Schools Linking Project there is a feeling in schools that the project has not been sufficiently recognised locally and has not received the publicity and high profile it deserves. This is unfortunate as the work going on is potentially transformational in terms of building relationships, improving attitudes and widening aspirations.

“The only chance our children have to play with Asian children is through this link”

4.2. Unity in the Community Project

The Unity in the Community Project started as a response to the riots in 2001 and was principally the idea of one of the EMSS project leaders (who has since left). The programme sought to combat and in a small way counteract the segregation in primary schools and sought to build on the good will that existed in the wider community by engaging with local services. At the time of conception the project asked schools to become involved in joining together in activities which would be supported by the Fire Service, Police and Oldham Athletic Football Club. The project had a large, high profile launch and enthusiasm for the project was very marked with 40 schools becoming involved.

The principles underpinning the programme are:

- Personal development through self esteem fostered through sporting activities
- Breaking down barriers through mixing children on neutral ground and helping them to work and play together

Since the launch of the project activities have included the following.

4.2.1. Year 1

- **Residential** at Bretton Hall in Yorkshire – every year 6 child in the programme had 1 ½ days to take part in sporting and art activities.
- **Sports Activities**
- **Champions challenge**
- **Art champions**
- **Poets**

4.2.2. Year 2

Due to a change in personnel and the timing of events around Ramadan and Eid, events were not re-started until January 2003 for the academic year 2002/3. It was decided that art activities in schools should transfer to the Linking Project and that the Unity Project concentrate on developing joint sporting activities. The name has also been changed to Unity rather than Unity in the Community. For the future, the project will be based around an

entirely sports oriented programme featuring 3 sports, i.e. football /netball/basketball carried out over 20 weeks

4.2.3. Evaluation

The Unity Project was a huge undertaking to get off the ground and consequently there has been no formal evaluation or in depth analysis of the programme in terms of impact. There is no management team in place as yet and the current project manager is aware of this. There is a genuine and deep desire by the sport development officers involved in Unity to promote sport as a way of mixing communities, developing self esteem and leading young people onto other avenues of personalised development. There is an enthusiasm and commitment amongst the managers who see sport as a important vehicle for change.

There have been many interesting developments as part of this programme and not the least is the training of the Escort staff, many of whom are from the Six form college. This is in itself an important development which will in time have an impact on the young people themselves, those they mix with and the building of emotionally and culturally well balanced young people in the town.

Sports Development Managers would like to see the programme extended into after school clubs and to engage pupils in a life time commitment to sport.

Using interviews and replies from questionnaires, an evaluation of the programme shows that many schools enjoyed the activities. The residential was described by many schools as 'excellent'.

"In small schools out in Saddleworth some pupils have little opportunity for involvement with other communities and cultures and the children have really enjoyed this opportunity of insight and integration with other cultures."

Anecdotal evidence from schools describe children's attitudes and opinions as enthusiastic. Children were shown role models of Asian and white people working together. The use of both black and white poets as role models was universally a success, as was the use of Champions – children loved this work.

There have been some difficulties which the project needs to address through, for example, more rigorous evaluation and feedback mechanisms. However, neither the complex and sensitive issues encountered by the project nor the problems with logistics and planning quelled most schools' response to the Unity programme. Almost all schools felt this was a very valuable and important experience for children, which needs to continue with perhaps more planning and evaluation!

4.2.4. Impact on Children

As with the Linking Project the impact of many of the activities was instant and provided many, many children with an experience that they would not normally have had. Children enjoyed the activities and they began making friendships. There needs however to be more thought given to the way in which these initial one off meetings can be planned and structured to involve children mixing purposefully as opposed to being at the same place at the same time, to ensure that racist comments are always challenged and that sustainability of the contacts and friendships thus initiated is built in.

For example, meeting and seeing black and white poets is an excellent experience challenging stereotypes as well as providing a rich educational learning experience. Sports activities develop self esteem and personal development and mixed residentials can develop friendships across the cultures. However, the impact of these rather unconnected activities is rather random and can be haphazard. Impact will be easier to evidence when the project concentrates on sporting activities, provided the children get enough opportunity to mix as well as progress their own individual self awareness and personal development. As a strategy for development the Unity programme is excellent, but it needs to be seen in a wider context and as part of a cohesive strategy to develop our young people individually and as groups.

