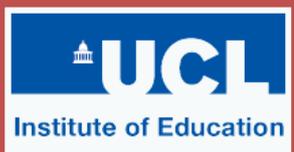


# Friendship and Diversity

Children's and Adults' Friendships Across  
Social Class and Ethnic Difference





# Children's and Adults' Friendships Across Social Class and Ethnic Difference

## Project report – July 2015

Carol Vincent (UCL Institute of Education)

Sarah Neal (University of Surrey)

Humera Iqbal (UCL Institute of Education)



## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the advisory group: Sharon Gewirtz, Gail Lewis, Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Ros George, Jess Healy, Tefera Tibebe, Daanish Saeed, and Paula Olurin for all their input and useful ideas.

We are grateful for the financial support of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (project grant ES/K002384/1)

Our thanks also go to all the parents, pupils and school staff with whom we spoke in the three schools. They generously shared details of their lives and thoughts with us, and we are very grateful for their participation in this project.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>p.5</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>p.5</b>
<b>Project findings</b>	<b>p.9</b>
• <b>A word on theory</b>	<b>p.9</b>
• <b>Methods</b>	
- <b>The schools and the surrounding areas</b>	<b>p.10</b>
• <b>Children’s friendships</b>	<b>p.12</b>
- <b>Friendship configurations in the classrooms</b>	<b>p.12</b>
- <b>Encounter and friendship</b>	<b>p.16</b>
• <b>Adults’ Friendships</b>	<b>p.19</b>
- <b>Forms of friendship</b>	<b>p.19</b>
- <b>Adults’ views and practices on diversity</b>	<b>p. 20</b>
- <b>Social capital</b>	<b>p.23</b>
• <b>Parental oversight of children’s friendships</b>	<b>p.24</b>
• <b>School policy and practices to support friendships</b>	<b>p.25</b>
• <b>Locality and place</b>	<b>p.27</b>
• <b>Conclusions</b>	<b>p.29</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	
• <b>Appendix A: project papers</b>	<b>p.30</b>
• <b>Appendix B: references</b>	<b>p.32</b>
• <b>Appendix C: Tables</b>	<b>p.34</b>

## Introduction

This two year qualitative project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, explores the friendships of 8/9 year old children, and their parents, in ‘super-diverse<sup>1</sup>’ localities in London, England.

The project uses school sites as a lens through which to understand social relations in localities which are experiencing rapid urban population change. We examine the ways in which local primary schools work as sites of everyday encounter, exchange and friendship making in multicultural and rapidly gentrifying London geographies.

Through a focus on three primary school classrooms, we explore how difference is experienced, and whether and how friendships and friendship networks are made and maintained across ethnic and social class differences. Our aim is to identify what friendships reveal about the nature and extent of ethnic and social divisions in contemporary multicultural society. In short, does living in diverse areas mean local populations have diverse friendship groups?

## Executive summary

Our research shows that the adults and children who took part in the study did make and maintain friendships with those socially and ethnically different to themselves. The children, especially, mixed across ethnic difference and social class; indeed very nearly all the children had close friends from a different ethnic group to themselves. Even for the children however, the frequency of cross class relationships drops when ‘best friends’ are considered. We found that the cultural and social diversity of both the local areas and the schools were valued by the vast majority of adult and child participants. Many of the adults also saw school as providing a source of friends for themselves as well as their children. However the adults were more likely to have friends – both in their school and non-school networks – who were similar to themselves, and friendships across class were especially infrequent. Despite this propensity for ‘sameness’ in adult friendships, even light, casual relationships, such as an exchange of greetings when meeting daily in the playground were felt by research participants to be important for creating friendly atmospheres and a sense of belonging in the school and its immediate surrounds.

### Collecting the data (pages 9-12)

- The project is based on data from three primary schools in three different areas of London. The data comprise 114 interviews with children, parents, governors, and school staff plus approximately 300 hours observation and 78 children’s drawings (social maps), illustrating their friendship networks.
- In each school we focused on one Year 4 (8/9 year olds) class. The three primary schools, which we have called Leewood, Fernhill and Junction are based in super-diverse localities with different degrees of ethnic and social mix as well as increasing, but varying, levels of gentrification, described below.

---

<sup>1</sup> ‘Super-diversity’: The project took place in localities with a super-diverse population. The term (Vertovec 2007) describes the increasing diversity arising from different ‘waves’ of migration, and the diversity of the migrant population in terms of history, religion, age, gender, trajectory to London, education status, legal status and so on.

## Children's friendships (pages 12-18)

- Children's friendships are often understood by adults as fluctuating and short-lived. However, friendships were a central part of the children's lives and the children told us how important friendships were to them. They spoke of their friendships causing incidents of conflict and pain, as well as enjoyment and pleasure.
- Close mixed friendships across ethnicity, and to a lesser extent, social class were common amongst the children.
- When we looked at who the children said their closest friend was, there were still a significant number of friendships across ethnic difference (nearly three quarters). There were far fewer 'best friend' friendships across social class difference (just over a quarter of the children).
- Children's shared classroom culture and play practices (of games, music and so on) facilitated mixing across difference, but this was less apparent where differences of gender and disability were concerned.
- Those friendships which moved outside of school were less mixed than those within school, as parents organized the children's out of school time.
- Many of the children successfully negotiated multiple identities. For example those whose families had origins in other countries typically identified as Somali, Bangladeshi and so on, but they were also clear that they 'came from' London.
- The children recognised ethnic and social difference and viewed diversity as commonplace, and an ordinary part of their everyday lives.

## Adults' friendships (pages 19-24)

- The adult participants found schools to be a source of friendships for themselves, as well as their children. Their relationships with other parents varied from interactions consisting of casual greetings to close friendships.
- However, adult friendship relations that emerged from encounters in the playground were characterised by fluidity, temporality and instrumentalism. That is, school based adult friendships were often understood as likely to last only as long as the children were in that particular school, and to be fostered, partly, to help the children's social integration.
- We found that adult friendships operated on different levels of emotional intensity and had 'thicker' and 'thinner' levels of intimacy. In the study, it was clear that both 'enduring' friendship and more casual, friendship forms based on seeing others regularly can work as a wide ranging resource for forming social-local connections (e.g. having someone to ask for childcare help; having someone to ask for information about a school event or outing; having someone to take the children to go to the park or swimming; having someone to socialise with, involvement in local community events, etc) and capacity building (involvement in school events and activities, 'know how' and awareness of the school world, knowing teachers and school staff).
- However, the generation of social capital resources (e.g. knowledge and information about education) tended to be limited to networks of adults similarly positioned in terms of ethnicity and in particular social class; that is 'bonding' social capital.
- Importantly, the vast majority of parents to whom we spoke voiced approval of the diversity of the areas in which they lived, and some had made a point of choosing the school *because* of its diversity. However, in their own friendships, both in and out of school, the parent participants mixed less than the children with those different to themselves. The adult friendships that were

made across difference, were, like those of the children, more likely to cross ethnic difference than to cross class difference.

- We did find a number of close friendships and wider friendships networks that were mixed particularly across ethnicity but also social class.
- When we discussed with the parent participants why the degree of adult mixing across difference was small, they responded that making friendly overtures to people who were different involved considerable effort and risked social awkwardness (e.g. language barriers, not knowing what to say). Such encounters could be anxiety-inducing. Making friends with ‘people like me’ appeared to offer shared interests, a basis for trust, and points of reference from the start.
- Some adults questioned and reflected on why they had relatively homogeneous (similar) friendship networks when they lived in diverse areas. Others felt that having friends ‘like me’ was ‘natural’ and ‘inevitable’. Boundaries between classes were perceived as particularly unlikely to be crossed, because they denoted differences in lifestyle and priorities.
- As a social site, the school world is stratified. By this we mean that the different forms and volumes of social and economic resources to which parents have access shape their relationship with the school and each other. For example, it was clear in all three schools that those parents who participated in the governing bodies and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) committees were middle class, and largely white British.
- However, when children attend a primary school in a diverse locality, parents and children encounter and engage with social and cultural difference. Even if that engagement is mostly avoided or is slight, the routine, day-to-day presence of being in the school world requires **civil attention** and **civic conviviality**. We suggest that primary schools in particular, with their inter-generational mixing, gather together diverse populations in ways which look more like Ash Amin’s (2012) concept of ‘collaborative strangers’ rather than that of ‘co-existing strangers’. That is, populations that are connected through their collective use of a shared social resource/organisation such as workplaces, schools, rather than populations that anonymously co-mingle as they use or move through shared public spaces such as parks, squares, streets.

### **Parental oversight of children’s friendships (pages 24-25)**

- Although the vast majority of parent participants were highly supportive of their children attending diverse schools, and took their children’s friendships seriously, very few intervened or explicitly encouraged their children to make or maintain relationships across difference. Their management of the children’s out of school time tended to mean that children spent time with others like themselves (at e.g. paid-for after school activities, religious classes and so on).
- Play-dates, sleep overs, birthday parties, and children mixing out of school was understood by some families as a routine, but important part of primary schooling, but this emphasis on out of school interaction was not shared by all families. This could sometimes lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding, if invitations were not responded to or returned.

