

# Communities **i**n **D**ialogue

## Citizens' Panel Forge Integrated Primary School 3 February 2016



The Forge IPS Citizens' Panel began with Principal, Neville Watson, welcoming all to the 'Communities in Dialogue' event, held during the school's 30th anniversary year.





Forge IPS Principal, Neville Watson, welcomed the range of schools, parents and community representatives who had chosen to be a part of the event. He commented on how pleased the school was that the invitation had been accepted by Holy Rosary PS, Botanic PS, Cranmore IPS, Loughview IPS, Wellington College and Lagan College.



“We are glad to be able to host this event in Forge Integrated Primary School as part of our anniversary celebrations. .... We are happy to give our children a voice as they share with us their experience of settling in to Northern Ireland and becoming a part of our school.”

Neville described how the day was intended to reinforce the core values of integrated education, within a society which was becoming increasingly diverse.

“It is hoped that by listening to our children’s experiences we will be encouraged to think about how we can best support families as they try to integrate and settle in South Belfast.”



## Introductions

Jo Scott, parent of a child at Forge IPS and news broadcaster, was introduced as the event compere and proceeded to set the event in context and to extend a further warm welcome to all gathered.







Jo described the format of the event and how it would involve hearing from Forge IPS students before participants, in small groups, would discuss their immediate reactions. Later, before small groups considered generating actions and recommendations at a school, community or individual level, there would be the opportunity to hear from an invited external panel who would answer questions about how they are supporting people from diverse backgrounds with integration and helping to counteract racism and discrimination.





## Participants

Young participants made up 51% of invited guests. They were placed in small groups alongside their peers so that they could form relationships and feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas.



Other significant individuals and groups were identified, within the wider community, who may also have an impact on the experiences of newcomer and minority ethnic students. Therefore, a range of community, statutory, voluntary and youth organisations participated as well as local political representatives and religious institutions.





An opportunity was also created for participants to address questions to an invited external panel comprising:

\*\* Principal of an integrated College

\*\* A police sergeant, with responsibility in South Belfast, working to counteract sectarianism and racism

\*\* A MLA from the Democratic Unionist Party

\*\* Chief Executive of the Polish Educational and Cultural Association



## Student Focus

To support students in feeling comfortable with the Citizens' Panel, and to ensure maximum participation, the school held the event during normal school hours, timetabling it to reflect a school day in terms of breaks. Primarily, the event was designed to give a voice to young people and explore the experience of those arriving from cultures beyond Northern Ireland to settle in the South Belfast area.

Six students, from different backgrounds, were therefore invited to give personal accounts of their experience of coming to live and study in a very different cultural and educational context. Extracts from their accounts are reproduced:



## Personal accounts



“Once in class, when I went to lift a pen, some of the children pulled their hand away, I think because I looked different. I was very sad, so I made friends with others instead. But I am really happy now and enjoy being in school.”

Soo Dhawow! This means Welcome in Somalian!

My name is ..... I am from Somalia, which is the horn of Africa. I joined Forge in 2013, and this was a special day for me. It wasn't easy because I didn't speak any English, I was nervous and shy. Sometimes I got answers right and I didn't know how!

Once in class, when I went to lift a pen, some of the children pulled their hand away, I think because I looked different. I was very sad, so I made friends with others instead. But I am really happy now and enjoy being in school. I have learnt about different cultures and I've learnt a whole new language. I know about different dresses, food and very different weather! My parents are very excited to see us gaining knowledge and experiencing new things through school. My Dad told me that other children in Somalia do not get these opportunities due to the civil wars in the country, so I feel very lucky! I would now like to introduce my sister!

**Female student from Somalia, Forge IPS**



The second presentation was given by the first presenter's sister.



"I felt uncomfortable at the start but I now feel comfortable going to school. I have two cultures and in school I learn about more cultures, dress, food and lots of other differences and similarities."



Mcficnth! I am .... from Somalia. I also started Forge in 2013, I was 6. It was special for me too. I didn't find it easy because of the language barrier, it was overwhelming. I felt uncomfortable at the start but I now feel comfortable going to school. I have two cultures and in school I learn about more cultures, dress, food and lots of other differences and similarities. We have never returned to Somalia to see our families, grandparents and cousins. But we talk to them on the phone or ipad. We still think that Somalia is home, but Belfast is home too. Thankyou.

**Female student from Somalia, Forge IPS**

"I remember being very nervous as my English wasn't too good then. Even though I was born in Northern Ireland, I had spoken Polish at home most of the time."

**P6 female student from Poland, Forge IPS**





Witamy! This is Welcome in Polish! My name is ..... and my family is from Poland, but I live in Belfast with my parents and brother.

I started Forge in 2009 in P1. I remember being very nervous as my English wasn't too good then. Even though I was born in Northern Ireland, I had spoken Polish at home most of the time. My first teacher was Mrs Foster and she was very welcoming and kind.

I got used to school quickly, and began to learn a lot of English and I like school now, apart from tests! I don't think anyone likes tests! I really like learning so that helps me with the challenges I face with language. Actually my mum is trying to teach me more Polish because I speak mostly English now, and as you can hear...I have a Northern Irish accent!

I have found that the two cultures are quite similar, but there are a few differences, e.g. I take my shoes off when I go into a house. Sometimes my family feel sad that we can't see the rest of our family regularly. My parents sometimes feel insecure and shy because of the language difference, it can be challenging, however, this has been getting easier for them.

We are proud that we have adapted to life in a new country. I feel sad occasionally when my friends say they are going to their aunties or grannies. It's something they take for granted. It might seem like such a small thing, but I don't get the chance to do that very often.