4.2.5. Impact on Parents

In terms of impact on parents and the wider community, this is more limited. Some parents raised issues with schools about the residential and had concerns about their children going, but these were all handled with sensitivity and with determination by the Head teachers involved.

4.2.6. Future Developments

Some of the activities the Unity programme are held on what is considered to be 'neutral territory' and this has an advantage in many ways over the Linking Project. However Unity can be seen as somewhat superficial in contrast to the Linking Project which appears to work at children interacting at a deeper level. This would however be a misinterpretation and would be undervaluing the power that sporting activities, team spirit etc. can have in children's lives. Unity's new management is very aware of the issues and sensitive to the role of Unity in developing community cohesion. More evaluation, closer liaison with schools and perhaps the use of user groups for feedback would further develop the impact of this initiative.

Unity provides a model of using what we already have in Oldham, particularly in accessing the good will in schools as well as in the wider community. Unity has now limited its frame of reference and will be more concerned with school sport but the model was effective in revealing the support and good will that abounds. Schools themselves have resources that many are happy to share,

but there is also a need to utilise civic resources more effectively such as the music centre and art gallery.

5. Audit of Initiatives in Schools

5.1. Evidence Base – Questionnaires and Sample Visits

There are 97 Primary schools in Oldham

40 are involved in the Unity programme
38 are involved in the Linking project
23 are involved in both
42 schools are not involved in either

The questionnaires sought to ascertain schools' views of the impact of initiatives on community cohesion as well as gaining information as to the range of activities being undertaken.

A total of 30 questionnaires were returned (31%) of which 4 replies were from schools not in either of the projects but gave details of community cohesion initiatives currently being undertaken in the schools concerned.

Questionnaires were also sent out to all secondary schools (15) but only two schools (one of which was Breeze Hill) replied.

A total of 45 interviews were undertaken, 14 with Head teachers.

Having excluded Linking and Unity schools from the EMSS audit there are a further 3 schools involved in the African Caribbean project and one further school involved in the Heartstone project. In addition visits were made to a further three schools who were involved in activities but had not returned the questionnaire.

The evidence now seems that out of 97 schools 66 are involved in community cohesion activities that are child centred.

5.2. Activities promoting Community Cohesion

Oldham should be proud of the wealth of activities that are being undertaken either under the auspices of EMSS, LEA funded activities, Schools own budgets or through any means that the schools can access. The wealth and range of work is breathtaking.

The full report lists the range of activities that the audit revealed, but in summary they are :

5.2.1. Ethnic Minorities Support Service

In addition to its involvement in the Linking Project and Unity, the EMSS supports and offers schools a range of activities and training opportunities. Schools use these training and enrichment activities to support and empower staff to work with issues of race, culture and community cohesion. The evaluations from these training sessions are extremely positive.

Cultural and Race Awareness training
Training the Trainers
African Caribbean Education Project
Oldham/Bangladesh School Linking Project
Curriculum Development Materials

5.2.2. Oldham Ahead

Oldham Ahead includes Investment in Excellence training. Approximately 80 staff in primary schools have already experienced this powerful training which promotes self realisation, self development and insightful learning. It empowers individuals to live a more constructive, fulfilled life by strengthening their self image.

Investment in Excellence could be used as a vehicle to deliver training to support segregated communities coming together. The opportunities for using this programme are endless. The training could be used with parents separately or together with staff from linked schools. As well as adult programmes there are series of materials specifically for parents, for communities and for children.

5.2.3. Examples of the wealth and range of activities identified in the audit:

Heartstone Odyssey Project
Pupil Parliament
Children's Fund Action Social Research – The University of Huddersfield
Excellence in Cities – Small action zone based at Breeze Hill Secondary School - BREAZONE
GW Theatre – Moving up
Beacon initiatives
School links with communities in the wider world
Visitors to schools
Networked Communities
Schools who actively build community cohesion through work with the community
Family Literacy projects
“ Women at Alt “ the power and strength of women from different communities mixing together
“It's a man thing” project – empowering men and boys

5.2.4. Impact

An analysis of impact must be seen as crucial to the projects that are being undertaken throughout the authority. There needs to be an understanding that having an effective and discernable impact is the reason d'être of the projects. Schools need to be supported in interpreting and interrogating ways in which they can try to analyse impact – where projects have funding this must be a quid pro quo for funding – part of the contract of becoming involved in the project. The evaluation of impact should not be bureaucratic, but a sensitive and academic evaluation which would support on going work. There must be a clear separation of evaluating initial impact and enjoyment and a clear understanding that the analysis centres on attitudinal change.

