

# Understanding School Readiness: Insights from Parents of Minority Ethnic Children

A Report Commissioned by Making Manchester Fairer and Flying Start  
and produced by the Ethnic Health Forum

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**MAKING  
MANCHESTER  
FAIRER**



## Preface

*This report is the result of a collaborative effort to understand better the complex issue of school readiness from the perspective of parents in Rusholme, Manchester. As researchers at the Research Capacity & Capability Programme (RCCP) at the Ethnic Health Forum, our work has always been guided by a commitment to community-led insights. This project, commissioned by the Making Manchester Fairer initiative, allowed us to engage directly with the very people at the heart of the matter.*

*The findings in this document stem from rich and open information collected during a survey and discussions with parents of children from Heald Place Primary School. We aimed to create a safe space for parents to share their experiences, concerns, and hopes for their children's education. Their stories provide a powerful and essential counterpoint to traditional data and statistics.*

*We wish to extend our deepest gratitude to the parents who so generously gave their time and shared their experiences with us. Without their openness, this report would not have been possible.*

*It is our sincere hope that this report will serve as a foundational document for future policy and practice, ensuring that all children in Manchester are given the tools they need to thrive.*

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*Ethnic Health Forum*

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## Executive Summary

This report explains what we learnt from a detailed study about why children from minority ethnic families at Heald Place Primary School, Rusholme, Manchester, might be less ready for school than their peers. Working with Manchester City Council, the Ethnic Health Forum (EHF) conducted a survey of 44 parents and held in-depth group discussions with Pakistani, Middle Eastern, and Somali parents to gain a deeper understanding of the issue.

We found that while most parents from minority ethnic backgrounds had a clear understanding of the importance of child play and emotional well-being, they were unfamiliar with the educational term '**School Readiness**'. We found that being "school-ready" is not just about academic skills, such as knowing the alphabet; it's a complex and deeply personal concept for these communities, and parents are highly involved and care deeply about their children's development. They are actively teaching their children at home, combining academic lessons with moral and religious values. The main reasons children may not be ready for school are not a lack of effort from parents, but rather a combination of other factors related to a child's emotional health, language barriers, and other systemic difficulties.

Our key findings indicate that a child's emotional and social skills, including their confidence, interaction with peers, and ability to express their feelings, are the most crucial factors for school readiness. However, these skills are often hindered by larger issues, such as a persistent lack of language support for both children and parents, a sense that the school doesn't fully acknowledge their culture, and inadequate assistance for children with special educational needs. The report highlights that while academic skills are important, a child's feeling of belonging and emotional security in school is what matters the most.

Based on the evidence, we offer key recommendations for policymakers, schools and early years education providers. We recommend investing in culturally competent programs that teach children emotional skills and support parents, ensuring these initiatives are accessible and relevant to the community. Additionally, school readiness measurement tools should be restructured and adapted to reflect cultural differences. Furthermore, we suggest hiring more bilingual and culturally-aware staff to help bridge communication gaps, strengthening parent-led community groups to create vital hubs for support, and expanding culturally sensitive health and wellness programs to include better support for children with special needs. These insights suggest that school readiness is as much about cultural gender roles as it is about child development. If boys appear "less ready," it may reflect how they've been socialised, and not a lack of capacity.

The main takeaway is that effective solutions must be created in partnership with these communities to build trust, empower parents, and fix the system-wide problems that currently hinder a child's successful start to school.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Ethnic Health Forum and the “Making Manchester Fairer” Efforts

The Ethnic Health Forum (EHF) is a community organisation with a history of over 20 years, dedicated to helping minority ethnic communities in Manchester with their health and social care needs. The EHF's work is focused on some of the city's poorest and most deprived neighbourhoods, and its speciality is providing holistic pathways to prosperity programmes for these communities. This project was part of a larger effort within Making Manchester Fairer at Manchester City Council, called the "Flying Start Project," which aims to reduce educational and social inequality among early years children across the city.

