



English

Beyond the school gates: report summary

Report published May 2008

'*Beyond the school gates*' presents the findings from research undertaken as part of the *Inclusive Secondary Schools Project* which began in 2005, was delivered by the Refugee Council and funded by the KPMG Foundation. The overall aim of the project was to research and pilot new ways of working that link schools with refugee and asylum seeking young people, their parents and carers and Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs). The report discusses the findings of the research phase which explored the needs and experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in relation to secondary schooling in England. The *Inclusive Secondary Schools Project* also set up pilot partnerships between schools and refugee community/supporting organisations, with a view to addressing factors that impact on parental/carer involvement and developing good practice. The findings from both the research and development phases form the basis of the resource pack for schools and refugee community/supporting organisations for increasing refugee community involvement in the education of refugee and asylum seeking young people.

The research discussed in the report consisted of 70 in-depth interviews, and questionnaire surveys with RCOs, secondary schools and local authorities, to:

- examine the experiences and needs of these groups
- identify key barriers to inclusion, and
- identify examples of practice aimed at overcoming these barriers.

The policy and legislative context, as well as the research design, are discussed in detail in chapters two and three. Chapter four explores young peoples' and parents'/carers' experiences of education at the secondary level. Chapter five examines the barriers to access and achievement in education, while chapter six highlights practice that helps refugee communities overcome these barriers. The report ends with recommendations that have been developed to assist stakeholders in better meeting the needs of refugee communities.

Experience and engagement

Young people in this research identified high levels of parent/carer involvement, which varied considerably, for example from one-off meetings to frequent encounters. Although proficiency in English could be a barrier, parents continued to try to engage despite this hurdle, and young people generally felt very positively about the support that they received from parents/carers.

Parents/carers had general levels of satisfaction with schools. Levels of involvement were high, particularly where supported by good communication with the school and supportive and approachable staff. Some parents/carers suggested ways in which engagement could be improved, such as through better communication and feedback from schools.

Schools identified effective engagement as an important factor in the overall well-being and achievement of young people, as well as empowering parents/carers to participate in their children's education. However some schools identified difficulties in engaging with some parents/carers, and noted the importance of a welcoming environment and inductions.

RCOs in the study provided a range of education-related services, developed as a response to needs which were presented to them, including concerns about pupil underachievement, and the need for support with schoolwork and behavioural problems. RCOs also identified the importance of raising achievement levels, initiatives to promote young people's heritage and language, and assisting parents/carers to integrate through teaching English. RCOs particularly emphasised the need to support parents/carers, since in some cases it appeared to be harder for them to integrate than their children.

Barriers to inclusion

The research identified a number of key barriers which can prevent effective inclusion of refugee and asylum seeking young people and parents/carers in secondary education.

- Respondents had a range of **significant difficulties in accessing school places**, including excessive delays (of up to seven months) in waiting for places. Support provided from a wide range of sources did not prevent these delays for many respondents.
- **Bullying and racism** were raised as key concerns by young people, and RCOs. Young people reported being reluctant to reveal that they were refugees or asylum seekers, or to talk about their past for fear of further stigmatisation. RCOs identified this as an issue that they had to deal with frequently.
- **Families reported financial barriers to inclusion** such as a lack of financial support for extra-curricular activities, and difficulties providing school books, uniforms and additional school related materials. This had a negative impact on the abilities of the young people to integrate in their schools.
- **RCOs also reported a lack of resources** leading to difficulties in securing funding for education related services, and in finding free or cheap premises to deliver services. Funding to aid inclusion was often short term, and therefore where activities existed, this limited their impact.
- RCOs and schools both experienced **resource barriers to providing effective training** to staff and teachers, limiting their abilities to provide tailored advice or to raise awareness with teachers.
- A lack of English language skills was a major barrier to effective engagement with parents/carers in the education process. Schools reported **difficulties in communicating students' progress**, particularly when relying on the **young people as interpreters**.
- **The UK asylum system** itself creates a number of barriers, including the uncertainty experienced by asylum seekers who are already in schools, but fear being removed. The reliance on dispersal and temporary accommodation means that **children are forced to relocate repeatedly to new schools** which can have a profoundly negative impact on their ability to socialise, keep friendships and receive support from communities.
- **Experiences of trauma and flight** can have a profound impact on the behaviour of children, particularly in their relations with teachers and peers.
- Young people and parents/carers can experience **a lack of familiarity with the schooling system**, and often find schools intimidating and confusing.

- Despite the fact that RCOs can be well placed to help improve schools' performance, their lack of access to schools, as well as schools' inability to identify and contact RCOs, can create a **lack of partnership working** to tackle these problems.

Meeting the needs of refugees and asylum seekers

The project identified a range of practices to respond to the barriers described above. These practices included:

- Obtaining extended school status to provide activities beyond the school day in order to help refugee parents/carers to play a bigger role in the school and wider community, as well as engaging young people.
- Some RCOs successfully generated funds to deliver education related activities.
- Some schools employed home school and community link workers who provided important links between communities and schools. Some schools used informal community advocates for this role.
- Schools and RCOs reported using peer mentors to assist with learning, inductions and general support.
- A small number of schools had developed good relations with specialist services and organisations to provide psycho-social support to young people who had been traumatised.
- Language support was seen as crucial, and was usually provided through mainstream provision. However, a number of other methods were identified such as Saturday schools run by schools and RCOs.
- Some schools reported translating materials for parents/carers and providing interpreters.
- Many schools provided tailored inductions for young people and parents/carers, which usually consisted of information on the admissions process, the curriculum and opportunities to engage with the school. Some schools created translated booklets tailored to the needs of young refugees.
- RCOs also provided information to parents/carers on the English schooling system, including one-to-one advice and courses on how to help their children in schooling.
- Some schools created on-going engagement methods such as coffee mornings and outreach sessions for refugee community groups.
- Examples were given of partnership work that secondary schools and RCOs engaged in to improve the educational experiences of refugee and asylum seeking young people, and their parents and carers.

Conclusions and recommendations

The report concludes with recommendations to assist stakeholders in better meeting the needs of refugee communities. These stakeholders include secondary schools, local authorities, RCOs, refugee supporting organisations and government departments.

The full research report, survey findings and a resource pack to help schools and RCOs meet the needs of refugee children produced as part of the *Inclusive Secondary Schools Project*, can be found at: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/inclusiveschools