6. Recommendations

This is a edited version of the recommendations which can be read in their entirety in the full report.

6.1. The Linking Project:

- The Linking project should continue to be funded at an appropriate level
- The Linking project should have a full time manager and administrative support
- A programme for involving all schools, possibly looking at broader links, should be devised
- Proactive action should be taken to encourage all schools to join the project
- A development pack should be designed on CD and hard copy detailing the types of activities that have been successful in various schools
- Schools should make a contract to undertake some small scale survey of impact on the children
- The project should be extended to include secondary schools
The importance of working with the neighbouring community cannot be forgotten when looking at bringing different types of schools together. If our collective goal is about helping communities to live side by side, then we need to work with neighbouring schools, as well as trying to widen understanding by working with schools from different areas of Oldham

6.2. Philosophical Enquiry

- Philosophical enquiry should be used more widely as a vehicle for developing cognitive skills in relation to racism and intolerance

6.3. Unity Project

- A formal rigorous evaluation system should be put into place

- A permanent Community Development Officer should be appointed to work with Unity
- Long term funding should be secured
- The project should be extended to involve all Primary schools
- Negotiation with the linking project should be planned to avoid duplication of effort
- Focus groups of schools/teacher or heads to support planning issues should be established
- Clearer lines of accountability and feedback mechanisms should be established, for example, schools are unsure of who in the authority liaises with the Unity project on their collective behalf
- The project should be extended to work with Secondary schools

6.4. Using the resources we have in Oldham

- **Music Service** and **Oldham Art Galley** have already been involved in some projects and could become major players in facilitating and supporting community cohesion initiatives. Their contribution should be continued and expanded.
- Schools' resources should be utilised more effectively. Some schools felt that our own resources in Oldham schools are under used and one made a generous offer to share the schools surrounding sports field and nature reserve, but felt that a coordinator would be needed to organise the community initiative - "we are more than happy to share our natural resources but have not got the time to organise this "
- The use of community resources should be explored. "Why are we not utilising cricket as a sport, Asian children are wonderful at cricket - local cricket teams could get involved – Werneth are excellent! "

6.5. Oldham Ahead should be used as a overarching strategy for developing greater emotional intelligence and sensitivity towards issues throughout the communities, involving parents, staff, governors and children.

6.6. A database should be established of schools and people in schools who would help other schools, for example, volunteers to take assemblies, put up displays and talk about cultural issues This is not tokenism, but a recognition that there is a nervousness of where and how to start in some schools. There is a rich cultural heritage in Oldham and great expertise in many teachers and support workers in schools.

6.7. Publicity

- A booklet of what is already happening in schools should be produced
- A permanent exhibition in the art gallery should be established to celebrate work in schools on community cohesion project
- Oldham must celebrate the good work, for example activities like the Heartstone project should be supported and celebrated

- A regular newsletter should be produced to share what is going on in schools

6.8. Admission to schools

- Existing discussion with schools who are on the periphery of the Asian areas should be built upon to explore ways in which they could encourage more Asian communities to join their school and how they could prepare their staff and parents for this greater mixing and its potential ramifications, e.g. white flight.

6.9. Marketing and visibility

- The combining of initiatives under one heading should be explored, for example Unity in the Community, Unity, Oldham Ahead and Oldham Together could be assigned a single brand image to badge everything as one overarching initiative.

6.10. Plethora of initiatives

- There is an inherent difficulty in having so many separate activities going on. Children are meeting different children at different times which has a role, and can be exciting for children, but does not meet the need for developing friendships and learning about individuals. A written document should be prepared collating initiatives, with a short summary, contact, type of initiative, funding source to support schools in organising, planning and keeping track of initiatives. This would also clarify the confusion about the nature of the Children's fund and its role in funding and supporting activities.