Heald Place Primary School, the study site, is situated within an area characterised by high levels of poverty and deprivation.<sup>1,2,3</sup> The project was initiated to explore and address three specific concerns raised by the school regarding its minority ethnic children: a belief that parents didn't value play and social interaction, a difference in how independent young boys and girls were, and the idea that some parents were hesitant to send their children to nursery. The EHF's approach was to go beyond these initial ideas and deeply investigate the real-life experiences of parents, to create a report with clear recommendations to help improve children's outcomes and increase parental involvement.

### 1.2 Heald Place Primary and the Rusholme Community: A Mix of Cultures and Challenges

Heald Place Primary School is a community school in the inner-city area of Rusholme, Manchester.<sup>1</sup> The school serves a very diverse student group with many families often moving into this area. Many students are learning English as an additional language.<sup>3</sup> The student body is mainly made up of children from minority ethnic backgrounds, with a large proportion of children from Pakistani, Somali, and Middle Eastern families. In addition to English, the most commonly spoken languages among students are Somali, Urdu, and Arabic, reflecting the rich linguistic diversity within the community.<sup>4</sup>



Fig.1 : EHF staff recruiting parents from Heald Place Primary School

<sup>1</sup> Ofsted Reports for Heald Place Primary School, retrieved from <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/105422>

<sup>2</sup> Manchester City Council Ward Profiles, retrieved from [https://www.manchester.gov.uk/directory\\_record/456601/rusholme](https://www.manchester.gov.uk/directory_record/456601/rusholme)

<sup>3</sup> Get Information about Schools (GOV.UK), retrieved from <https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/Establishments/Establishment/Details/105422>

<sup>4</sup> Multilingual Manchester Research, retrieved from <http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Heald-Place-Primary-School-Cotton.pdf>

The Rusholme area faces significant challenges. It is a very deprived area, and data from the Manchester City Council shows that more than a third of children live in low-income families.<sup>1,2</sup> This is also reflected in the school's own numbers, with 37.5% of students eligible for free school meals, a key sign of poverty.<sup>2</sup> A high rate of new students moving into the area also adds to these challenges, as many families live in rented housing and move frequently, creating instability for their children.<sup>1,2</sup> These factors create a complex environment that requires a thoughtful and culturally aware approach to understanding issues like school readiness.

### 1.3 How We Did the Study: Combining Surveys and Focus Group Discussions

To understand the various aspects of school readiness, we used a mixed-methods approach that combined data from a survey with rich information gathered from the focus group discussions. A pilot survey was administered to 44 parents, collecting information on aspects such as parental confidence, home learning activities, a child's health, parental education, and the language spoken at home. The survey's purpose was to find broad patterns and connections between these factors and a child's school readiness.

To gain a deeper understanding and go beyond just the numbers, the project included three in-depth group discussions with parents from the school. The groups were intentionally separated by community, one for Pakistani parents, one for Middle Eastern parents, and one for Somali parents, to allow for specific cultural insights. This method was guided by a culturally sensitive approach to ensure we had the best possible participation and an accurate picture of the community's views.



Fig.2 : Middle Eastern parents Focus Group in session



Fig.3 : South Asian parents Focus Group in session



Fig.4 : Somali parents Focus Group in session

The details of our focus group discussions are outlined below.

Community Group	Number of Participants	Venue	Date
Pakistani/South Asian	8	Local Community Centre (Rusholme)	May 2025
Somali	7	Community Hall, MossSide	May 2025
Middle Eastern	6	Heald Place School Meeting Room	June 2025

Table 1: Details of Focus Group Discussions Participation

Combining these two sources of information was crucial. While the survey gave us a foundation of information, the group discussions provided the real stories, emotional context, and specific examples that explained *why* the numbers looked the way they did. For instance, our survey did not find a strong link between socioeconomic factors, such as parental education or income, and school readiness. However, the group discussions frequently and explicitly referenced financial hardship, the cost of nursery, and the impact of housing insecurity on their children's well-being and readiness.<sup>5</sup> This apparent difference highlights a critical point: socioeconomic factors may not reveal a simple, direct link in a survey, but they manifest as powerful, real-world problems, such as housing instability, which causes anxiety in children that is only visible when listening to people's personal experiences. This combined approach, therefore, allowed us to get a more complete, accurate, and holistic understanding of the data.

