



## **NRT ENGLAND 2019**

### **Report**

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## Context

England did not participate in the 1<sup>st</sup> NRT round (2017-18: Setting the scene workshop). For this reason, the 'Setting the scene' stage was incorporated in the preparation activities of the 2018-19 workshop. Specific topics were identified as priority policy areas both through a review of the findings from recent research carried out in these areas and through consultation with a number of policy makers and with practitioners who work with migrant and refugee children. Through this process we identified the following three topics as priority areas for discussion at the English NRT:

- How to effectively engage the parents of migrant and refugee children.
- How to ensure teachers are adequately prepared to meet the challenges of successful integrating migrant and refugee children into the classroom.
- The impact of mental health issues on the ability of migrant or refugee children to learn effectively.

Together with the invitations to the NRT, participants were asked to confirm the significance of the above or/and to suggest other topics that might be considered key priority areas. All participants confirmed their agreement on the significance of the issues in the list either by email or during the event. No other areas were put forward for discussion.

- The challenges of engaging parents in migrant and refugee children's education was raised as an issue in the ALFIRK: Erasmus+ project which sought to address barriers relating to increased parental empowerment in the education processes. Our findings showed the significance of the role of the school not only for the educational inclusion of migrant/refugee students but for the social inclusion of parents and families. The project highlighted the significance of parents' engagement in the school life and made suggestions to schools for the development of initiatives and policies that support parental involvement.
- The PERAE Research project, funded by the MERCATOR foundation, explored refugee students' experience of educational inclusion in several EU countries and highlighted the complexity of achieving inclusive education for this group. Two key components were found to be the role of the migrant students' parents and family in supporting them in their education journey and the preparedness of teachers. Examination of teacher training programmes (Initial and CPD) showed that trainee teachers are taught very little about the needs of these groups of students beyond the schools' statutory duty to ensure their inclusion.
- Finally, PERAE, as well as other projects conducted by other research teams have shown the impact of the experiences of migrant and refugee students on their mental health and wellbeing. In fact, mental health has drawn a lot of attention in England in recent years both in general society and in the education sector specifically and has been raised as a particular concern by several local organizations. Indeed, one of the attendees came from an organization that specialises in offering child and family therapy for refugee children at school. Many schools are looking at ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of their school community including teachers and students, aiming to reduce student stress and anxiety and in so doing improve student outcomes and results.



Whilst none of these areas are necessarily on the national policy agenda, they are felt by those working with refugee and asylum-seeking students in the sector to be areas that urgently need addressing at the policy level.

## *National Round Table*

The event took place on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2019 at the Cloth Court, Quebec Street, Leeds, between 9:30 am and 4:30 pm.

The event was entitled: *Ensuring the inclusion of migrant and refugee children in the education system: defining key issues.*

There were 19 participants; the majority of whom (16) were women. The participants came from a number of organisations, mostly local, representing practitioners and migrant organisations such as:

- Leeds City Council
- Local schools
- A local nursery
- A member of Leeds NASWUWT (The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers or as it is more commonly known as The Teachers Union)
- Local grass-route refugee and migrant organisations involved in education such as the children's society, Bright Kite and Solace.

At the event, the attendees discussed three key issues facing the inclusion of migrant and refugee children in relation to the English education system as outlined above.

The day was divided into two parts. The morning was dedicated to discussing the three key issues. The afternoon explored what strategies might be used to address the challenges identified in the morning.

Following introductions, the facilitator also gave an overview presentation of the current context in the sector and shared some results of projects he had been involved with that had investigated parental involvement in migrant education.

For the discussions, participants were divided into three groups. Each group discussed one topic for 30 minutes before moving onto discussing the next. A spokesperson from each group then fed back key points to all attendees (see attached photos for discussion summaries).

Attendees were also given the opportunity to share the work of their organisation with others during the day.

## *Inputs and debate points*

### **Main points from the discussion on how to effectively engaging parents of migrant and refugee children:**

- We need to make schools less institutional – have more fun activities. Parental engagement is dependent upon the articulation of the school as a community through social events, food, music, drama etc.
- It should be made easier for community groups to use the school premises. Schools now charge for using the premises which makes it more difficult to use schools as a community hub.
- Parental engagement is harder in secondary than primary schools. In primary schools, parental engagement is facilitated by the friendliness, approachability, and relaxed atmosphere and by the fact that the class teacher is the main point of contact for parents. The daily contact between teachers and support staff was also identified as a facilitating factor as it allows issues related to parents' views and family issues to be communicated. In secondary school, interaction is more formal and de-personalised.



