

**MEMORANDUM TO THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING OF
LEEDS CITY COUNCIL ON 18 APRIL 2007 FROM MEMBERS
OF SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITY LANGUAGES SUPPORT
GROUP**

Honourable Lord Mayor and respected Councillors.

Good afternoon! My name is Abdul Quddus. I along with my four colleagues Mr. Ujjal Singh Ryatt, Mr. Prem Singh Duggal and Mrs. Santosh Kaur Ryatt are here to make a representation on behalf of all South Asian communities in Leeds.

We are deeply concerned about the lack of appropriate structure and support to maintain quality teaching provision of South Asian community languages e.g. Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali and Gujarati in different schools in this multiracial, multilingual and multicultural city of Leeds from September this year. The community language provision in Leeds schools was the result of a series of discussions, debates and negotiations between the representatives of various South Asian communities and the former Education Department of Leeds City Council. However, in recent times we have observed the tendency of undermining the need and quality of provision compared to other European languages e.g. French, German and Spanish. This is evident from the fact that Education Leeds failed to replace the co-ordinator of languages after the retirement of the previous post-holder. Not only that in recent months the team is being managed by an administrative staff who do not have any requisite qualification and expertise of community language teaching. Finally, we are shocked to learn that Education Leeds has served redundancy notices to all the community language teachers thereby virtually dismantling the provision without any prior consultation with the local South Asian communities. This outrageous decision has caused anger, frustration and disappointment amongst the members of local South Asian communities who constitute approximately 5% of total population in Leeds.

This is now almost a universally acceptable view that teaching of community languages not only helps in maintaining culture and heritage, and building self-confidence and positive image of bilingual pupils; it also enhances their achievement level in education. There are ample evidences that grades obtained in community languages are relatively high thereby raising the overall educational performances of bi-lingual children. Given that a significant proportion of bilingual children are under achieving in Leeds schools and there is gross under-representation of teachers from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, the decision to get rid of those teachers are completely unacceptable to the members of South Asian communities.

In addition to educational argument, there are other valid reasons for maintaining community language teaching provision in schools: There is a substantial population of South Asian origins in Leeds. Learning of community languages help in maintaining close links with their countries of origins and in developing not only cultural but also commercial links which would be of great mutual benefits in this days of globalisation.. It also helps in improving intergenerational and intercommunity communication helping in enhancing community cohesion. Moreover, it helps Education Leeds and the Leeds City Council to meet their obligations under various legislations including Race Relations Amendment Act and the F U directives. While the DFES has decided to introduce the learning of modern foreign languages (including Urdu, Mandarin and Arabic) at the primary level from the year 2010, Education Leeds has been taking diametrically opposite actions with regards to community languages in Leeds schools. The claim by Education Leeds that individual schools would make their own arrangements in maintaining community languages teaching provision is not valid. It is understood that Head teachers of schools who are the major users of the services of the community language team were in favour of existing arrangements. It is also a matter of great concern that schools having a relatively small number of children from South Asian backgrounds will find it difficult to appoint staff to teach community languages.

Leeds is one of the most vibrant cities with cultural diversity and South Asian communities have made significant contribution towards its economy and culture.. In the past City Council's actions to improve educational provision particularly for Black and Minority Ethnic children have been applauded and greatly appreciated by all quarters. Unfortunately, all those great works are now being undone by Education Leeds to the horror and dismay of the local South Asian communities. We therefore, urge you to exert your influence and authority to reverse the decision of Education Leeds thereby continuing the services of the community language team in delivering teaching of community languages in Leeds schools.

Yours faithfully,

Abdul Quddus

Ujjal Singh Ryatt

Prem Singh Duggal

Mrs. Santosh Kaur Ryatt

On behalf of South Asian Community Languages Support Group
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