## 2. A Multidimensional View of School Readiness: What We Found

Our study showed that for minority ethnic communities at Heald Place Primary School, being ready for school is much more than just a checklist of academic skills. The findings all point to a deep focus on emotional well-being, social confidence, and a child's sense of belonging. The challenges they face are not due to a lack of parental engagement but are a result of bigger, systemic problems that prevent families from fully participating and children from succeeding.

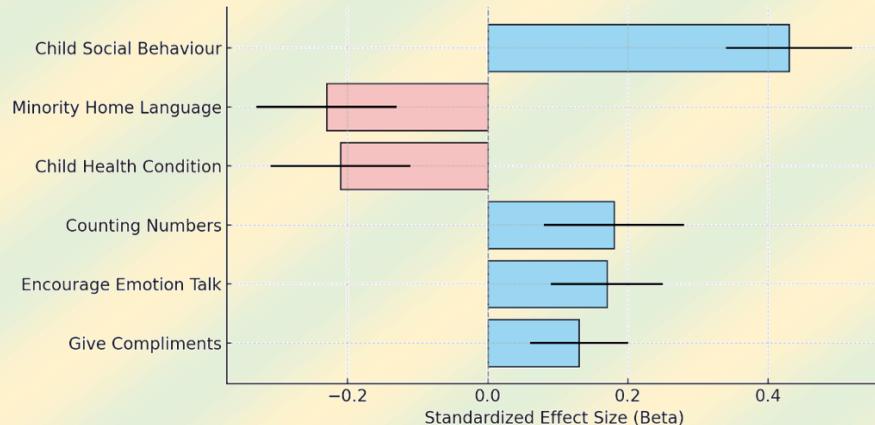


Fig.5 : Predictors of School Readiness - Effect sizes from regression

### 2.1 The Most Important Factor is Emotional and Social Well-being

The most explicit finding of our study is the massive importance of social and emotional support in getting a child ready for school. The survey showed that emotional and social support at home was the most important factor for overall school readiness. We found that a child's social behaviour and encouraging them to talk about their feelings were more important for school readiness than academic activities, such as reading books, or a parent's educational level.

This finding from the survey was strongly supported by the information gathered during the

<sup>5</sup> British Council, "Why schools should teach young learners their home language," retrieved from <https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/why-schools-should-teach-young-learners-home-language>.

group discussions. Parents from all three groups, Pakistani, Middle Eastern, and Somali, agreed that social confidence, independence, and emotional well-being were more important than just academic skills. A Pakistani parent said it best:

*"Confidence is more important than ABCs."*

A Somali mother shared,

*"My son is shy in new places. For me, readiness is about how he feels comfortable, not just knowing his numbers."*

A Middle Eastern parent also explained,

*"We teach them kindness and respect at home. If they can get along with others, they are ready for school."*

These quotes show that parents widely believe that a child's emotional security and ability to get along with others are the basic building blocks for all other learning. As another Somali parent put it,

*"For me, it's most important that my child can talk to other children and feels happy and secure. Reading and counting will come later."*

This finding directly challenges the initial assumption that parents might not value play and social interaction. The evidence shows that parents not only value these skills, but they also see them as the most crucial measure of readiness. This shifts the focus from a perceived flaw in parental understanding to a need for schools to provide support that matches these community values. The problem is not that parents don't appreciate emotional skills; it's that there is a disconnect between the school's beliefs and the parents' own values and experiences.