### **School policy and practices to support around friendships (pages 25-26)**

- The teachers in the three schools were aware of and confident in interacting with the complex, diverse and multicultural communities that the schools served. They took the children’s well-being very seriously, had a good knowledge of the children’s friendship networks, and implemented often very sophisticated strategies to help children who were struggling with friendships. While there was some work done on friendships, such as ‘circle time’, proactive

initiatives were vulnerable to being crowded out of the timetable, due to the need to ensure the children met targets in maths and English.

### **Locality and place (pages 27-29)**

- Primary schools can be understood as situated social institutions; they are part of the social and spatial environment in which they are located. In this way, the dynamics of social relations within the project's three schools are connected to the social relations outside of the school. The micro geographies of each of the schools matter, as these impact the school world and adult and child friendship relations. A key finding is that rapidly developing social and super-diverse dynamics and formations can be understood through a focus on place, as well as on demography. In this context, while all the localities in the project were shaped by gentrification and migration, we found there were significant social and super-diverse differences between these three localities within a very small geography (about a six mile radius).
- We argue for a nuanced approach to analysis of gentrification as a dominant frame for understanding profound urban social change in areas that have been previously associated with significant levels of social deprivation and ethnic diversity. Gentrification tends to be a rather blunt descriptor for explaining urban population change. Our study suggests there is significant variation in the forms and stages of gentrification, and we suggest these may shape interpersonal and affective social relations.

# Children's and adults' friendships across social class and ethnic difference

## Project Findings

### A Word on Theory

Our interdisciplinary theoretical resources are taken from geography and sociology. We have sought to use and contribute to the geographical literature which focuses on how people routinely negotiate and manage encounters with others who are very different from themselves in the course of their everyday lives (including, but not limited to, the work of Les Back 1996; Paul Gilroy 2004; Stephen Vertovec 2007, 2015; Amanda Wise 2009; Ash Amin 2002, 2012; Greg Noble 2009; Julia Nast and Talja Blokland 2014; Susanne Wessendorf 2014; Helen Wilson 2013; Sarah Neal and colleagues 2013.).

We have also drawn on literature from geography which analyses processes of gentrification, with a particular focus on the identities and educational choices and decisions of the gentrifying middle classes (including, but not limited to, the work of Doreen Massey 2005; Mike Savage and colleagues 2005; Paul Watt 2009; Tim Butler and colleagues 2003, 2011, Jackson and Butler 2014).

Our third set of resources has come from work on sociology, in particular sociology of education, which focuses on the way in which inequalities in social class and race/ethnicity play out in the social world, and especially in and around schools (including, but not limited to the work of, Stephen Ball 2003; Diane Reay and colleagues 2011; Nicola Rollock et al 2015; Carol Vincent and colleagues 2012; Bridget Byrne 2006, and Byrne and Carla De Tona 2014).

Finally, our analysis has been informed by sociological work on adults' and children's friendships (including, but not limited to the work of, Harry Blatterer 2014; Liz Spencer and Ray Pahl 2006; Carol Smart and colleagues 2012; Paul Connolly 1998; Alison James, 2013; and Ros George 2007).

## Methods

- **The project is based on data from three primary schools in three different areas of London. The data comprise interviews with pupils, parents and teachers, plus observations and children's drawings (social maps) showing their friendships.**
- We chose these schools because of their super-diverse populations, identifying them through Ofsted reports, data from the Department for Education and the Office for National Statistics, and local knowledge.
- The project focused on three Year 4 classrooms (children of 8/9 years old) in three different community primary schools in London. This was an in-depth study which generated rich and detailed data. We kept the number of schools small in order to have the opportunity to become familiar to children and parents, necessary, we argue, in order to be able to discuss emotive and

personal details to do with friendship, class and ethnicity. We have given pseudonyms to all the respondents, schools, and localities to protect their identity. We have called the schools: Leewood, Junction, and Fernhill Schools.

- The research is based on a data set made up of interviews, social maps, and notes from approximately 300 hours of observations. The data consists of 58 interviews with 46 parents, 13 interviews with school staff and governors, and 43 interviews with 78 children in pairs. The total number of interviews, including re-interviews, is 114. As is common with other research on parents, most of our respondents were mothers.
- We also have 78 social maps of their friendship networks drawn by the children. We used these social maps to generate interview conversation and to work out the friendship networks and reciprocities within the school classes. We also conducted observations in playgrounds, classrooms, and school events (assemblies, summer fairs, parents' evenings etc).
- We were very careful to avoid exposing any of the children to hurt or upset. We obtained informed consent from their parents to talk with the children, and also from the children themselves, and considered carefully the make-up of the pairs of children with whom we spoke. When an active case of bullying was disclosed to us, we spoke, on the child's behalf and with her permission, to the class teacher.
- We recognise that talking about social class and ethnicity is often overlaid with a variety of silences, absences and avoidances. Often euphemisms such as 'background' were used by the adult participants as a code for talking about difference
- The data was analysed through a combination of a software package (NVivo) and hand coding.

### **The schools and their surrounding areas**

- **Data was collected from three primary schools in inner London. In each school we focused on one Year 4 (8/9 year olds) class. The three schools, which we have called Leewood, Fernhill and Junction, were based in super-diverse localities with different degrees of ethnic and social mix as well as increasing, but varying, levels of gentrification. Each was within six miles of another, separated by the dense residential and small-scale commercial geography of this part of London.**
- A commonality in each of the neighborhoods was the existence of social housing and expensive private housing side by side, causing a mixed class population to feed into the local primary schools.
- Leewood was situated within an established area of gentrification, while there were early signs of gentrification around Junction, particularly in the form of new shops and services. Fernhill was in an area of partial gentrification, with pockets of well-established middle class settlement, now intensified by an on-going local regeneration programme.
- Leewood was an over-subscribed school with a reputation for being creative, and for being inclusive of children with special needs. Junction School emphasized being a 'green' school as well as having a focus on drama and the arts, while Fernhill had a reputation as a local community school with a well-established staff group.
- All three schools were close to green spaces which were frequented by the children after school. These surrounds were important in fostering opportunities for positive encounters.
- Each of the three schools had been marked 'good' by Ofsted in 2013, yet while Leewood moved 'down' in the rankings from an 'outstanding' to 'good', Junction and Fernhill had moved 'up' from 'satisfactory' to 'good'.

- The percentage of children on Free School Meals (a proxy indicator of relative poverty) differed across the schools, being lowest in Leewood (19.7%), reflecting the surrounding affluence of the neighborhood. Percentages were higher for Junction (32.8%) and Fernhill (38.7%).

### **Leewood School:**

- Leewood School serves Glen Park, a relatively affluent area, within a super-diverse and gentrifying London borough. Social housing and expensive private housing can be found side by side all over this borough, and in Glen Park itself.
- It is a highly bounded locality, focused around a small central shopping area, and an adjacent area of parkland. Glen Park has been gentrifying over 20-25 years, and the current shops and services (independent bookshop, clothes shops, butchers, restaurants, several boutique cafes, gentrified pubs, a delicatessen, and a 'traditional' green grocer) reveal the middle class dominance of the area.
- Whilst Glen Park's shops and services are increasingly directed at the affluent section of the local population, the park itself was popular with and used by all the Leewood children with whom we spoke. It had a large and well-maintained playground, and other facilities.
- Leewood itself attracts a middle class pupil group from the surrounding neighborhood, but also serves several areas of social housing, and has a multi-ethnic population. The school had a change of headteacher just after the fieldwork period. We have called our target Year 4 class, Crimson.

### **Junction School:**

- Junction School stands on a side road, just off a major traffic and commercial artery which leads to a busy commercial centre. The surrounding area, which we have called Ross Road, is visibly more multi-ethnic than Glen Park; this was reflected in the shops, the places of worship and passers-by. The nearby large commercial centre also caters for a significantly poorer and more diverse population than the one living in the environs of Glen Park.
- However, the residential roads around the school are full of large Victorian terrace houses, which are increasingly popular with middle class professional families, priced out of nearby middle class enclaves. There are far fewer signs of gentrification here than in Glen Park, but the recent appearance of a boutique café, the refurbishment of some local restaurants, and the much discussed rising house prices are testament to emergent gentrification.
- Junction School is a Victorian building, which several years ago received funding as a school in a deprived area, to develop its grounds, which has greatly improved its appearance. Under the last headteacher (a new headteacher has recently been appointed), the school had improved in terms of attainment.
- The school has a diverse multi-ethnic population, and one (white British) father told us he had heard it referred to as the 'headscarf school'. There is also a more recent population of children with origins in Eastern European countries. The school had a higher rate of pupil mobility than Leewood, and this was reflected in our target class, Burgundy.

### **Fernhill School:**

- Fernhill School is a Victorian building sat just off a bustling high road with shops, cafes, and close to the local station. The school is in an area which has long shown some signs of gentrification. Recently, a regeneration programme has caused the rate of this to increase, and so we have described the area, Hanson Green, as one of partial gentrification.