I'm looking forward to meeting children of other cultures today.

Next came a personal story from a young P5 pupil from Forge IPS whose family had come to live in Northern Ireland from Zimbabwe.

Salibonani Lonke! This means Welcome in my language that mum and I speak at home. My name is ..... My mum and Dad were both born in Zimbabwe, they moved to Northern Ireland in 2003.

I started Forge Integrated Primary School in 2012. At first it was very scary as I didn't know anything or anyone. However as time went on, I got a lot of assistance from my teachers and from my friends Joshua, Jojo and Liam.

It hasn't always been easy, it has been a new experience for me, and not what I'm normally used to. It was frightening at the start and I was often worried. However, I'm now settled and get a lot of help from my mum and teachers.

Everywhere in the world has different cultures, I've learnt that it's OK to be different as it makes us all unique. We all look different, talk different and even walk differently. Being from Zimbabwe, I know I have a different tone of speaking and at



home we eat a lot of different dishes.

My family and I are very happy living in Northern Ireland, however my mum complains about the cold weather!

**P5 male student from Zimbabwe, Forge IPS**



“Everywhere in the world has different cultures, I’ve learnt that it’s OK to be different as it makes us all unique. We all look different, talk different and even walk differently.”



Huan ying! Welcome in Chinese!

My name is ..... my family are from China, and we speak Cantonese, although my parents can speak both Mandarin and Cantonese.

I came to Forge when I was 7, at the start of P3. I had never been to an integrated school before. It was really hard to meet new people, I felt scared and different. I'm now really happy in school and have made lots of friends.

I noticed that people here use spoons for picking up food, not chopsticks! There are lots of differences, for example, food, the toys children play with, and clothing is different too! My parents decided to move from China as there were too many people there, it was a big decision for them and they had mixed emotions about moving to Belfast. When they moved then they had me, my sister and brother. There was sadness because we left family and friends behind but we knew they would come to see me in Belfast in the future.

We felt excited because we were getting to explore a new place, met new people and learn about a different culture. We got lost a few times at the start! But it is calmer here. In China if you get stuck in traffic you are there for 2 hours, in Belfast it takes 5 or 10 minutes. I really like living here now.





The final account was given by a Lagan College student.

“My parents feel happy here, however, there have been challenges due to being of a different colour that have made us anxious at times.”

12 year old female student from Zimbabwe, Lagan IC



MAWUYA (ma-u-ya).

My name is ..... and my family comes from Zimbabwe!



I started Forge in 2006, I remember on the first day I made new friends and met all the staff! I always enjoyed playing at the sandpit and playing outside on the bikes and scooters!

It was so easy for me to make many friends, it was very exciting and I was a bit worried but then I realised I had nothing to be worried about!

The differences I notice between the cultures are food, festivals, art, music and traditions! In Zimbabwe Sadza (made from maize mill) is our main dish whereas here it is potatoes and we call people by their last name whereas here we call people by their first name.

My parents feel happy here however there have been challenges due to being of a different colour that have made us anxious at times. At the same time my parents have met very lovely people who have become our good friends. Since Zimbabwe was once a British colony and English being widely used it wasn't such a big challenge to integrate with the local communities.

The sharing of personal accounts finished with a short video, made by two Hazelwood Integrated College students, which highlighted the extent and impact of stereotyping and labelling which they had experienced since moving to Northern Ireland. They stressed how resilient they had become, through the support of school, but remarked on how negative labels would always follow them. This video was shown only to the parents and post-primary group but not to the primary pupils (due to concerns expressed by the Principal about the strong language represented within it).

## **Discussion Groups, Reflections and Recommendations**

Following the personal accounts from students, participants divided into facilitated working groups to openly discuss their thoughts on the issues which had been raised by the young speakers and to generate some ideas for supporting young people from newcomer and minority ethnic groups with the process of integration through recommendations at personal, school and community levels. The participants were taken through a facilitated process of exploring initial thoughts and making sure everyone's voice was heard, before thinking more deeply about the issues raised.

The small group format allowed for increased involvement from participants to ensure all were given an opportunity to speak. The experienced facilitator in each group also recorded group thoughts in summary form.

The primary discussion focused on initial introductions followed by thoughts generated on the immediate impact of hearing the students' personal stories.



## Initial thoughts

'Eye opening', 'being worried', 'feeling different', were just some of the phrases used to describe an immediate reaction on hearing the young people's stories. One participant noted "I will remember that some people pulled their hands away rather than touch different coloured skin. I found it shocking and nasty. If it happened to us we would feel strange, confused, lonely, like we didn't belong – extremely sad."

There was a lot of admiration expressed for the young speakers who confidently shared their personal narratives. Their parents were also present and articulated considerable pride in their children being able to stand up and speak so confidently and were appreciative that the school had given them the opportunity to do so. This led to the parents expressing positivity about Forge IPS and, generally, about integrated education, highlighting its important contribution to NI society. It was acknowledged that the young people's stories, and the 'Humaneyes' video, were very effective in terms of highlighting challenges experienced by newcomer families.