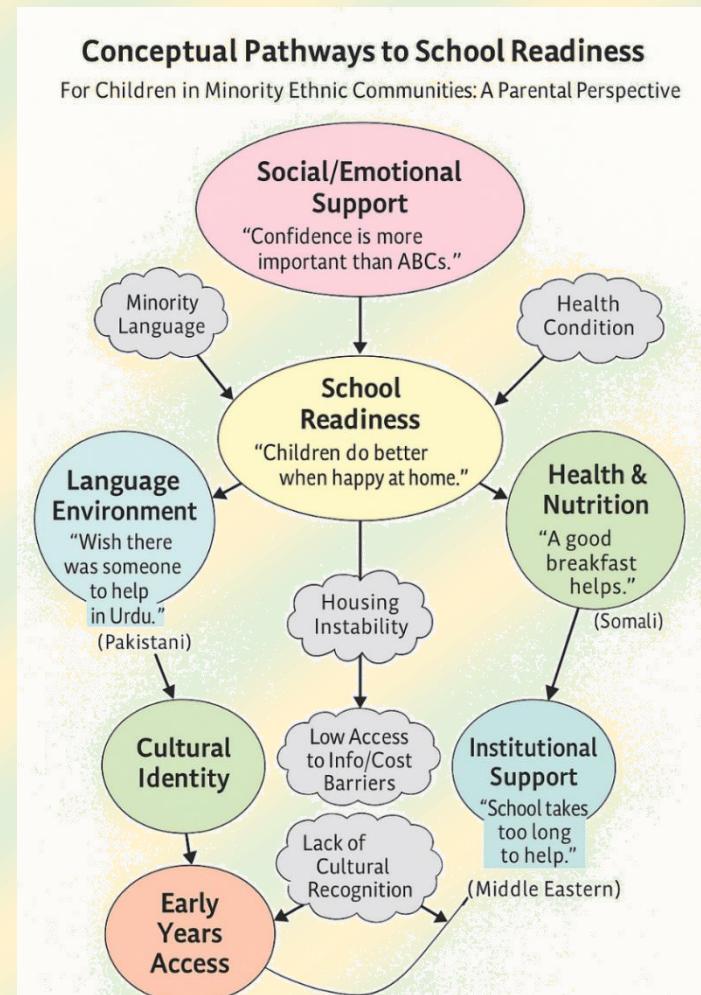


Fig.6: Conceptual Pathways to School Readiness for Children from minority ethnic communities – a parental perspective

A Somali parent also highlighted the value of community-led emotional support:

*"I talk with other mothers if I'm worried. We help each other and teach our children to be strong inside."*

## 2.2 Dealing with Language and Cultural Differences

Both the survey and group discussions identified language as a major and ongoing problem for school readiness. The survey results show that children from homes where a minority language is spoken consistently had lower parental confidence and overall low social/emotional readiness. This means that children from homes where the primary language is not English are at a consistent disadvantage when they start school.<sup>5</sup> The focus groups provided direct, powerful examples of how these language barriers affect daily life for both children and parents. A Pakistani parent explained,

*"Sometimes my English is not enough to understand the letters from school or talk to the teachers. I wish there was someone to help in Urdu."*

A Middle Eastern parent noted that they had to wait for help because

*"I didn't understand the enrolment form. No Kurdish translation."*

For children, a Somali parent shared,

*"Our children are smart, but they are shy to speak up in English. At home, we speak Somali. More staff who understand our culture would help."*

The need for translated materials and bilingual staff was a consistent request from all communities.<sup>6</sup>

This is not just about language fluency, but also about a deeper emotional and cultural disconnection.<sup>5</sup> When a child's home language and cultural background are not acknowledged or celebrated, it can make them feel like an "outsider," which directly affects their emotional readiness and confidence. For example, a Middle Eastern parent shared that their child's Kurdish name was never said correctly, noting that