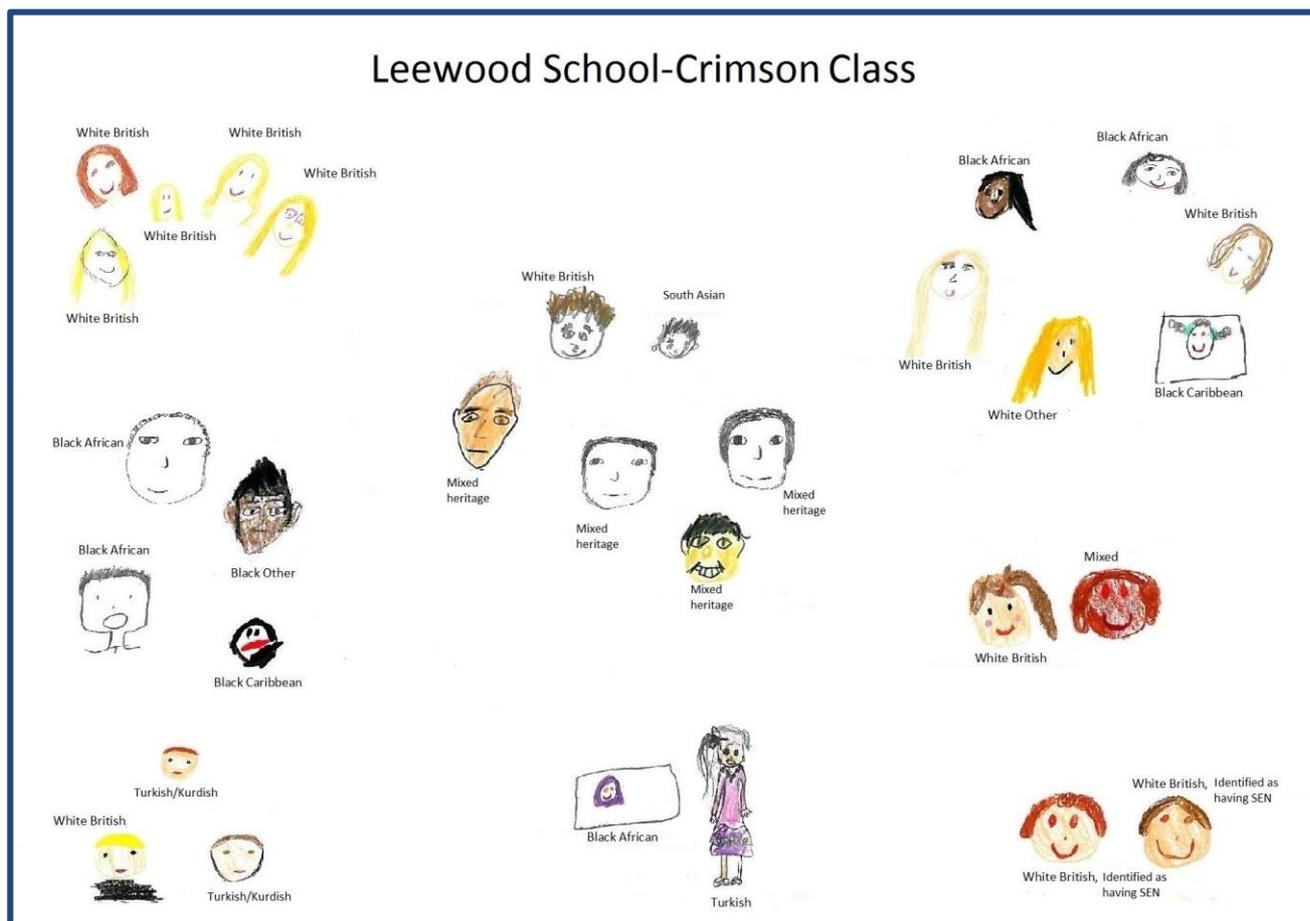
- The school differs from the others in terms of stability of staffing, as senior members of the school have all been in place for over ten years.
- The population of the school is mixed in terms of both ethnicity and social class. There has long been an established middle class group at the school, as well as a significant population of Turkish and Kurdish families. Recently the school had seen an increase in families with their origins in Eastern Europe and in Somalia.
- Our target class, Scarlet, was smaller than the other two classes with just 20 pupils and had twice as many boys as girls.

## **Children's Friendships**

### **Friendship configurations in the classroom**

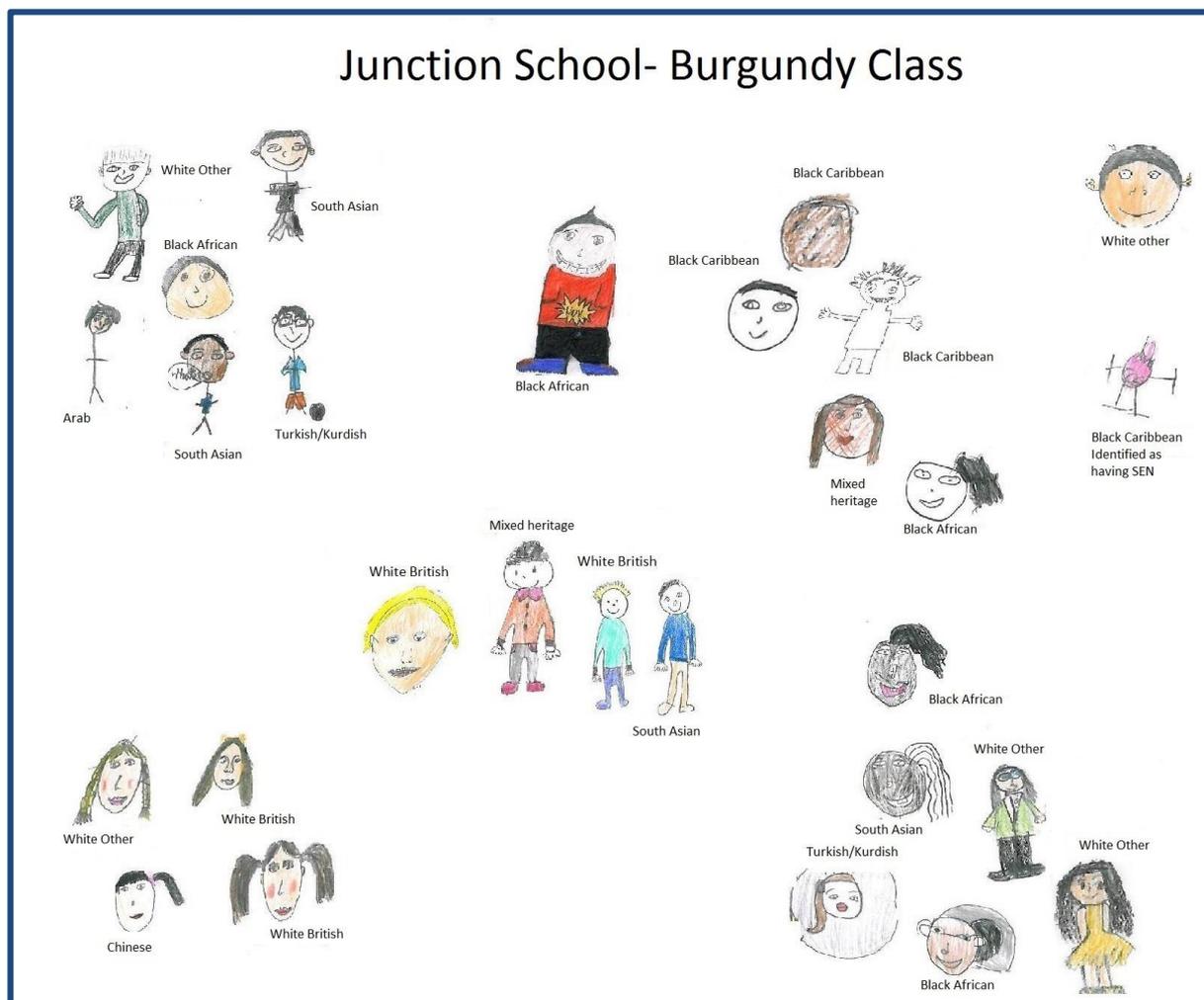
- Crimson Class in Leewood School contained 30 8/9 year olds, most of whom had been together for five years, since nursery. They were a diverse group of children in terms of social class, ethnicity and attainment. Although the interviews with the children revealed some points and moments of tension and distress, social relationships were generally presented positively. Some children, however, were clearly less embedded than others. Three children (all boys) had statements of special educational need, and two of these children had physical disabilities and full time adult support.
- The children themselves described four main friendship groups (as shown in the class friendship map below): a group of girls, described by their teacher as the “white middle class girls” group, which encompasses all the white middle class girls in the class except for one; a boys’ football playing group (referred to by one of the children as the “tough boys” group), a non-footballing boys’ group, and a mixed girls’ group which is ethnically diverse. Moving in and out of this group are another clearly identifiable pair of girls who are close friends. The two more isolated friendship pairs are the only orthodox Muslim children in the class, and two boys, both of whom have complex learning needs and some degree of physical disability. These groupings are displayed in the illustration below.