The Humaneyes video had a tremendous impact in touching on the harsher realities which all parents of children from minority backgrounds recognised as being real. Parents spoke about appreciating that Forge IPS was involved in a process of creating a positive, protected environment for their children from diverse backgrounds. However, they commented on how important it was that their children were prepared for the realities of life and able to contend with those in a resilient way. They felt that their children should have been exposed to the Humaneyes video (this comment initially came from the mother of the youngest child who presented and all the parents agreed with her statement). The point was made that their children hear and experience these comments outside school and, seeing the video and hearing



everyone in the room reaffirm how wrong and inappropriate such negative language is, would have had a positive rather than a detrimental impact on their children. As one parent commented: "it is important that we make our children resilient in the face of dehumanising language"



It was articulated, in each group, that experiences such as those spoken about could lead to young people feeling 'socially isolated' and that a lack of English language, in the early days, could cause communication barriers, exacerbating the problem. Some of the young participants were particularly struck by the difficulties created by a lack of English language skills.

All groups gave some consideration to why local responses could be so negative and aggressive. This led to a sharing of some personal experiences of hostility with one young boy speaking about having eggs thrown at his house and a few other children referencing examples of racism and hate crimes happening in their street. It was suggested that: "People from minority backgrounds are vulnerable and an easy target" while another explanation offered was, "local people are uneducated about different backgrounds." It was acknowledged widely that, unfortunately, discrimination and racism are widespread and the parents of children from minority backgrounds spoke of trying to overcome that and dispel myths and misconceptions, on a daily basis.

The Humaneyes video had raised the issue of myths leading to adult participants articulating feelings of disappointment at the anger generated through unfair representation in the media, leading to cries of 'they are stealing our jobs, benefits, homes!' Another participant, working in a relevant area, spoke of the misinformation in the wider community about how homes are allocated, on the basis of a points



system. He said it was factually incorrect that newcomers received additional points making them move faster up the waiting list for homes. It was thought important that such misconceptions should be consistently challenged by all those in a position to do so within the local community.

Each group was then then prompted to give thought to what might need to happen to increase feelings of being welcomed and included, in order that young people could thrive socially and academically. Some of the young people presented their views: '....Need to respect others from different countries and cultures' and 'treat others as you would like to be treated yourself .' One of the primary pupils also added, "It doesn't matter that you look different. Skin is like a wrapping paper. It's just a cover on the outside."

Towards the end of this session, groups were also facilitated to come up with a question for an invited, external panel who had been participants in the small groups.

### **The external Panel**

Each small group generated one key question for the external panel which was comprised of the following representatives:

**Amanda McNamee, Principal of Lagan College**

**Sergeant Brian McLaren, PSNI**

**Emma Pengelly MLA, DUP**

**Barbara Snowarska, Chair of the Polish Educational and Cultural Association**



A selection of the generated questions were put to the panel by Jo Scott..



**Q. What are politicians doing to help newcomers settle in NI?**

With a supplementary question: **Why can't adults make friends as easily as children?** (Question from a primary school children's group)

**Emma Pengelly**

The DUP MLA referenced the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister's strategy 'Together Building a United Community' and how it placed an emphasis on everyone working and playing together in order to stomp out hate, prejudice and stereotypes. She said that examples of activities coming under this strategy were sport and fun events which may encourage the development of new friendships. Also free English lessons for refugees.

In relation to the supplementary question, she said that adults often have other priorities, in terms of going to work and paying bills, which can get in the way of making new friends and having fun. She suggested that one way of counteracting this would be to run lots of community events and activities in community venues, ranging from yoga classes to coffee clubs. She said that unfortunately some people don't make new connections without effort and, therefore, she suggested the children encourage their mums and dads to engage in these sorts of community activity.



**Q. How is your organisation helping members of ethnic minorities fit in within our local communities and have your efforts been effective?**

**Barbara Snowarska**

As Chair of the Polish Educational and Cultural Association NI, Barbara explained that the Polish Saturday School had been established to support the Polish community and also those children from mixed backgrounds (having one Polish parent and a parent of another nationality). The project had been established because of the importance of nurturing the language and culture that Polish people had come from. Maintaining bi-lingualism was encouraged because of the importance of preserving identity. Barbara underlined that while integration was thought important, PECA also provided opportunities for Polish people to meet and share important aspects of their culture.



Barbara stressed the open nature of all PECA events, where everyone was welcome to join in and people from other cultures were encouraged to participate, such as at Christmas or when PECA took an active role in the annual MELA.

Apart from Polish classes for children, the PECA runs English and Irish language lessons and are in the development stages of establishing language classes for local Northern Irish people who are interested in learning Polish.

Additionally, advice clinics and PECA's representation role, engaging with other organisations and public bodies, was necessary. Barbara summarized PECA's overall purpose as being to develop a sense of belonging for Polish people residing in NI. She said they were trying to encourage civic involvement and facilitate people



in understanding how institutions work and ways of influencing them in order to have their needs met.

**Q. Should shared and integrated education take more account of the reality that Northern Ireland is increasingly multi-cultural?**

**Amanda McNamee**

Amanda described her role as Principal of Lagan College, the first integrated school in NI which was established in 1981. She said integrated education was based on the fundamental principles of respect for diversity and developing an understanding of people who differ from us in various ways. She said her school's ethos and her own philosophy were very much grounded in the belief that we have to explore together and that an important part of our learning is in finding out about the different aspects of our backgrounds etc. While the foundations of integrated education were rooted in Protestant and Catholic, she noted that Lagan went beyond that to explore other aspects of identity and equality and that she would like to see shared education being about more than just that. Ideally, differences in socio-economic background, family units, religion, race and nationality would be explored and embraced by more schools.