- School staff need to be aware of cultural awareness and difference sensitivities. They need to be culturally competent in a way that reflects that profile and needs of the community in which the school is situated.
- Volunteerism and employing parents as school staff has been identified as a key facilitating factor. Schools which employ parents as Teaching Assistants and particularly migrant parents as bilingual teaching assistants report positive impact on parental engagement. Good schools will engage all parents from a range of backgrounds.
- There are some good examples such as buddy systems, coffee mornings, matching new families, ESOL for parents and teachers clued-in to where they can access help. Some have regular meetings between parents and teachers. There were good pockets of practice reported but not a lot of sharing.
- Sometimes parents do not engage in school but that does not mean they are not engaged or supportive at home of their child's education. There can be different cultural interpretations of 'the language of education', i.e. dad not engaging because the mother was present and dealing with the child's educational need. There may also be gender issues or cultural roles over mother attending meetings or not. There can sometimes be resistance, especially by working-class parents, to engaging in schools. Schools need to show understanding of the circumstances.
- A safe space is needed for these children and school is often seen as that safe place. Some parents might find school setting intimidating, needing extra support. Fences, CCTV etc are becoming more common, schools are more like prisons and they are not very welcoming or helping.
- Parents may require information and support in understanding the new educational system which is alien to them.

The following questions and issues were raised during the discussions:

- Does the level of parental engagement have an impact on pupil learning?
- Are we taking a 'missionary' approach or are we supporting parents in the ways they need to be supported?

**Main points from the discussion on how to ensure teachers are adequately prepared to meet the challenges of successful integrating migrant and refugee children into the classroom.**

- These pupils could be a resource for teachers to use so others can understand the issues they are facing and the context they have come from. Parents can also be a resource – especially if they are trained and skilled.
- Unconscious bias training needed for all teaching staff.
- Changes in teacher education to a shift to a child-focused need-led model.
- The pressures on schools and teachers around targets, funding and time means there is no space for teachers to be creative and empowering. The teaching role is so overwhelming now – they are more than just teachers.
- New the Bell Foundation's EAL Assessment Framework helps to track progress but it is a lot for one teacher to do. But at the same time, clear monitoring of the students is needed.



- Attendees were surprised there is no support mechanisms for the teachers to 'off-load' what they are dealing with.
- Teachers need to be trained in EAL.
- Innovation needed- who is creating the curriculum, how diverse are the decision maker teams?

**Main points discussed around the impact of mental health issues on the ability of migrant or refugee children to learn effectively:**

- These students do not only have to progress academically, but they need to adjust to a different cultural setting and have to learn new cultural norms. All these have an impact on their learning. Being aware of the cultural issues, the context in which the child has come from is important.
- Some of these students face the pressure of separation, an uncertainty for the future and guilt for those left behind.
- There is the stigma or taboo of mental health in some cultures. It is not long since it has been acceptable to talk about it here.
- Some children are suffering from post-traumatic stress (PTS). Families do not always understand who to turn to for help. One of our NRT participants, a senior person in the NHS mentioned that not even GPs are always equipped to deal with PTS. That the army is but not the NHS, so attendees asked: 'how less equipped are teachers?'
- There is an initial amount of money for Syrian refugees available, but it often disappears into the pot if not claimed from Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). CCG boundaries do not coincide with those of the Local Authority (LAs).
- There needs to be a sharing of good practice – i.e. GPs specialising in PTS and other health issues. There needs to be a single point of contact - supporting schools to get assistance.

Language and the concepts around mental health can be problematic. Teachers need to know how to use clear language on the symptom. I.e. state that a child is unable to concentrate and how that translates to the impact of the child and their ability to learn on a day-to-day basis.

### *Conclusions and way forward*

Attendees agreed that all three areas need to be looked at by policy-makers on both a national and regional / local level as a matter of urgency and that teachers were not in a position to tackle these issues alone.

The following suggestions were made:

- There needs to be an ongoing project to help parents know what is going on in schools to encourage them to engage.
- Multi-agency services could be run via or out of schools so that parents know what help is on offer.



- Voluntary opportunities - schools could be more proactive in recruiting parents as classroom assistants, onto the governing body and into other aspects of school life. They should be more pro-active in utilising parents their skills and making them feel like they belong to the school community.
- Explore the potential for linking oversea university students and teachers with schools to draw on resources.
- Sharing of good practices on parental engagement and addressing mental health issues.