## Leewood School-Crimson Class



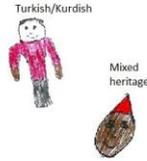
- Burgundy Class in Junction School comprised of 28 children, whom the teacher described as rather young for their age. Friendships appeared more fraught than in Crimson Class, and the rate of pupil mobility higher.
- The teacher saw the class as not having clear friendship groups, but rather temporary alliances that 'dissipate quite regularly', with the exception of the small group of white middle class children who were held together by their shared experience of outside activities, and their parents' friendships. However, the children saw clearer groupings.
- They described the following friendship groups (as shown in the class friendship map below) - a group of three white girls (later joined by a Chinese girl), and a multi-ethnic quartet of boys. Both these groups mixed out of school. A larger, looser group of boys often play football together. However, relationships within this latter group are largely confined to school, as is the case with another group of mixed ethnicity girls.
- Our data suggested that the most isolated children were three recently arrived boys, two who were recent arrivals in the country, and who were learning English, and one who had a statement of special educational need, and was largely taught separately in a corner of the classroom (although this later changed).
- The children's interviews revealed stronger tensions than in Crimson class, with one girl describing prolonged bullying, although this was eventually resolved with the intervention of teachers.
- Being Muslim in Burgundy class was seen as a high status identity, and more frequently cited and discussed in the children's interviews, than in Crimson class where there were few Muslim children.

## Junction School- Burgundy Class



- Scarlet class in Fernhill School was the smallest containing 20 pupils. It also had a gender imbalance with only 7 girls in the class.
- As the class friendship map below shows, there were a number of pairings, particularly amongst the girls. Some of the girls played frequently with the boys, and were included in the boys' friendship maps (this was unusual as often the children's friendship maps only included those of their own gender).
- The boys in this class tended to mix in larger groups across social class and ethnicity, and play football.
- The two middle class boys (white other and white/mixed heritage) in the class had formed a strong friendship pair, and their friendship was facilitated by their parents outside of school.
- There were more children in this class who reported having few close friends in the class. One reason for this was the school's policy of mixing classes at the end of each year, thus disrupting existing friendships.

# Fernhill School- Scarlet Class



## The Children: Encounter & Friendship



Putting together the 78 individual 'maps' of the children's friendships gave us 'maps' (socio-grams) of the social networks within the classroom (as shown above). With these 'maps' and accompanying children's interviews, it was possible to identify particular friendships groupings informed by gender, class, religion, and disability, and explore how the children understood difference. We found:

**Children's friendships are often understood by adults as fluctuating and short-lived. However, the children told us that friendships were very important to them, and they particularly valued loyalty in their friends. They spoke of their friendships causing incidents of conflict and pain, as well as enjoyment and pleasure.**

- Classroom compositions were super-diverse, comprising of children from a range of national, ethnic, linguistic, religious and social class backgrounds.
- Many of the children successfully negotiated multiple identities. For example, those children whose families had origins in other countries typically identified as Somali, Bangladeshi and so on, but they were also clear that they 'came from' London. The children often had detailed knowledge of where they and their friends came from.

She's from Columbia and I'm from Algeria [but] everybody was born in London. (Omar)

Serena is from France...Bella is from England. She is half from Jamaica..... Jameel is Turkish, he is a quarter Muslim. (Iper)

I was born in London, but I come from Somalia.... [I am] mostly Somali, but a tiny bit English. (Aslam)

I come from India, I was born here. (Satnam)

- Children had different levels of closeness with friends, and all mixed across class and ethnicity within the classroom. While they often interacted in smaller closed friendship groups, they also mixed in larger, more fluid groupings in the classroom and playground.
- The children displayed autonomy and agency in their decision-making around their friendships. However, parents and teachers also influenced these relationships.
- Humour was an important part of the children's worlds and they used humour as a means of negotiating relationships, particularly in diverse friendship groups.

**Close friendships across ethnicity, and to a lesser extent, social class were present amongst the children. However, there were noticeably fewer 'best friend' relationships across social class.**

- Nearly all of the children in the research had close friendships with others in the class who were from a different ethnic group to themselves (we defined 'close' as meaning amongst their 'top five' friends).
- There were close cross-class friendships, but fewer in number than cross-ethnic friendships. However, a majority had close friends - in their top five - who had a different social background to themselves.
- When we looked at who the children said their closest friend was, there were still a significant number of friendships across ethnic difference (nearly three quarters). There were far fewer 'best friend' friendships across class difference (just over a quarter of the children).
- Where there were more middle class children in the class, polarisation between working and middle class children tended to be greater. The white British middle-class children in the research tended to mix less across ethnicity and social class than others, despite often being able to talk in a sophisticated manner about diversity. The small number of white British working class children, however, did tend to have more friendships across ethnicity.
- Children's shared culture facilitated mixing across difference, but this was less apparent where differences of gender and disability were concerned. A shared children's classroom culture and play practices of music, computer games, and playground games was a source of commonality and bonding, and meant that membership of the different friendship groups were not completely fixed, but was fluid.
- Within each class, there were a few children who were 'super-mixers' tending to move between groups easily. These children often tended to be skilled in resolving conflicts, as well as being inclusive of the other children.

Helen and Pippa really get into fights sometimes. And it is not like that great, because we have to sort it out all the time. It is really difficult because sometimes they say 'Go away' or stuff like that and they push each other because they are really angry.... I go and see what they say about each other and then I get them together and I say, 'You say sorry for saying that', 'You say sorry for saying that' and then I make them shake hands and hug and they are all friends again...Sometimes that works...It is really hard work. (Chanelle, Black Caribbean origin, Leewood School)

- There were only a few close friendships across gender. The children chose to mix in single sex groups in the playground for much of the time, although there were some games (especially chasing games) that boys and girls played together.
- The children had quite clear stereotypes around gender, talking of 'tough' football-playing boys, and 'girly girls'. However, being a boy and not being a footballer, or being a girl and not being very 'girly', was certainly possible, although stepping away from gender stereotypes, particularly for non-football playing boys, could be difficult depending on the attitudes of the other children in the class.
- In two of the classes, there were children who had complex physical and learning needs. While the other children looked after these children with disabilities and often included them, it

required targeted and consistent adult intervention to help develop deeper friendships and mixing across disability.

- Religion also influenced children's friendships both within and outside of school. Religious classes and community centres meant some children met outside of school and this facilitated their friendships. School activities e.g. Ramadan club, celebrating religious days and shared identifications also encouraged such friendships.

**Those friendships which moved outside of school were less ethnically and socially mixed than those within school.**

- Children formed friendships outside of school, through nearby clubs and activities, language or religious classes. These friendships were often with those of similar backgrounds to themselves, compared to those formed through school.
- Children discussed how space influenced and facilitated friendships and mixing across difference. They spoke about local parks and outdoor spaces in housing complexes as being areas where they met and played with children from their school. None of the children attended local parks without adult supervision.
- The children viewed diversity as commonplace, and an ordinary part of their everyday lives; but at the same time, they were aware that diversity was the subject of a celebratory discourse at their schools.
- The children recognised ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity as a normal part of social life, and as not something particularly special, but at the same time, they were aware that diversity was the subject of a celebratory discourse at their schools.

Oh yeah, like the school don't really have a lot from the same cultures, [we are] all mixed. It is not really - like you wouldn't say that there is like one popular culture here, because literally we are all mixed. [That is good because] you get to learn more about other people and how they live and stuff. (Callum, Black Caribbean origin, Leewood School)

It doesn't make a difference [where people come from] because everybody is the same, everybody comes from earth and stuff... It doesn't matter what culture [other children] are, what nationality, what colour, they are still human beings. (Nayna, Turkish origin, Fernhill School)

- Children understood social class difference in terms of materiality, e.g. type of home, size of bedroom, and possession of new gadgets. Ethnic difference was understood in terms of language, food, religious beliefs, festivals and holidays celebrated, and country of origin.
- Children had complex and dynamic identities. They often identified with particular aspects of their identity in different contexts, allowing them to develop affective relationships with a range of peers. This showed a level of cognitive sophistication in mixed classroom settings.
- The children, in their interviews with us, did occasionally express negative views of each other, reflecting friendship tensions, but in only one case was this expressed in racial, indeed racist, terms.

## Adult Friendships

### Forms of Friendship

The adult participants found schools to be a source of friendships for themselves, as well as their children. Their relationships with other parents varied from interactions consisting of casual greetings to close friendships. However, adult friendship relations that emerged from encounters in the playgrounds were characterised by fluidity, temporality and instrumentalism. This illuminates the complexity of what friendships are, the diversity of types of friendships, and what friendships deliver in terms of emotional support, sense of belonging and practical help. We found that adult friendships operated on multiple levels of emotional intensity, and had 'thicker' and 'thinner' levels of intimacy. In the study, it was clear that both 'enduring' friendship and more casual, 'hi hello' friendships forms (based on seeing people daily and greeting them) can work as a resource for forming social-local connection and capacity building.



Yeah, you know, what I have observed in this country is, people do mix in some areas. One of them is like, you know, pubs! Apart from this, the other areas people mix is in the school activities and you know, parent meetings – whenever there are events. The other thing is you know, sport activities like football stadium or such areas. Apart from that, maybe it's my view, the society is a little bit, you know, reserved society. That's my view. Apart from that places like pubs and school, places like meetings events, sometimes in parks areas as well, or where children can go and play, you can see people opening up, opening themselves, so you can have such kinds of interactions and in rare situations, rare conditions, making friends (Black African father, Leewood School).

- Adult friendships tended to be both characterized by an intense localism (friendships which were enacted and practiced within micro geographies surrounding the schools) and significant time-space stretch (friendship networks going back to university or friendships that were transnational and/or made through religious/political/social justice organizations). The study found that friendships that were very local and friendships that spanned time-space could all form part of what participants experienced as social resource. By that we mean that friendship relations were

a central part of participants' emotional support networks, child care and parenting networks, information exchanges about the school and locality, socialising networks and so on.