**Q. What can be done to stop people doing things like throwing eggs at our houses? How can they be stopped? (question from the primary students)**

**Sergeant Brian McLaren**

The PSNI neighbourhood sergeant said this was a good question because, unfortunately, this happens a lot in South Belfast. In fact he went on to describe an actual example of a family, from a minority background, who had experienced eggs being thrown at their windows several times over a period of months. He acknowledged it was difficult to identify people and combat the crime because these incidents happen quickly and the culprits run away immediately. However, he underlined the importance of homeowners reporting these incidents and, in this case, information was gathered from the homeowner who informed them that these incidents always occurred after 9pm at night..

Due to the repetitive nature of this crime, the police decided to go to the local convenience store and asked if they could check their CCTV to find out if there was someone buying eggs in the period just before 9pm, on the nights in question. They discovered the same two / three young people purchasing eggs. Once these young people had been identified, the police visited their parents to explain the situation and then went into their school where they gave presentations to the whole school body, to educate them about the penalties for engaging in such activity. Subsequently, the egg throwing stopped completely.



Sergeant McLaren reiterated that this should carry a message of reassurance as although such crimes would be considered low level they are still taken seriously and investigated fully with the aim of stopping such behaviour.



**Q. What are you doing together to try and make our communities better places and more welcoming to people coming to Northern Ireland?**

**Amanda McNamee**

At Lagan College all children are made to feel proud of their own cultural identity. The school is developed as an environment where all children should feel safe to express and be open about who they are. They are encouraged to talk about their learning which is experienced through meeting those from different cultural backgrounds, who may speak different home languages and have very different backgrounds. Lagan currently has 33 different home languages spoken and it is the school's aim to celebrate those cultures in a meaningful way. Having taken part in today's event, the school would like to connect more with intercultural and community organizations, such as the Polish Educational and Cultural Association.

**Sergeant Brian McLaren**

The PSNI combat all forms of hate crime and are keen to pursue prosecutions. They see it as extremely important that victims are supported and will, therefore, follow up on all incidents and treat them seriously. At times this may mean engaging with other bodies to also provide victim support.

Hate crime is a priority for the police and where the greatest prevalence of hate crimes were sectarian, in the past, there is now a huge increase in racist hate crime. Consequently, the PSNI are undergoing training in this area to improve their skills as it is important that all communities should feel safe in their own homes.

**Emma Pengelly**

The role of government is to co-ordinate and support the work of other bodies and organisations to ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland is included and that also means incomers. For example, the government works closely with the police to stop negative things from happening. Emma stressed that politicians can convey very clear public statements to indicate that some things are wrong.

She also spoke of the need to work with education and health to ensure relevant support is available and provided to newcomers.

Finally, Emma suggested that when community organisations apply for funding they should consider how they can include elements in their proposal which will meet the needs of the different communities which reside in Northern Ireland.

Emma finished by reminding everyone that politicians listen to children as well as adults and encouraged all participants to connect with their local elected representatives if they were experiencing any problems.

**Barbara Snowarska**

As Chair of PECA, Barbara stated that engagement with other community organisations was important. PECA itself aimed to make people more able, and a

part of society, through increasing their knowledge and providing them with opportunities for friendships. This encouraged them to settle and was vital in a situation where other family members are not around.

**A range of additional questions were generated by the small groups but there wasn't time to put these to the panel.**

They are listed below:

Q. What can we (school children) do to support diversity?

Q. How welcoming do you feel Northern Ireland really is?

Q. What do you struggle with most in working with and for minority ethnic communities?

Q. How do you, in your role, model the type of behaviour and attitudes necessary to promote social integration?

Q. How are you trying to help welcome people in your community? Have you heard of the work of Oasis and the Inbetweeners?

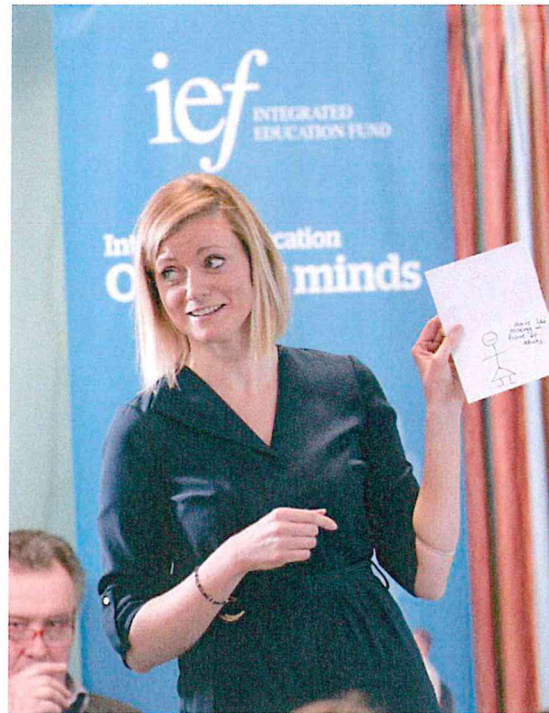
Q. In your line of work, how do you and your organization prevent and tackle racism and hate crime and abuse?

## **Exploring Identity & Diversity Workshop**

Principal, Neville Watson, and Forge IPS teacher and EAL co-ordinator, Sara Gowan, introduced an active workshop exploring identity and diversity. This was designed to encourage everyone to think a little more deeply about their own identity, learn about others identities and express some positive thoughts about diversity, in a creative way.

This process involved each participant drawing an outline of themselves and writing words around the outside of that outline, on the front of a piece of card, which described the visible aspects of their identity, which could already be observed by everyone. Following this, on the inside of the card, they were told to replicate the image of themselves and add important facts about themselves which were not necessarily apparent to others. These details should reflect everything which they considered dear to them.