Suggested actions / follow-up activities from the meeting included:

- Building a network of those involved with refugee and migrant children.
- Further opportunities to share good practice.
- Develop relationships between schools and grass-route organisations.
- Improving communication especially around services that are available to support schools.
- Better signposting for schools of where they can help for families and children.
- Changes to teacher training programmes to ensure teachers have an awareness of the issues this group face and how their needs differ to other vulnerable groups.
- Engaging more schools, parents and children in the discussions.

One concrete suggestion from the attendees was to map the local provision and expertise in Leeds for this group of students and set up a database (or similar) so that people know who to contact within the group when they face particular issues. If unable to help, someone at the meeting may know who can. This would make life easier for everyone.

### *Follow up of the NRT*

Feedback from the meeting has been very positive with many stating how valuable the day was and that it provided a great opportunity to connect, and in some cases re-connect, with others working in the sector.

All participants commented on the research updates on this area and the dissemination of the projects that Leeds Beckett team has been participated or led. Following the presentations, participants had the opportunity to discuss and explore the implications of the research on teachers' practice and schools' policies.

The facilitators and participants begun mapping the work of the organizations present. It is hoped that one of the attendees will volunteer to take on responsibility for keeping the resulting database up to date.

The group agreed that one useful action would be the restart of the '[Schools of Sanctuary](#)' initiative in Leeds which guides schools in developing inclusive practices targeting specifically migrant and refugee and accredits schools with School of Sanctuary status. The initiative has been inactive due to lack of funding and after the resignation of the main officer who was working voluntarily.



## *Continuity with the NRT 2018*

UK did not participate in the 1<sup>st</sup> NRT round (2017-18: Setting the scene workshop). For this reason, the 'Setting the scene' stage was incorporated in the preparation activities of the 2018-19 workshop. Specific topics were identified as priority policy areas both through a review of the findings from recent research carried out in these areas and through consultation with a number of policy makers and with practitioners who work with migrant and refugee children. Together with the invitations to the NRT, participants were then asked to confirm the significance of the identified topics or/and to suggest other topics that might be considered key priority areas. All participants confirmed their agreement on the significance of the issues identified by the UK team either by email or during the event. No other areas were put forward for discussion.

## *Challenges*

The main challenge was finding the right people to attend the event and fixing a date that everyone could make. This is particularly difficult when involving schools as they have so many calls on their time and it can be extremely difficult for teachers to get released from the classroom.

Getting policy makers at the national level was also challenging as these areas do not tend to attract national policymakers but rather, they are decided at local level.

There was no representation from migrant and refugee parents at the meeting. Whilst one was invited and agreed to attend, they did not turn up on the day. This is a very difficult group to reach but one that is important to consult with. Ideally, we would have liked to include migrant and refugee children, or adults who came to the UK as a migrant or refugee child to elicit their views on education, but this is also a very difficult group to engage.



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### **Participants**

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Name	Organisation/ institution	Position in organisation/ institution
<b>POLICY MAKERS</b>		
Sadiya Salim	Leeds City Council	Local Authority Officer at Child-Friendly Leeds
Moira Burke	Leeds City Council	Local Authority Officer on resettlement
Katherine Selkirk	Leeds City Council	Senior Educations Psychologist, Learning inclusion council
Louise Sidibe	Leeds City Council	Senior Social Worker
Jennifer Gavin-Allen	Migration Yorkshire	Integration and Partnerships Officer
Jhardine Farrell	Leeds City Council	Learning Improvement officer
<b>TEACHERS, TEACHER-TRAINERS, SCHOOL-LEADERS OR OTHER SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES</b>		
Anna Mason	Lawnswood School	EAL Coordinator
Fred Grindrod	NASUWT – Teachers’ Union	Principal Official (Campaigns, Policy and Communications)
Sally Kincaid	National Education Union	Activist
Catherine Allott	Harehills Primary School	
<b>OTHER RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS</b>		
Anne Burghraef	Solace Surviving Exile and Persecution	Clinical Manager
Nola Ellen	Bright Kite	Co-founder
Steven Johnston	Leeds Stand Up to Racism	
Olivier Nkuzimana	The Children’s Society	Key worker
Paula Boston	Solace Surviving Exile and Persecution	Retired - Clinical Supervisor
Clare Brown		Local nursery manager
Caroline Bligh	Leeds Beckett University	Head of Subject for Education, Childhood and Early Years
Kate Graham	Solace Surviving Exile and Persecution	Psychotherapist