- Materialities underpinned friendship relationships and practices. The geography and nature of surrounding environments of schools – residential patterns, routes to school, nearby parks, proximity of local cafes, parent rooms, playground layout – could all differentially shape friendship networks, resource opportunities and circuits of communication. The latter in particular was important for knowing what was happening, and feeling involved and part of their children's school world.
- School-based friendships vary from 'thicker' to 'thinner' levels of intimacy: deep friendships, through lighter friendships, composed mainly of making arrangements around the children, to what Granovetter (1973 p. 1361) calls 'nodding relationships', and we refer to as 'hi hello' relationships (citing a parent participant).
- Our findings show that some of the friendship relationships that parents made through school did corresponded to Spencer and Pahl's definition of friends as 'comforters, confidants and soulmates', and did 'act as a vital safety net providing much needed support and intimacy' (2006: 197 and 210). However, we found that many other friendship relations that participants valued were more situational (someone to chat to while waiting for the school to open; someone to call if you needed help with a late pick up) and circumstantial or life course generated (the friendship was felt to be mostly linked to the school and unlikely to continue when the child had gone on to secondary school).
- We heard a number of accounts in which parents' more 'enduring' friendships were experienced as demanding and stressful. School-based friendships did seem more fraught, worried over, than those friendships that people had from childhood, university and work. We were told of friendship breakdowns. Fallings out in parents' friendships could, at times, have repercussions for children's friendships. This corresponds with the findings of Smart et al (2011) who argue that friendship needs to also be recognized as a site of strain, conflict and fragility. In our study, the fragility and emotionally demanding aspects of deeper friendship relations lead us to argue that more intense friendships and greater intimacy do not necessarily equate with being a greater source of social resource.
- Schools were more often associated with temporary friendship relationships and social networks than were non-school friendships, but these were still able to act as sites of social and emotional resource. The 'lighter' friendship relations were still able to create and maintain 'friendly atmospheres' which were part of wider 'structures of feeling' resulting in positive senses of social care, social trust and belonging.
- Within this a playground etiquette, consisting of greetings, smiles and making eye contact with other parents was considered important by many participants, and they complained of breaches of this etiquette. It was key to creating atmospheres of recognition and familiarity. We agree with Nast & Blokland (2014) that regularly passing and acknowledging each other creates a sense of connection and comfort in semi-public spaces, such as these three school playgrounds.

## **Adult views and practices on diversity and difference**

**Importantly, the vast majority of parents to whom we spoke voiced approval of the diversity of the areas in which they lived, and some had made a point of choosing the school *because* of its diversity. However, in their own friendships, the parent participants tended to mix less than the children with those socially and ethnically different to themselves.**

I had such a homogenous schooling [in a private school] and I think that gave me a terribly blinkered view of society which I'm hoping that I've shrugged off some of it, but I don't think you shrug off all of it, because school is an important part of your forming of your ideas (white, middle class dad explaining his desire for his children to attend a diverse, local state school, Junction School)

- There was a tendency in adult friendships towards homophily – gravitating towards ‘people like me’. This meant that where there were friendship networks made through the school, these were often very visibly composed of those who had similar class backgrounds, and often shared ethnicity. Tied into the playground encounter is the idea of ‘taking the first step’. Here some parents blamed themselves for not doing this (time, awkwardness), others blamed other parents (‘cliques’, other languages being spoken).
- However, adult friendships were, like those of the children, more likely to cross ethnic difference than to cross class difference.
- Our data is more limited on how friendship relationships managed social and ethnic difference. Participants in cross ethnic/religious friendships spoke of learning from each other’s heritage, and middle class parents who had or avoided friendships across class spoke of feeling awkward about uneven resources. Some of our non middle class respondents firmly disassociated themselves from middle class lifestyles, behaviours or patterns of consumption that they saw as ‘not for them’. The extent to which culturally mixed friendships were resources and sites that had the capacity to manage experiences of racism and exclusion was also unclear. From accounts from black and minority ethnic participants it seemed that ‘talking about race’ was done more with those friends who were of the same ethnic group.
- When we discussed with the parent participants why the degree of adult mixing across difference was small, they responded that making friendly overtures to people who were different involved considerable effort and risked social awkwardness (e.g. language barriers, not knowing what to say). Such encounters could be anxiety-inducing. Making friends with ‘people like me’ appeared to offer shared interests, a basis for trust, and points of shared reference from the start.
- This tendency to make friends with ‘people like me’ was not limited to one particular ethnic or class group but apparent amongst all social groups (for example white British middle classes, Somali parents, Turkish/Kurdish parents and so on).
- However, there was little hostility or tension amongst adults in diverse playgrounds. For the most part everyone lived ‘amicably side by side’ (mother, Fernhill School). As we note above, the vast majority of adult participants voiced approval for the diversity of the area in which they lived and the schools their children attended. Some made a point of choosing their school because of its diverse population.
- Children often acted as catalysts for contact between the adults, which brought people who might not have mixed much into contact with each other.
- Adults’ friendship networks, apart from their children’s school, often centred on friends from school, university, or country of origin. Adults practised mixing or homophily in different parts of their lives, with workplaces (public sector workplaces especially) often occasioning a degree of mix.
- Some adults questioned and reflected upon why they had relatively homogeneous networks when they lived in diverse areas. Some others felt that having friends ‘like me’ was ‘natural’ and

'inevitable'. Boundaries between classes were perceived as particularly unlikely to be crossed, because they denoted differences in lifestyle and priorities.

- Adults' dispositions towards diversity and their practices around difference can be placed on a continuum from a **refusal of difference** to an **enabling role** (c.f Wise 's 2009 concept of 'transversal enabler', that is individuals who facilitate contact and communication across difference). Most of the respondents took up positions around the mid-way point on this continuum, and we have identified two main positions here: those who are **accepting** of homophily, and those who take a **reflexive** or responsive position to difference.
  - **Enablers:** this was a small group who i) actively sought to develop friendly relations with those who were different to themselves, ii) had close friendships with those who were different to themselves in terms of social class and/or ethnicity, and iii) facilitated their children's friendships across difference. Not many of our enablers fell into all three categories, but all had an open, interested and responsive approach to difference. It is interesting to note that they were mostly from minority ethnic groups, and had access to middle class resources.
  - Those who we have categorized as **reflexive** tended to problematize the homogeneity of their own social networks, pointing out that these did not reflect the diversity of the areas in which all the respondents lived. They were often interested in questions of difference, and different experiences and lifestyles to their own.
  - **Accepters** of homophily were those who deemed it 'natural' that people made friends with others like themselves in terms of ethnic or social class background. This group also included a small sub-group of fairly recent migrants to London who relied on networks of others from their country of origin. They often made contact with these people through existing acquaintances, or through churches, mosques etc. Migration can be an exhausting and stressful process and some recent migrant parents spoke of lacking the energy, confidence, or fluency in English to broker interactions across difference.
  - We found only one clear **refuser**, a middle class, 'White Other' mother who viewed the diversity of her children's school as 'too much' because her child was in a white minority in her class.
  - As noted above, adults practised mixing and homophily in different areas of their lives, so their position on the continuum is subject to a certain amount of fluidity depending on the social setting in which they find themselves.
- As a social site, the school world is stratified. By this we mean that the different forms and volumes of social and economic resources to which parents have access shape their relationship with the school and each other. For example, it was clear in all three schools that those parents who participated in the governing bodies and PTA committees were middle class, and largely white British.
- However, when children attend a primary school in a diverse locality parents and children encounter and engage with social and cultural difference. Even if that engagement is mostly avoided or is slight, the routine, day-to-day presence of being in the school world requires civil attention and civic conviviality. We would suggest that primary schools in particular, with their inter-generational mixing, gather together diverse populations in ways which reflect Ash Amin's (2012) distinction between 'collaborative strangers' and 'co-existing strangers'. That is, populations that are connected through their collective use of a shared social

resource/organisation such as schools, rather than populations that anonymously co-mingle as they use or move through shared public spaces such as parks, squares, streets.

I mean my sister in law she lives in X now so she came over and we all went [out locally] for a meal and I think every few yards, she was like, 'Oh my God you are like a celebrity' it was the half term holiday and it was [constantly] 'Oh Hello' you know and the mums because everyone is out and about aren't they? [...] It is nice to introduce people that can help other people or just you know even friendship wise it is nice isn't it, someone to talk to. (Middle class Bangladeshi mother, Junction School).