The identity cards were voluntarily placed on a wall display and everyone was encouraged to read them. Each group also expressed their positive thoughts about diversity, with individual, inspirational messages written onto bands of ribbon.





It was hoped that such positivity would permeate the air, like the tradition of Tibetan prayers, displayed as bunting at the peak of mountains in Tibet.



The intention was that, following such an interactive, creative workshop, participants would be ready to think about positive actions which could be taken forward at a school, community and individual level.







## **Actions and Recommendations**

The final facilitated discussion engaged participants in generating recommendations which could be initiated by 'school' and 'community' to help young people from minority groups feel welcomed and included.

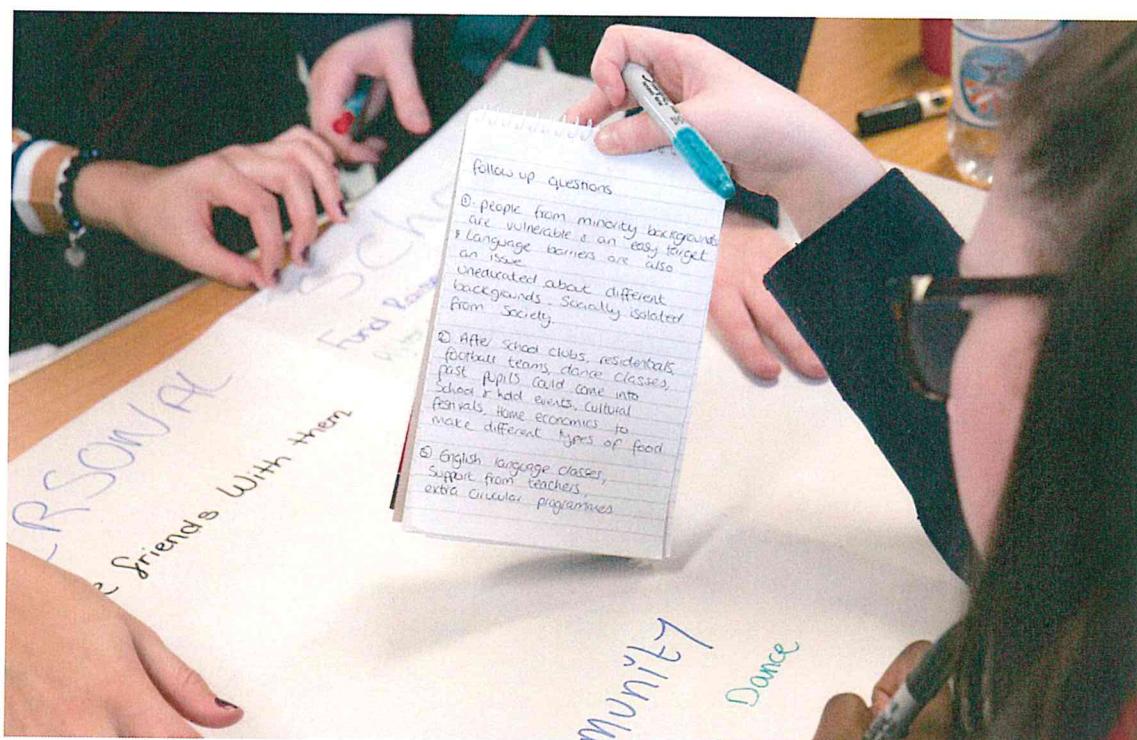
### **School**

Since several schools were represented at the event, suggestions were made for how a school of any management type could encourage young people from minority backgrounds to feel welcome and included.

There were numerous thoughts as to how schools could visibly become more open and inclusive in order to "make it normal and everyday to learn about other cultures." It was proposed that 'further integration' should be encouraged through "after school clubs, residentials, football and dance classes." Also it was widely suggested that it would be beneficial to hold a culture day, such as a Polish day, within the school or a series of days dedicated to exploration of different cultures. Doing this between schools was also popular, as one of the pupil groups recommended, "schools need to organise days when young people from different schools and backgrounds can mix and where adults can make friends." It was also thought that past pupils should be invited back into school in order to facilitate or support such events. There was a particular reference made to the importance of learning more about Islam and its relevance to the life of Muslims. It was proposed that involving parents in giving insight into this would be a positive step.



There was praise for Forge Integrated Primary School, from newcomer parents, and appreciation that the school was trying to do its best, for their children, in relation to diversity and equality. The positive impact of integrated education, more widely, was also underlined. The importance of schools tackling real issues was underlined, as one participant put it: "There is great impact in schools tackling issues that affect communities – networking people who are experiencing the same issues and difficulties is a very positive approach and this event should be repeated". The call of the 'Communities in Dialogue: Citizens' Panel' approach to be rolled out again was echoed through a number of groups, as expressed in the words of another group member: "Most people at this event are of a like mind and a school running an event such as this sends out a powerful message that racism and hate are totally unacceptable."



"Most people at this event are of a like mind and a school running an event such as this sends out a powerful message that racism and hate are totally unacceptable ....."

It was felt that schools should always have an up-to-date anti-bullying policy and that it should specifically reference racism. Ensuring that issues of racism and discrimination are dealt with, in a learning context amongst pupils, was also thought to be crucial. It was proposed that through classroom discussion and workshops schools should teach pupils to respect that people are different. A participant in one group commented: "anti-racism should be embedded through education and



curriculum – schools should be doing this – taking on an action role.” The post-primary student group made specific reference to how the Humaneyes video could be used to raise awareness. This video was also mentioned by the group involving parents from newcomer and minority ethnic backgrounds. They mentioned how, at future events, they would like their primary age children to be exposed to the Humaneyes video (a comment which initially came from the mother of the youngest child who presented and all the parents agreed with her statement). The point was made that their children hear and experience these comments outside school and seeing the video, and hearing everyone in the room reaffirm how wrong and inappropriate such negative language is, would have had a positive rather than a detrimental impact on their children. These parents felt it was important to make their children resilient in the face of de-humanising language.