*"small things make a big difference."*

Another parent noted that if

*"school ignores our traditions, children feel lost or ashamed."*

A child who feels their cultural identity is ignored may internalise a sense of not belonging, which can stop them from having the confidence to speak and participate. This makes it clear that schools must do more than teach English; they must actively create an environment where minority languages and cultures are seen as valuable assets, not problems, to help children feel safe and included.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.3 Home-Based Strengths and the Importance of Early Education

The research clearly shows that stereotypes about disengaged parenting in these

<sup>6</sup> LanguageLine, "Education Translation Services," retrieved from <https://www.languageline.com/en-gb/industries/education>

communities are not true. The study found that parents in all three communities are very engaged in home-based learning activities, such as reading books, counting numbers, teaching new words, and playing educational games. Parents in the focus groups described a hands-on, active parenting style that combines academic lessons (like teaching counting and the alphabet) with moral and religious education. For instance, a Pakistani parent shared,

*"I teach them counting and the alphabet, and also give the Qur'anic education."*

Despite this rich home-learning environment, parents from all communities "universally valued" preschool and nursery settings. They see these places as essential for a child's language development, socialisation, and learning routines. A Middle Eastern parent emphasised,

*"Preschool is where a strong foundation is built. My son was shy, but now he plays and talks confidently."*

It creates an interesting situation that parents value early education so highly, while our survey did not find a strong link between attending early education and school readiness! This apparent contradiction points to a critical gap between what parents want and what they can actually access. The group discussions explained that while parents want their children in these settings, they face major practical problems. Parents reported not being able to afford nursery fees, not knowing how to apply for places, or facing housing instability that led to frequent moves and disrupted their children's routines. A Pakistani parent stated,

*"We want our children to go to nursery, but sometimes the fees are too high or we don't know how to apply."*

The problem is not that parents don't understand the value of early education, but that they lack accessible information and affordable options. A child's readiness is not simply a function of attending an early years setting, but of the stability and support that allows them to be there and thrive consistently. This finding suggests that solutions must focus on removing practical and institutional barriers to access, rather than trying to convince parents of the value of a system they already fully support. Another Pakistani parent noted that

*"At home, we do reading and stories, but nursery helps them learn how to sit with others and follow rules."*

A Somali parent added,

*"Preschool is important for making friends and learning English. We can't give them everything at home."*

## **2.4 The Impact of Health and a Lack of Stability**

The study also found a strong link between a child's health and their school readiness. The survey found that children with health conditions affecting learning were rated lower in both parental confidence and overall readiness. The group discussions gave more details, with parents from all groups consistently connecting a child's physical well-being and nutrition to

their ability to learn. For example, a Somali parent stated,

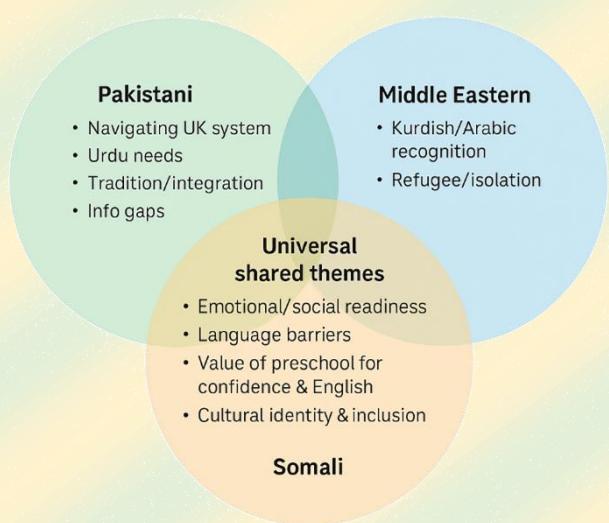


Fig.7: Parental Perspectives on School Readiness Thematic Distribution

*"A good breakfast and healthy food help my daughter focus at school,"*

while a Middle Eastern parent noted that

*"if a child is sick or has not slept, they cannot learn well."*

These comments show that there is a high level of health awareness within these communities.

