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Mount Pleasant Junior School
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Social Cohesion Project

Mount Pleasant Junior is an inner city school with a high ethnic intake. The pupils are from first, second and third generation immigrants mainly from the Asian sub-continent. The largest percentage is Pakistani, Bengali and Indian and in recent years from Somalia and Poland. We also have a smaller number of children from Iran, Iraq and Eastern Europe. The largest religious group in the school is Muslims and we have a smaller but significant number of Sikhs. Many of the children live in extended family groups and consequently experience a high degree of stability. Numbers and composition of any class fluctuate considerably during their four years at Mount Pleasant.

We were paired with a white, Christian school from Hedge End that, even though it is only a few miles away, is in a leafy suburb and different social conditions. It is a smaller primary school with only one class in each year group. At the moment it is housed in a sixties building that is being replaced this summer with a new complex in the present school's grounds. Mount Pleasant is a Vast Victorian building, with high ceilings and spacious halls. We have large concrete playgrounds and an all weather pitch, whereas King's Copse has an enormous field and many trees on its site.

The project has been very worthwhile. The children have enjoyed meeting pupils from another area and with such different backgrounds. We were worried that our students might feel inferior in some way but they didn't, and actually it developed their sense of pride in the school and a stronger sense of identity. The question of colour just did not arise, it was all about individual personalities and whether the person was likable or had anti-social traits. They were curious about the other children but really it was to find out if they shared favourite pop-stars, football teams and liked the same chocolate bars. They realised that the children from King's Copse had more pets but accepted that some went to church every Sunday, to them it is normal to worship regularly. We think that a very few pupils from Mount Pleasant could have behaved more appropriately but again any remarks from King's Copse children about them was directed at specific people and no derogatory remarks were made about colour or religion.

We would like to continue our link with King's Copse and have discussed the possibility of the project becoming a regular part of the year 6 curriculum. However, both schools agree that running the project throughout the Autumn and Spring term has added a lot of pressure to the timetable and planning time for the teachers involved. Consequently we have decided that next school year the two schools will repeat the sequence of lessons and meetings but after the Sats tests in May. We would book visits well ahead of time and condense the project into half a term. We think that the exploration of the idea of difference and similarities and looking for common ground would be very useful just before the students transfer to secondary school. It will make them aware of the wider world and the different types of people they would meet when they start year 7.