Language challenges and appropriate means of tackling them was a recurring theme. Additional, appropriate English language support from teachers was highlighted as well as the need for extra English language classes while also acknowledging the bi-lingual benefits of maintaining fluency in the language of home.



The power and importance of using appropriate language was also discussed. One parent mentioned that their child was somewhat confused when someone described them as ‘black’ in the street and asked about this as their ‘teacher’ in school had said they were brown rather than black. The parent said this had created a dilemma or sorts as ‘black’ is the appropriate terminology and makes reference to black history, culture, politics etc. As this is very important to the parent, with regard to identity, they had been unsure whether or not to speak to the school as they fully understood that this was an attempt by school staff to be polite. There was additional discussion about language and the power of language. It was suggested that staff training around language, ethnicity and culture, for all staff in every school, would be beneficial.



There were numerous recommendations related to parents. Most suggestions centred on creating opportunities for integration as it was thought that schools could arrange more occasions for families from diverse backgrounds to mix. As one participant commented: “our children have formed friendships and it would be positive if parents could do the same and the school could help with that.” This might involve extending an intercultural day or evening to parents or broadening the range of cultural focus and having events dedicated to individual cultures. Newcomer parents could be invited to run events which allow them to showcase their home countries and provide local parents with a chance to interact and learn more at a deeper level. Alternatively, parents could be included through invitations to speak to pupils and parents about, for example, a day in their cultural and religious life.

Schools engaging with the wider parent body in order to raise awareness about the impact of racism was considered beneficial. To emphasise this point one person commented that when there is an outbreak of head lice in a school, every parent receives a letter asking them to assist by taking action to eradicate the head lice infestation. This person asked the question: “are racist incidents more damaging than head lice, leaving a deeper impact on the young people who are subjected to them? Should a school find a way of informing all parents and ask them to counteract the potential for racist thinking or behaviour in their children?” This participant felt that due attention should be paid to counteracting thoughts and behaviour which have the power to leave deep scars.

Recommendations were given for how schools could engage actively in challenging prejudice and discrimination in the wider community. Apart from running an event such as the Communities in Dialogue Citizens’ Panel it was also proposed that all schools in the area should engage more with Ballynaveigh Community Association with its focus on helping with integration, celebrating diversity and supporting victims of hate crime.

“All schools in the area should engage more with Ballynaveigh Community Association with its focus on helping with integration, celebrating diversity and supporting victims of hate crime.”



## Community

Many suggestions made reference to the Ormeau Road community and the actions which could be taken, or services which could be better utilized, within the area. The activity organized by Ballynafeigh Community Association was given particular mention. It was suggested that the association could create more linkages between families through its programme of activities, events and festivals. A representative from the association noted how positive it was that currently 20 – 30% of families taking part in Ballynafeigh Community Association fun days were from minority ethnic backgrounds. The importance of these families participating, and gaining visibility, was stressed. It was further noted that when a diverse range of families take part, racist comments will sometimes be made and it is important that such occasions happen so that racism can be challenged. Creating conditions where dialogue occurs was thought to be essential.

Community centres were considered to be natural environments for facilitating cultural awareness sessions to help newcomers settle in and to foster a 'sense of belonging'. Extending a hand of welcome could be initiated through leafleting in the locality while identifying local people who could act as newcomer contact / liaison neighbours would be a more personal approach.



Some participants expressed concern about the local population's lack of knowledge and awareness of the culture and background of new communities. It was suggested that positive images and narratives of newcomers could be as part of a poster campaign and that this could be linked to social media. It was thought that perhaps this campaign could be dedicated to encouraging the indigenous population to attend workshops providing insight into the main minority communities in NI. One of the primary groups proposed that local people should visit the Chinese Welfare Association and learn a new language and they felt it was important to "get adults out

to make friends and meet up.” Moreover the Indian Community Centre should encourage more people to celebrate festivals such as Diwali. To reciprocate it was mentioned that more effort should be dedicated to opening up local festivals, such as Christmas celebrations, with a message that everyone is welcome.

An emphasis was placed on the improved role that various institutions could play, in working together, to counteract racism. Churches, charities, the PSNI and libraries were all encouraged to be more co-ordinated in their efforts and supportive of newcomers. Politicians received specific mention as it was felt they “should act as role models and raise positive awareness within communities” and one pupil group made reference to how “the First Minister needs to set an example.” This was reinforced by the thoughts of other participants who spoke of politician having “a disdain and disregard for difference.” It was felt that “politicians must start to lead the way rather than worrying about tribal loyalties and being re-elected by demonising those who are different and think differently.”

“Within NI, in politics, there is a disdain /  
disregard for difference. The principles of  
integrated education should be applied widely  
throughout the education system and within  
public life. Politicians must start to lead the  
way rather than worrying about tribal loyalties  
and being re-elected by demonising those who  
are different and think differently.”

There was also discussion about how the media often play a negative role and are not helpful in perpetuating negativity and stereotyping. One group participant provided an example: “ignorance is often fostered by inaccurate information giving and reporting by the media, such as ‘migrants are stealing our jobs’. These stereotypes must be challenged consistently by those with more insight. For example, the huge contribution made to the health service locally by nursing staff from the Phillippines.” It was felt that the local media should report on positive stories and play their part in dispelling myths.