This issue is made worse by the broader problems of poverty and instability in the Rusholme area.

While socioeconomic indicators did not show a strong link in the survey, the group discussions painted a clear picture of how money problems

and unstable housing cause stress and anxiety for both parents and children.<sup>7</sup> A Somali parent shared,

*"Housing problems mean sometimes families move a lot. This makes it hard for children to settle in school."*

The link between health and readiness is, therefore, an important sign of a deeper issue. In an area with high poverty, children may have more stress-related health problems, anxiety, or poor nutrition, all of which directly affect their ability to concentrate and engage in school.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that poverty and instability do not just act as direct barriers to resources; they also show up as health and psychological challenges in children, which in turn hurt their ability to be school-ready. A complete approach must therefore include integrated health and wellness support.

## 2.5 A Gap in Institutional Support: The Case of Special Needs

The mixed-methods study uncovered a consistent and cross-community frustration with the support systems available for children with additional needs. The qualitative data, in particular, highlighted a pervasive dissatisfaction with the slow pace and communication surrounding the identification and support of Special Educational Needs (SEN). Parents reported significant delays in receiving assessments and a lack of proactive communication from schools and services. A Somali parent stated,

*"It took too long to get support for my son,"*

While a Middle Eastern parent noted,

*"We didn't know until much later that he needed extra help."*

<sup>7</sup> University of Leeds, "New school starters not ready for learning," retrieved from <https://www.leeds.ac.uk/news-society-politics/news/article/5659/new-school-starters-not-ready-for-learning>

This consistent feedback points to a critical breakdown in trust. For parents, especially those who are new to the UK or have language barriers, navigating the school system is already a complex and challenging task. When they encounter delays, poor communication, or insufficient support from the very institutions that are supposed to help their children, it can damage their trust in the system as a whole. A Middle Eastern parent explained,

*"If a child needs extra help, it takes too long for the school to notice or do something."*

This lack of trust can lead to reduced parental involvement, a greater reliance on informal community networks, and a hesitation to seek help in the future, creating a cycle of institutional disconnection and delayed support for children who need it most. Any successful solution must therefore focus on rebuilding this trust through transparent, proactive, and culturally sensitive communication and support.

## 2.6 Gender Differences in School Readiness

A significant theme emerging from all three community focus groups was the perception that girls were generally more school-ready than boys, which was attributed to both cultural parenting norms and the ways that school systems reward traits typically encouraged in girls, such as emotional regulation, compliance, and verbal expression. In the South Asian FGD, participants mentioned involvement of girls in household routines and helping younger siblings:

*"My daughter helps me set up things, she knows how to deal with small kids, which gives her confidence in school."*

This early responsibility translates into skills that schools value, such as organisation, self-discipline, and social-emotional maturity. Several Somali and Middle Eastern parents mentioned that girls engage in more verbal interactions and mimic older siblings, often sisters who are already in school. Girls develop verbal fluency earlier and are more likely to engage in role-play that mimics adult or school behaviour.

*"My daughter loves writing and drawing like her older sister. She pretends to be a teacher at home."*

In the Somali and Middle Eastern groups, some boys were described as "not focused," "running around," or "not listening." However, these traits were not framed positively, despite being developmentally normal for their age. It reflects a mismatch between active male learning styles and passive classroom expectations. A Somali parent clearly mentioned that:

*"Preschool helped my daughter learn how to sit and listen, she enjoyed it. My son found it harder to adjust."*

While parents value education for all children, schools were often described as favouring quiet, compliant behaviour, something girls are more often socialised to display. These insights suggest that school readiness is as much about cultural gender roles as it is about

child development. If boys appear “less ready,” it may reflect how they have been socialised, and not a lack of capacity.