6.11. Development of IT

- Strategies should be developed to support the linking of schools, CD ROMs, web cameras, videos of communities, case histories on web sites etc.

6.12. Citizenship

- The issue of citizenship should have a higher profile for all schools. As an educational community we should be looking at building children's self esteem, social and moral responsibility. Citizenship is not just an aspect of the curriculum but a moral imperative which Oldham as an educational community needs to debate. It is not just about work in Primary schools, the debate needs to involve Secondary schools and colleges at a strategic level to analyse what the collective educational community means by citizenship, particularly in the context of Oldham. There needs to be a more coherent, consistent and cumulative approach to building young citizens of the future.

6.13. Community Cohesion

- A greater understanding of what a cohesive community looks like and how schools can make a contribution to that ideal should be shared with schools.

6.14. Buildings

- The Unity project had the aim of having a central meeting place for the young people of the town on neutral ground - The Roundhouse – this would be wonderful if it could be funded. Many schools spoke of the need to meet initially on neutral territory. 'Territory and no go areas' are a symbol of the depth of the challenge Oldham faces in bringing communities together. In the context of the segregated communities of Oldham this would be a symbol not only of the meeting of people but of minds and would represent the will to move towards a more integrated society. The provision of such a central meeting place should be funded.

6.15. Working with Colleges

- The Sixth form college and Oldham College were keen to become involved in issues of community cohesion in schools. There was a feeling that they had been under used, particularly by Secondary schools, in terms of supporting and modelling initiatives of community cohesion. Ways of effectively utilising the resources of these establishments by primary and secondary schools should be explored.

6.16. Using models of good practice

- There is a wealth of good practice in Oldham much of which could be replicated and shared.

6.17. Academic Research

- A piece of academic high profile research should be commissioned to undertake a long term thorough and rigorous investigation of attitudinal change amongst the pupils in our schools, particularly in relation to the impact of the experiences many are currently having through projects in the authority.

7. Conclusion

There needs to be a greater commitment from all schools to create a more cohesive community. There is no doubt from the evidence provided by schools that there has been an impact on children, staff and to some extent parents involved in the projects detailed in this report. Many children have had often valuable but essentially one off experiences interacting with other children. Some children, particularly in the Linking Project, have had the opportunity to start to develop closer friendships. However, the lack of continuity as they move into Secondary schools diminishes the personal and long term impact of these friendships.

Children from all heritages need to have their experiences structured and re-framed in order to question underlining assumptions, stereotypical thinking and racism. This is not to undervalue the experiences of the children so far, which needs to be to be seen as a start and as a model to develop. There needs to be a more pedagogical and rigorous investigation of the children's values, beliefs and attitudes in order to assess the long term impact of the experiences to which they are exposed. This awareness of and attention to attitudes and beliefs need to be developed further as children move onto Secondary school.

There needs to be an understanding at transition from primary to secondary of ways in which children's views, beliefs and attitudes have been developed, questioned and challenged, so that Secondary schools can build on this cognitive attitudinal development.

As many young people move on to the Sixth Form College or Oldham College, they need to continue to be involved in sharing this development of attitude, beliefs and moral responsibility. Whether the mechanism by which this is to be achieved is a longitudinal attitudinal development programme for our children into which we bring the projects that already exist, (rather like a washing line on which we hang the projects) or whether an existing structure like Investment in Excellence is used to under pin the work, is a choice to be made.

The amazing quality of work going on in Oldham must be evidenced by proof of impact on its citizens, young and old. The vision displayed by Head teachers, teachers, project leaders, EMSS and the wider educational community in developing projects like Unity and the Linking Project should not be underestimated in the work that is going on in Oldham. Although individual projects are absolutely worthwhile and exciting, there is a lack of coherent structure. However, one would not want them to stop or lose their identify. They must be seen, acknowledged and evaluated as part of a coherent framework and articulation of purpose towards building a cohesive community. This articulation of purpose needs to be embraced by the whole of Oldham's educational community in order to face the enormous challenge of building a brighter future for the young people of the town.