It was believed that considerable work would be required with local media in order to sensitize them to the needs of newcomers and how their reporting could be detrimental to integration within the community. Part of their education should be around use of language with an example was provided of the negative perception created about the word ‘immigrant’ The participant who referenced this asked the group to note the different perceptions of the word ‘expatriate’ compared to



'immigrants' or 'migrants'. This would mean encouraging media to consciously change their language to avoid creating hysteria, such as with regard to the small number of Syrian refugees actually coming to the UK.

## Note to Self

Facilitators requested a recording of some final actions by each participant. The participants wrote 'a note to self' which the Principal agreed to send to them some weeks later as a reminder of their pledge to take action. In their 'note to self' they recorded what they had learned which would encourage them do things differently in the future and contribute to making their school or community a more welcoming place. A sample of expressed thoughts and actions, from adult and pupil participants, are outlined below as they agreed to take action to help newcomers with the process of integration:

"In future, I will defend anyone experiencing name calling, verbal or physical abuse"

"...I will try to make newcomers feel welcome – make friends and show them around..."

"Without friends school wouldn't be fun. I will remember that and be kinder"

"I will consider ethnic minority groups feelings in the future"

"I will remember the nasty name calling and be more considerate to others"

"I will personally start to challenge racism and discrimination"

"I will speak to someone I have not talked to before in the playground"

"I will try to dispel myths and misconceptions on a daily basis"

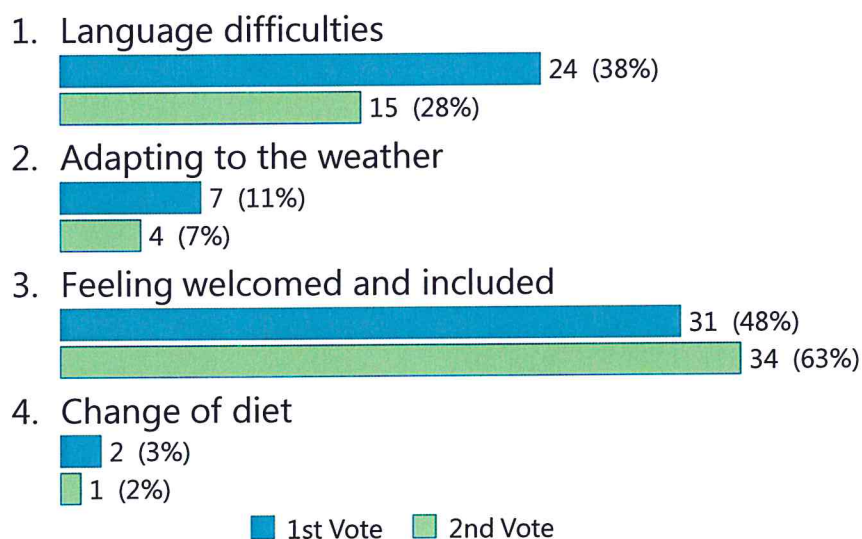
## “I will treat others as I wish to be treated myself”

Participant desire to be inclusive and to take action to counter racism was also reflected through the live poll which was conducted, by Lucid Talk, at the beginning and end of the day.

Primarily, it is interesting to note that the event had some impact on people's perceptions of the greatest barrier experienced by newcomer and minority ethnic people to Northern Ireland as 63% of participants recognised 'feeling welcomed and included' as most important at the end of the day compared to 48% at the beginning of the day. There appears to have been a realisation by some that while 'language difficulties' are pertinent, they are often less so than being made to feel welcome. This was indicated by a 10% decrease in the choice of 'language difficulties'.