## Social capital

**The generation of social capital resources (e.g. knowledge and information about education) was mostly limited to networks of adults similarly positioned in terms of social class and ethnicity; that is 'bonding' social capital<sup>2</sup>. However, even interactions limited to an exchange of greetings in the playground could foster an atmosphere of belonging for different parents, and make them feel comfortable within the school space.**

It is not easy to make new friends, new social groups, you do it through kids' schools or your school if you are studying or your job. But mostly I think these days we do make most friends through our kids' school. (Turkish, working class mother, Leewood School)

I think the school is the best place [...] Normally when you go shopping and stuff you don't stand up and see people and say 'Hello Hi', it is just I think school [...] I think it is probably because you go every day, you see them every day. (Pakistani mother, intermediate class, Junction School)

What I do in the school, when I go in the school I like to be friendly to everyone, no matter who it is, Somalian or whatever, we talk (Black African mother, working class, Fernhill School)

- We were interested in the extent to which social capital was generated through supportive and affective links between parents and between children, in situations of social heterogeneity (difference). We wished to explore the ways in which social resources and cultural competencies can be created through routine, amicable, everyday interactions and exchanges and then transferred to school and surrounding social worlds. For example, in what ways do parents'

---

<sup>2</sup> 'Bonding' social capital describes ties between people in similar social situations, such as friends and close family. It is usually contrasted with 'bridging' social capital which describes looser ties, often with people who are differently socially situated.

friendships and supportive networks influence school activities and social events, affect parent-teacher relationships or create parent 'knowledge' about what is happening in a school and their children's classroom? We found instances of 'bonding' social capital, that is, that the densest social networks were within the homogeneous groupings visible in the playgrounds. For example a group of Somali parents at Fernhill School had been very active in negotiation with the school over a homework club.

- While we found some examples of 'bridging' social capital, these networks were not the 'norm'. However, we did find examples of conviviality which opens the door to new encounters. Wise and Velayutham describe conviviality as 'affectively at ease relationships of co-existence and accommodation' (2014, p.406). The school summer fairs for instance are good illustrations of convivial interactions, as the varied communities which make up the school come together to organise and run stalls, cook food, play games, watch their children performing, buy snacks and toys, with the shared purpose of raising funds for the school. There are instances of both 'conviviality and rigid boundary maintenance' (Karner & Parker 2011 p.368) in the research.
- Indeed we agree with Karner & Parker that we can see 'contradictory and co-existing tendencies towards both conflict and conviviality' in the research (Karner & Parker 2011 p.356), and that this is an example of what Grasseni (2009) calls the 'multi vocality of place' [the place being the school]. So we see no direct conflict, but often a lack of contact, and sometimes avoidance of contact, in the three playgrounds.

## Parental Oversight of Children's Friendships

**The vast majority of parent participants were supportive of their children attending diverse schools, and took seriously their children's friendships. However, very few explicitly intervened or encouraged their children to make or maintain relationships across difference. Parents' management of the children's out of school time meant children tended to spend time with others like themselves.**

- As we noted above, there was strong parental support for children attending diverse schools. These were seen to develop the knowledge and understanding children would need to thrive in a diverse city like London. Paradoxically there was relatively little active effort by parents to facilitate children's friendships across difference.
- There were very few instances of clear directive approaches from parents to children about their friendships (i.e. telling children to play with or not to play with particular children).
- Nonetheless most parents actively sought to intervene in and manage friendships in a number of ways. The children's out of school time was particularly managed by their parents. After school the children might routinely do one or two of a variety of things: go home, attend after school clubs, or paid-for music, drama, sports activities elsewhere, attend after school religious classes, or routinely go on play-dates. This resulted in most children spending out of school time with others like themselves.
- Parents commented that if their children were friends with similar children, there was points of similarity from the start, which made for an easy straight forward relationship. Facilitating friendships across difference could require at times considerable effort in, for example, persuading other parents that your home was a safe and secure one.

I wonder if [children] are going for similar kids who have got, like I said, similar radio on in the background, similar books, similar newspapers, similar kinds of outlook and faith, if they have got a faith. So they are going for the familiar. And it is boosted by parents who encourage it...I like the parents therefore you can be friends with and we can have coffee...It flows more easily...the easy path (white middle class mother, Leewood School).

- Play-dates, sleep-overs, birthday parties, and children mixing out of school was understood by some families as a routine, but important part of primary schooling, but this emphasis on out of school interaction was not shared by all families. This could sometimes lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding, if invitations were not responded to or returned.
- There was some evidence that some parents, particularly, but not exclusively, first generation migrants, felt they were unable to trust other parents they did not know, and so did not want their children visiting other homes. Anxiety surrounded issues such as whether children would be given food they could eat (e.g. consistent with religious laws) and whether they would be properly supervised. Parents who saw play-dates as an ordinary, routine part of primary school life were often unaware of these anxieties.

We went to a birthday party with my daughter and I didn't know what was in the food and I had to refuse and I had to make Zayla refuse as well. But with Fatimah [friend from Crimson class] because it's all halal food, then I can send my daughter there with a good heart...After that incident because they [other parents] look at you a little bit differently when you don't eat the food, then nowadays she just goes to birthday parties of Turkish families (Turkish mother, Leewood School)

## School policy and practices for supporting friendships

**The teachers were aware of and confident in interacting with the complex and diverse communities that the school served. They took the children's well-being very seriously, had a good knowledge of the children's friendship networks, and implemented often very sophisticated strategies to help children who were struggling with friendships. However, due to the need to ensure the children met targets in maths and English, proactive work with the children on friendships was vulnerable to being crowded out of the timetable.**

- The teachers were aware of and confident in interacting with the complex, diverse and multi-cultural communities that the schools served. The headteachers could implement policy which allowed their schools to engage in small acts of cross cultural accommodation (see Wise's 2009 concept of 'transversal enabler'). For example, whilst we were there, Fernhill provided, for the first time, a Ramadan Club, a quiet space at break times, primarily for those children who were fasting, but also open to others. Fernhill and Junction Schools both provided halal meat.
- Relationship issues at school fall under the heading of Social and Emotional Learning, which is one part of PSHE (Personal, Social, and Health education). PSHE is a recommended, but non-statutory curriculum area, so schools don't have to teach it. However, most do, and PSHE is often

understood as a way of promoting pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development – and schools are inspected by school inspectors, Ofsted, on how they do this. The importance of Social and Emotional Learning has fluctuated on the policy agenda over the last few years, and currently has a relatively low profile, although the current Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, is promoting 'character education' to build resilience in children.

- Teachers across the three schools took children's friendships very seriously, and invested considerable time and effort in resolving tensions. The class teachers had detailed understandings of who was friends with who, which largely matched those of the children themselves.
- The schools had a range of proactive and reactive strategies to create and strengthen friendships and resolve any tensions. Proactive strategies address friendship issues with all children, and included circle time, Anti-bullying Week (a national initiative), 'action boxes' (messages for the teacher), drama, adult mentors in the playground organizing games and art activities, reiterations of school vision statements about 'how we behave to others in our school', and so on. Reactive measures responded to tensions between particular children, and included 'restorative justice'<sup>3</sup> to address conflict, circle time, 'buddy' schemes, the provision of alternative spaces for children not happy in the playground, and interventions tailored for particular children.
- Due to the pressures of a crowded timetable and the need to ensure children met their targets in core subjects, teachers' work around friendships tended to be reactive rather than proactive.

I think that what happens sometimes in a whole school is that this whole sort of academic targets, and them [test results at 11] being published, and everything being driven by that, sometimes that means for the class teacher that is the main priority and they sometimes lose sight of other things that are absolutely essential for a child. [...] I think our senior management team do see the great [ie bigger] picture, but you know, we are sort of driven by external forces a little bit (senior leader, Junction School).

- A focus on reactive work around friendships meant that children whose interactions with others often led to tension and disruption, were the focus for interventions around social and emotional learning. Other instances of quieter exclusion and marginalisation, where the children did not draw attention to themselves, were sometimes missed by teachers.
- There is a role here for proactive work with all children on social and emotional learning. Such an approach has the potential to diminish alienation, and offer safe spaces for all children to explore the nature of friendship, and processes of friend-making and maintaining. We recognise, however, that there are considerable practical limitations for teachers - who work within a system where tests results are the priority - to find time to implement such programmes.

---

<sup>3</sup> 'Restorative justice' is a process that resolves conflict by encouraging children to take responsibility for their actions and respect the views of others. See for example <http://www.restorativejustice4schools.co.uk>. 'Circle time' provides a space in which children can gather together to discuss personal/emotional issues, and can be used as a reactive or proactive strategy with regards to friendship.

## Locality and place

**Primary schools can be understood as situated social institutions; they are part of the social and spatial environment in which they are located. The dynamics of social relations within the project's three schools are shaped by and shape the social relations outside of the school, and the micro geographies of each of the schools impacted on the school world, and adult and child friendship relations. A key finding is that rapidly developing social and super-diverse dynamics and formations can be most effectively understood as a placed and spatialised, and not only a demographic phenomenon.**

- In this context while gentrification processes and migration settlements were a shared feature of all the localities in the project we found there were significant social and super-diverse differences between three localities within a very small geography (about a six mile radius).
- We argue for a nuanced approach to analysis of gentrification as a dominant frame for understanding profound urban social change in areas that have been previously associated with significant levels of social deprivation and ethnic diversity. Gentrification tends to be a rather blunt descriptor for explaining urban population change, and our study suggests there is significant variation in the forms and stages of gentrification. We suggest these variations may shape interpersonal and affective social relations.