## 2.7 Bringing It All Together: A Visual Summary of Our Findings

The table below visually represents how the findings from our survey and focus groups align to provide a robust and holistic understanding of each theme.

Ref.	Theme	Survey Evidence	Focus Group Evidence & Quotes	Interpretation/Policy
2.1	Social/Emotional Readiness	Strongest predictor of readiness	“Confidence, independence, talking to others”	Schools should focus on peer play, emotional skills, and confidence-building
2.2	Language Barriers	Lower readiness in minority homes	“We speak Urdu/Somali, struggle with forms”	Need for bilingual staff, translated resources
2.2	Cultural Identity	Cultural pride is measured, but less predictive	“Children are confused if school ignores our culture”	Cultural events & curriculum inclusion needed
2.3	Home Learning	Reading/books are common but less predictive	“We read stories, teach the Quran, play games”	Home learning is strong, but structure/routine at school adds unique value
2.3	Early Years Access	ECE days/week not significant	“Children who went to nursery adjust better”	Barriers to access (cost, info) remain
2.4	Health/Nutrition	Health condition = lower readiness	“Healthy food is important; breakfast helps the brain”	Nutrition and health must be part of the readiness strategy
2.5	Institutional Support	Not directly measured	“Diagnosis for special needs is too slow”	Schools/services need earlier, proactive support

Table 2. Thematic analysis of quantitative and qualitative themes

## 3. Evidence-Based Recommendations

The findings from this mixed-methods study clearly demonstrate that school readiness is a complex, culturally embedded, and relational process. It is shaped by family strengths, community assets, and, most significantly, by the presence of systemic and institutional barriers. The following recommendations are designed to address the core issues identified in this report and provide a strategic, evidence-based roadmap for funders and practitioners.

### 3.1 Invest in Emotional Literacy and Peer Support Programs

The analysis demonstrates that social and emotional skills are the single most important factors for a child's school readiness.<sup>8, 9</sup> To build upon this crucial finding, it is recommended

<sup>8</sup> The Institute for Government, "School readiness: a new approach to policy making for 'left behind' groups," retrieved from [https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-03/school-readiness-policy-making-left-behind-groups\\_1.pdf](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-03/school-readiness-policy-making-left-behind-groups_1.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Coram Pacey, "Resource School Ready Report," retrieved from <https://www.corampacey.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Resource-School-Ready-Report.pdf>

to fund and implement programs that prioritise these skills.

*Actionable Points:*

1. Fund parent-child emotional literacy workshops that are co-designed with community partners to ensure they are culturally resonant. These workshops should focus on techniques for encouraging open and honest communication and fostering gentle, supportive parenting practices.
2. Support community playgroups and peer-led activities to provide children with essential opportunities for peer interaction, which were identified as a vital component of social readiness.

### **3.2 Expand Bilingual and Culturally Responsive Staffing**

The data from both the survey and focus groups show that language barriers and a lack of cultural representation are significant obstacles to a child's readiness and a parent's ability to engage with the school. To address this, a direct investment in staffing and resources is essential.

*Actionable Points:*

1. Rethink School Readiness Measures, i.e. restructure and adapt school readiness measurement tools to reflect cultural differences. For example, while some measures may score a child low for being shy, this trait is often considered a positive quality in certain cultures. Tools should be revised to accommodate these cultural variations.
2. Provide funding for schools and early years settings to recruit and train staff fluent in the primary languages of the community, including Urdu, Somali, Kurdish, and Arabic.
3. Create dedicated community liaison roles within schools to serve as a bridge for communication, providing support in the parents' native language for forms, letters, and teacher meetings. It will help to rebuild institutional trust.<sup>6</sup>
4. Ensure all school and SEN guidance is translated into the target languages and made easily accessible to families.<sup>6</sup>

### **3.3 Strengthen Community-Led Parent Networks**

The focus groups highlighted the vital role of peer support networks, particularly among Somali parents, who described sharing tips on discipline, homework, and providing emotional support to one another. These networks represent a significant community asset that can be leveraged and strengthened.