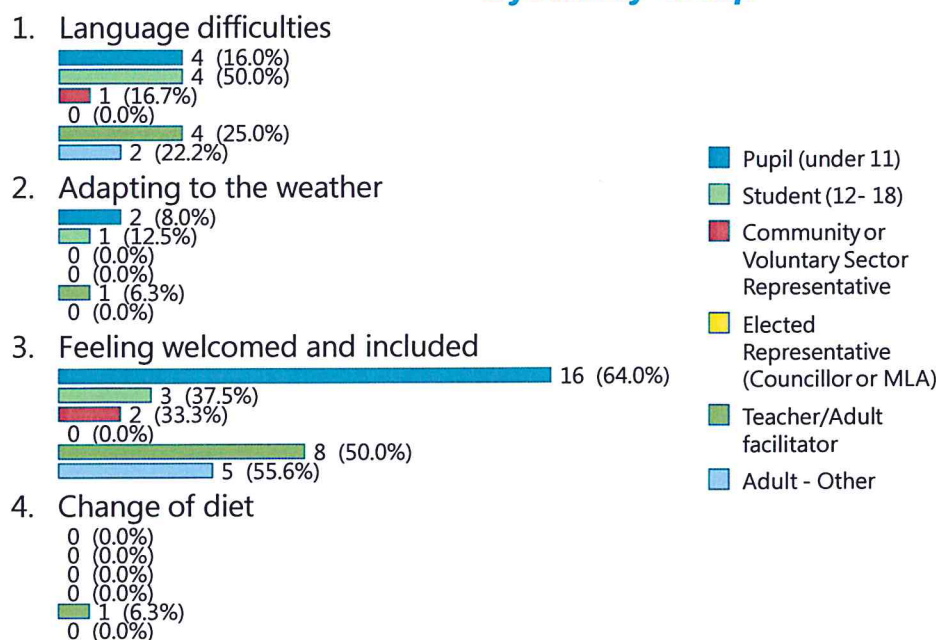


### *What do you now think is the greatest barrier newcomers experience when they come to NI? – Before and After*





**What do you now think is the greatest barrier newcomers experience when they come to NI?**  
– By Activity Group

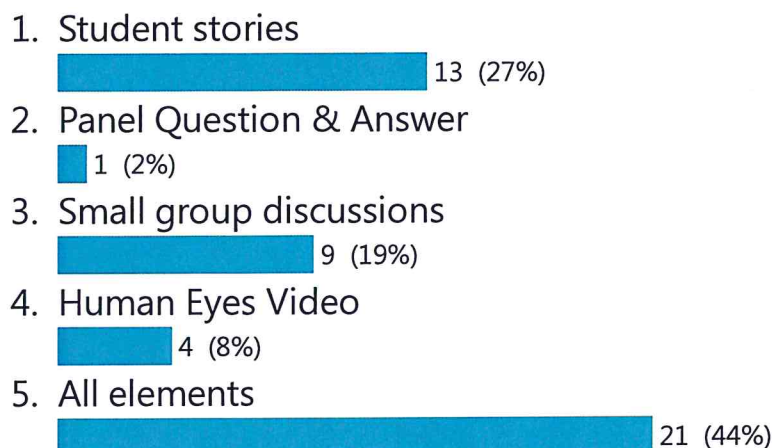


The diagram above shows that 64% of under 11 years olds recognised the importance of 'feeling welcomed and included' by the close of the event compared to 40% at the beginning. This is particularly interesting as 76% at the opening of the day acknowledged having close friends from minority ethnic backgrounds. Indeed, their appreciation of the importance of being included replaced a belief that language presented the most important obstacle for 20% of those primary school children who attended the event (falling from 36% of under 11 year olds to 16% in the second vote). This appears to demonstrate considerable understanding and empathy being generated as a consequence of the event.

The empathy seems to have been created by a combination of the different elements of the day, as indicated by 44%, although listening to the student's personal stories certainly stood out for 27% of those gathered.

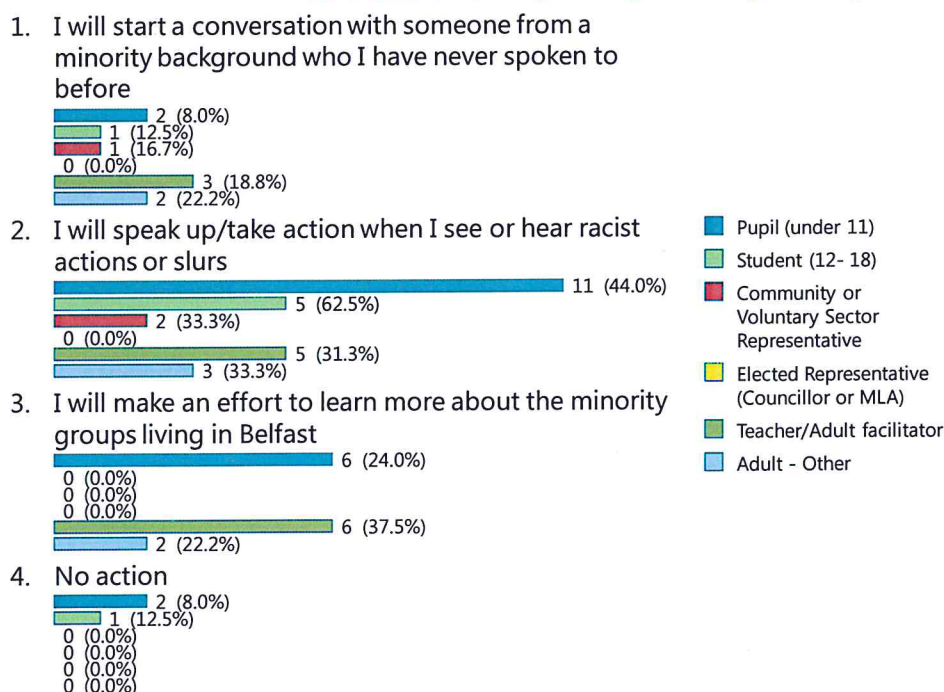
## What element of the programme impacted on you most?

Vote Now



Moreover, beyond creating empathy, the event also encouraged young people to be up-standers, rather than bystanders, with 44% or under 11s and 62.5% 12-18s pledging to 'speak up / take action when I see or hear racist actions or slurs.'

## What action will you take as a result of today? – By Activity Group



An additional 24 % of under 11s pledged to make an effort to learn more about minority groups living in Belfast.





The event ended with Principal, Neville Watson, thanking the Open Society for funding the initiative and the Integrated Education Fund for facilitating the Citizens' Panel and congratulating his staff on making the event so successful. Paul Caskey, Campaign Director with the IEF, was invited to say a few words and congratulated the school on such a successful event.

**"The IEF is proud to support Forge Integrated Primary School in placing such importance on promoting equality and tackling racial prejudice and discrimination. Congratulations to all who have participated today and shared your thoughts on making this community more welcoming and inclusive...."**

**Paul Caskey  
IEF Campaign Director**

The school choir provided a fitting end to the day and invited guests and all participants were also thanked by the Principal for their participation and contributions, as the event was drawn to a close.



## **Appendices**

**Appendix 1:** Forge IPS Citizens' Panel publicity leaflet

**Appendix 2:** Facilitator Notes for Small Group Discussions

**Appendix 3:** Results of Forge IPS Citizens' Panel Live Poll





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