- For example, as noted earlier, the area around Leewood School has been one of long term and **established gentrification**, and it was in this school in which we found more clustering of white middle class children's friendships, but the school also had a mixed black and minority ethnic middle class parent presence. The locality also reflects the long-term urban middle class presence in terms of the types of shops, cafes and pubs in the streets next to Leewood School. Conversely the area around Junction School has been subject to rapid, but much more **early stage gentrification**, and it was in this school were we saw less social class and ethnic clustering among

children's friendships, but more social class and ethnic clustering among parents' friendship networks. The locality here also can be read as a 'bellwether' of the gentrification stage; in the area around Junction School, an urban middle class local population is less visibly reflected in the shops, cafes and amenities in school's immediate built environment. The area around Fernhill presented another variation of gentrification, that we describe as **partial gentrification**. There were pockets of long-term established gentrification in the area, but these appeared to co-exist alongside established areas of more deprived private and social housing. In other words this was an area which had not tipped heavily towards an urban middle class (as in Leewood School), but nor was it an area unused to middle class presence (as in Junction School). In this context we suggest that the partial gentrification of the area around Fernhill School was implicit in the fewer accounts we heard of school-based adult friendships, and in the lower levels of out of school children's friendship practices.

- Gentrification stages also impacted the social networks of more recent migrants: in the more uneven and more recently gentrified areas of Fernhill and Junction Schools, other settlement processes were shaping localities and social ties. Migrant-based social networks appeared to be more present (and significant in participants' lives) in the less entrenched geographies of Fernhill and Junction Schools. For example, in Fernhill School, both Somali parents and school staff identified the strong Somali parents' network in and out of the school, and in Junction School, participants spoke of networks of others from their country of origin (for example Bulgarian and Columbian networks).
- Gentrification processes visibly impact the local built environment and influence school-associated social networks and friendship practices. Middle class facilities dominate Leewood School's streetscapes, but the streetscapes of Fernhill and Junction School were much more socially and ethnically diverse. We saw something of what Tim Butler (2003) has described as gentrification 'bubbles' in the separations in the use of the social spaces surrounding the schools. Parents' interactions with socially polarized localities highlighted the extent to which the same locality is used and experienced very differently, by different local populations. However, the more public spaces (parks, recreational play areas) were also sites of pre-school drop off, post-school pick-up encounters and were used for affective social interactions and friendship activities for some groups of parents. The routines of walks to/from school and waiting at school gates and in playgrounds meant these were key sites in which parents encountered each other. Parents identified these as places where they had conversations, met up, made friends but they were also spaces that could be experienced as exclusionary.
- Local primary schools and school-based friendship relationships are topological and connect distinct spaces i.e. school-made social relationships often went beyond the boundaries of the schools and into the wider local environments and leisure spaces, the cafes, shops, streets and parks for example and sometimes into personal (home) spaces of participants, for birthday parties, sleep-overs, play dates etc.
- As described, above, we found that the parents in the study variously chose to accommodate, or avoid, or engage with the social and cultural difference in their personal lives. However, being part of the primary school world in diverse settings meant that all parents, in all the localities, had to negotiate their proximity to difference within the multiple spaces of localities and personal life. School worlds, as a collective commons, rely on some level of social collaboration and even if

difference is avoided or minimized through implicit or explicit practice, negotiations of difference will at some stage of the school experience *have* to take place.

## Conclusions

Our research illustrates that the adults and children who took part in the study did make and maintain friendships with those different to themselves. The children especially mixed across ethnic and social class difference; indeed very nearly all the children had close friends from a different ethnic group to themselves. Even for the children however, the frequency of cross class relationships drops when 'best friends' are considered. We found that the cultural and social mix of both the local areas and the schools were valued by the vast majority of adult and child participants. However, despite valuing living in diverse neighbourhoods, adult friendships had a tendency to revolve around 'people like us', and this sense of 'likeness' was often defined in terms of social class and culture. Some parents told us that they would like their friendship groups to be more mixed and more like their children's friendship groups, and some expressed social embarrassment, under-confidence and awkwardness about approaching people from different ethnic and cultural groups which did result in some avoidances of difference.

However, despite these tendencies for adult friendship relationships to be among socially and, to a lesser extent, ethnically similar groups, we also found examples of parents who made particular efforts to interact across difference, a relatively small group we refer to (after Amanda Wise's work) as 'enablers'. We also found only one parent whose views could be described as 'refusing difference'. We also highlight the generally amicable relationships in the three playgrounds where very diverse families gathered at the beginning and end of the school day. The primary schools were a key site in which social interactions across difference took place. Even casual interactions - simple everyday 'hi hello, how are you' exchanges between parents - were felt by research participants to be important for creating friendly atmospheres and a sense of belonging in the school and its immediate surrounds.

Even if the adult engagement is mostly avoided or is slight, we suggest that the routine, day-to-day presence of being in the school world requires **civil attention** (an extension of Goffman's notion of 'civil inattention'<sup>4</sup>) and **civic conviviality** (an process of engagement with and recognition of others built around an acknowledgment of collective use of the shared social resource of the school).

---

<sup>4</sup> 'Civil inattention' describes the mostly non-discursive process of acknowledging but ignoring the presence of another. This is a respectful process that maintains public order, and allows people to co-exist in urban spaces without imposing on each other.

## Appendix A: Project papers

We have developed our findings in more detail in several project papers. For copies of these papers, please email Sarah Neal ([sarah.neal@surrey.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.neal@surrey.ac.uk)) or Carol Vincent ([c.vincent@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:c.vincent@ioe.ac.uk)) We will continue to analyse and write about our data.

### **2013, 'Multiculture, middle class competencies and friendship practices in super-diverse geographies', *Social and Cultural Geography* 14, 8: 909-929**

In this paper we report on a pilot project, using a small number of in-depth interviews with parents with primary school children to examine social mixing and friendship practices in two super-diverse London boroughs. In these complex geographical contexts, characterised by gentrification processes and old and new migrations, we suggest that primary schools are convergent places where adults and children from different backgrounds are likely to meet and interact. The paper explores the extent to which adults and children, thrown together in and through these sites, negotiate relationships with those who are differently socially and culturally situated to themselves. Informed by the interview narratives, the paper highlights the importance of focussing on the micro, quotidian ways in which differences in social and/or ethnic background shape those relationships and it explores some instances of the ways in which those differences are routinely encountered, managed and/or avoided. In this way, the paper contributes theoretical and empirical nuance to current concerns around difference and diversity and the interactions of complex urban populations by 'adding' social class to everyday multicultural perspectives, and everyday multicultural perspectives to urban middle class debates.

### **'Encounters with diversity: children's friendships and parental responses' (under review)**

Drawing on qualitative data provided by interviews with children and their parents, this paper analyses parents' affective responses to their children's friendships, identifying instances where parents seek to manage these friendships. We identify the importance of the 'ease of similarity' for many parents concerning their children's friendships, and the relative lack of concrete practices amongst parents to support their children's friendships across difference. We argue that the reactions we see to negotiating diversity are ways of managing anxiety. This is not to suggest a consciously anxious, alert, stressed population, but rather that many adults whilst consciously, and for the most part competently managing diverse encounters, experienced some level of anxiety about close contact with others not like themselves. Within the context of a broad acceptance of, and often stated enthusiasm for, diversity, different parents displayed different ways of negotiating difference. Some managed those who came into the house or limited the houses their children went to. For others, the private space of the home was more open, but a process of managing difference still took place, through the consignment of others not like themselves to the periphery of the social encounter, centering instead the dense networks of other 'people like me', through, for example, organising the children's out of school time. However, we conclude by also noting the value of parental support for living in super-diverse localities and children attending schools therein.

### **'Children's friendships in super-diverse localities: Encounters with social and ethnic difference (under review)**

This paper explores how children make, manage, or avoid friendships in super-diverse primary school settings. We aim to contribute to, and extend, through a focus on rapidly changing places,

the literature on children's friendships by addressing their engagement with social, cultural and ethnic diversity. We draw on interviews and pictorial data from 78 children across three local London primary schools to identify particular friendship groupings and the extent to which they followed existing patterns of social division. Children in the study did recognise social and cultural differences, but their friendship perceptions, affections, conflicts and practices meant that the way in which difference impacted on their relationships was partial and unstable; children's friendship practices and management of complex difference in the routine settings of school involved interactions across difference, as well as entrenchments around similarity. Our work chimes with Connolly's argument that young children are very much engaged in identification processes which include conceptions of ethnicity and class. In the super-diverse localities in which they lived, and were themselves constituents of, the children in the study, appeared to be able to participate across difference in proto-skilled ways, to generally mix competently and without major tensions or frequent recourse to racialization and othering. We conclude that children in the study could and did form friendships across class, ethnic and religious difference, but also that these relationships were initiated and practised on a terrain inscribed by largely unspoken, but still powerful social divisions.

### **'Children's friendships in diverse settings: primary school teachers and the processes of policy enactment' (under review)**

This paper focuses on the enactment of national and institutional policy around children's friendships as realized in three primary schools in diverse urban areas in London. Through a focus on the way in which social and emotional learning and teachers' understandings of children's friendships seek to govern children's friendship behaviours, we turn to Foucault's work to explore how power shapes relations between policy frameworks and teachers' practices, and between those who teach and those who are taught. We discuss the ways in which teachers act to support the children's relationships, but how proactive work on social and emotional learning is vulnerable to the pressures of a crowded timetable and a performative policy agenda. We also discuss the disciplinary potential of social and emotional learning and teachers' 'common sense' understandings of children's friendships, but conclude by noting possibilities for teachers to create spaces in which all children can safely explore the nature of friendships.

### **'Placing friendship: how everyday micro spaces shape friendship networks, relationships and practices in complex urban geographies' (paper in progress)**

This paper seeks to bring together current debates about difference encounter, social intimacy and place. While there is a growing literature on adult friendships (e.g. Pahl and Spencer 1999; Savage et al 2005; Smart et al 2012; Blatterer 2014) this does not tend to focus per se on social intimacy across cultural difference or the (micro) spaces and places in which friendship relations are generated and maintained. In earlier work (Neal and Vincent 2013) we note the way in which the spatial impacts on friendships in urban environments and, with Doreen Massey's (2005) concept of 'throwntogether' in mind, we use this paper to begin to think through the ways in which the 'where' of being friends is central to friendship relations given that social and personal geographies are almost invariably marked by class, gender and cultural and ethnic boundaries.

The paper explores the spatial-social interactions of friendship relationships. In particular, we consider the ways in which the built environments in which urban primary schools are located (surrounded by homes, cafes, shops, transport, parks, streets), the built environment of the primary school itself (the playground, school gates, foyers, assembly halls, parents' rooms) and the social practices of using/being in these connective public, semi public and private spaces

(playing in the park, walking to/from school, meeting in the café, negotiating the playground, the school foyer, going to others' homes, inviting others home) animate (or not) convivial etiquette, affective engagements and social intimacy (Noble 2009; Wise and Velayuthum 2009; Wilson 2013; Wise 2013; Wessendorf 2014). Our research shows that friendships and affective social networks that incorporate and cross ethnic and, to a lesser extent social, difference emerge from the rhythms, requirements and routines of being within and around the social world of primary school, but, are also avoided.

## Appendix B: References

- Amin A, (2002) 'Ethnicity and the multicultural city: living with diversity' *Environment and Planning A* 34, 959-980
- Amin, A. (2012) *Land of Strangers*. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Back, L. (1996) *New ethnicities and urban culture: Racisms and multiculturalism in young lives*. London, St Martin's Press.
- Ball S.J. (2003) *Class Strategies and the Education market*. London, RoutledgeFalmer.
- Blatterer, H. (2014) *Everyday Friendships: Intimacy as Freedom in a Complex World*. London, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Butler, T & Hamnett, C. (2011) *Ethnicity, Class and Aspiration: Understanding London's New East End*. Bristol, Policy Press.
- Butler, T. & Robson, G. (2003) *London Calling*. Oxford, Berg.
- Byrne, B. (2006) *White Lives: the interplay of 'race', class and gender in everyday life*. London, Taylor & Francis
- Byrne, B. and de Tona, C. (2014), Multicultural desires? Parental negotiation of multiculturalism and difference in choosing secondary schools for their children. *The Sociological Review*, 62: 475–493.
- Connolly, P. (1998) *Racism, Gender Identities and Young Children: Social Relations in A Multi-Ethnic, Inner-City Primary School*. London: Routledge.
- George, R. (2007). *Girls in a Goldfish Bowl: Moral regulation, ritual and the use of power amongst inner city girls*. Rotterdam, the Netherlands: Sense.
- Gilroy, P. (2004). *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* Oxfordshire: Routledge.
- Granovetter, M. (1973) The Strength of Weak Ties, *American Journal of Sociology* 78, 6: 1360-1380
- Grasseni, C. (2009) *Developing Skill, Developing Vision*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn.
- Jackson, E. & Butler, T. (2014) Revisiting 'social tectonics': The middle classes and social mix in gentrifying neighbourhoods, *Urban Studies*, published on-line 5 September
- James, A. (2013) *Socialising Children*. Basingstoke: Palgrave
- Karner C. & Parker D., (2011) Conviviality and conflict: pluralism, resilience and hope in inner-city Birmingham, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 37, 3: 355-372.
- Massey, D. (2005) *For Space*, London. Sage Publications

- Nast, J. & Blokland, T (2014) Social mix revisited: neighbourhood institutions as a setting for boundary work and social capital, *Sociology*, 48, 3: 482-499.
- Neal S., Bennett K., Cochrane, A. and Mohan, G. (2013) Living multicultural: understanding the new spatial and social relations of ethnicity and multiculturalism in England. *Environment and Planning C*, 31, 2: 308-323
- Neal, S. & Vincent, C. (2013) Multiculturalism, urban middle class competencies and friendship practices in super-diverse geographies, *Social and Cultural Geography* 14, 8: 909-929
- Noble, G. (2009) Everyday cosmopolitanism and the labour of intercultural community, in Wise, A. and Velayutham, S. (eds) *Everyday Multiculturalism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 46 –65.
- Reay, D., Crozier, G. & James, D. (2011) *White Middle Class Identities and Urban Schooling*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan
- Rollock, N., Gillborn, D., Vincent, C. & Ball, S. (2015) *The Colour of Class*. London, Routledge.
- Savage, M. Bagnall, G. & Longhurst, B. (2005) *Globalization & Belonging*. London, Sage.
- Smart, C., Davies, K., Heaphy, B. and Mason, J. (2012), Difficult friendships and ontological insecurity. *The Sociological Review*, 60: 91–109
- Spencer, L & Pahl, R. (2006) *Rethinking Friendship: Hidden Solidarities Today*. Oxford, Princeton University Press.
- Vertovec S. (2007) Super-diversity and its implications, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30: 1024-54
- Vertovec, S. (2015) (ed.) *Diversities Old and New: Migration and Socio-Spatial Patterns in New York, Singapore and Johannesburg*. London, Palgrave Macmillan
- Vincent, C., Rollock, N., Ball, S., & Gillborn, D. (2012) Intersectional work and precarious positionings: Black middle-class parents and their encounters with schools in England, *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 22:3, 259-276.
- Watt, P. (2009) Living in an oasis: middle-class disaffiliation and selective belonging in an English suburb *Environment and Planning A* 41, 2874-2892.
- Wessendorf, S. (2014) *Commonplace diversity: social relations in a super-diverse context*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Wilson, H. (2013) Collective Life: parents, playground encounters and the multicultural city. *Social and Cultural Geography* 6, 14 : 625-648.
- Wise, A & Velayutham, S. (2014) Conviviality in everyday multiculturalism: Some brief comparisons between Singapore and Sydney. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 17, 4: 406-430
- Wise, A. with Selvaraj Velayutham (2009) *Everyday Multiculturalism*. Houndsmills, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

## Appendix C - The Children's ethnicity and free school meals

	Leewood	Junction	Fernhill	
<b>Free School Meals (School)</b>	<b>19.7%</b>	<b>32.8%</b>	<b>38.7%</b>	
<b>Free School Meals (Class)</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>21.4%</b>	<b>40%</b>	
<b>Ethnicity</b>				<b>Total</b>
White British	<b>13</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	19
White Other	<b>1</b> <i>1 Albanian</i>	<b>7</b> <i>2 Cypriot, 3 Columbian, 1 Bulgarian, 1 Czech</i>	<b>3</b> <i>1 Romanian, 1 Portuguese, 1 French</i>	11
Black (African/Caribbean/Black British/Other Black)	<b>8</b> <i>3 Caribbean, 1 Somali, 3 Black African, 1 Ethiopian</i>	<b>9</b> <i>7 Black British, 2 Somali</i>	<b>9</b> <i>1 Somaliland, 2 Somali, 6 Caribbean</i>	26
South/East Asian	<b>1</b> <i>1 Indian</i>	<b>5</b> <i>3 Bangladeshi, 1 Pakistani, 1 Chinese.</i>	<b>1</b> <i>1 Indian</i>	7
Turkish/Kurdish	<b>3</b> <i>3 Turkish</i>	-	<b>2</b> <i>1 Turkish, 1 Kurdish</i>	5
Mixed	<b>4</b> <i>1 White/Caribbean, 1 Indian/Anglo Indian, 1 White/Malay, 1 Eurasian</i>	<b>2</b> <i>1 Black African /White British, 1 Greek/Jamaican</i>	<b>2</b> <i>2 Caribbean /White British</i>	8
Arab	-	<b>1</b> <i>1 Algerian</i>	<b>1</b> <i>1 Algerian</i>	2
<b>CLASS TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>78</b>

## Appendix C – The Adults’ ethnicity and social class

<b>Ethnicity*</b>	<b>Leewood School</b>	<b>Junction School</b>	<b>Fernhill School</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>White British</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>White Irish</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>White Other<sup>+</sup></b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Turkish</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Black British<sup>&amp;</sup></b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>South Asian</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Mixed</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>-</b>		<b>2</b>
<b>Arab</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Somali</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Social class<sup>bc</sup></b>				
Working class	6	4	3	13
Intermediate class	3	5	1	9
Middle class	10	5	7	22
Not enough Information	0	1	1	2

\*Ethnicity based on self-identification of parent interviewed.

<sup>+</sup>White other includes: Eastern European (e.g. Albanian, Polish, Romanian, and Czech) Other European (e.g. Greek, Finish, French, Spanish) American (North American, South American), Australian

<sup>&</sup>Black British includes: Individuals of Black African and African Caribbean descent

<sup>b</sup>Social class is according to occupation. The three class NS-SEC model has ‘middle class’ (1- higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations), ‘intermediate’ (2. Intermediate occupations) and ‘working class’ (3. - Routine and manual occupations).

<sup>c</sup> Working and Intermediate class parents are in council housing/housing association accommodation. All middle class parents are in owner occupied accommodation