*Actionable Points:*

1. Provide micro-grants or targeted funding to community organisations to lead playgroups, parenting workshops, and outreach programs.
2. Support the creation of parent ambassador programs where experienced parents from the community can mentor new or isolated families, helping them to navigate

the early years' system and build confidence.

### **3.4 Streamline and Culturally Adapt SEN Support Pathways**

The consistent frustration expressed by parents over delays and a lack of proactive communication regarding Special Educational Needs support is a significant concern that erodes institutional trust.

*Actionable Points:*

1. Fund a pilot program to create clear, fast-tracked, and culturally sensitive SEN pathways. This program should prioritise early screening and assessment to ensure children receive timely support.
2. Train all school staff in cultural competence and trauma-informed care to ensure that all interactions with families are respectful and sensitive to their unique needs and experiences.

### **3.5 Integrate Holistic Health and Well-being Initiatives**

The study's findings, which link health conditions, nutrition, and stress to lower readiness scores, particularly in the context of deprivation, highlight the need for a holistic approach that extends beyond the classroom.

*Actionable Points:*

1. Embed mental health awareness and support into early intervention programs for children and parents.
2. Provide funding for nutrition programs, such as healthy breakfast clubs or healthy eating workshops, to ensure children have the physical foundation to learn and thrive.
3. Partner with local health services to provide proactive, in-school screenings and resources for families, thereby removing practical barriers to access.

## **4. Conclusion: A Call for Co-Designed Solutions**

This report presents a comprehensive, community-led analysis of school readiness that probes beyond surface-level metrics to illuminate the lived experiences of Pakistani, Middle Eastern, and Somali families in Rusholme, Manchester. The findings consistently and robustly demonstrate that school readiness is not a simple "one size fits all" checklist of academic skills, but a complex, multifaceted process shaped by emotional well-being, language inclusion, and a child's sense of belonging. The research clearly indicates that parents in these communities are highly motivated and deeply invested in their children's success. However, they face significant institutional and structural barriers that are often beyond their control.

The convergence of survey and qualitative evidence proves that the problem is not a deficit in parental effort or values, but a systemic issue of disconnection, language inaccessibility, and delayed support. The most effective interventions will therefore be those that respect

and build upon existing community strengths, empower parents as partners, and actively work to remove the practical and institutional barriers identified in this research. The central conclusion is that for children from minority ethnic backgrounds at Heald Place Primary School to achieve their full potential, Manchester City Council and educational practitioners must move beyond traditional models and invest in co-designed, community-led solutions that build trust, celebrate diversity, and ensure that every child feels safe, seen, and ready to learn.

## 5. Limitations

This report provides a transparent and critical analysis of the constraints inherent in the study design and execution. Acknowledging these limitations is essential for contextualising the findings, ensuring their responsible application, and providing a clear framework for future research.

1. The study was conducted at a single site, Heald Place Primary School (Rusholme), which means the findings may not be directly applicable to other schools or communities with different socioeconomic and cultural demographics.
2. Although it was a pilot study never conducted before, with a small sample size consisting of a survey completed by only 44 parents and in-depth discussions with 21 parents, which is insufficient for achieving statistical significance or generalising the findings to a broader population.
3. The report is built exclusively from the parental perspective and lacks the direct input of children and school staff, including teachers, early years staff and administrators.
4. There was a discrepancy between the quantitative survey data and the qualitative focus group findings; for example, the survey did not find a strong link between socioeconomic factors and school readiness, but parents in focus groups explicitly referenced financial hardship and housing instability.

## 6. Future Directions for Policy, Practice, & Research

The findings of this report provide a foundational, community-led analysis that must be built upon to create effective, lasting change.

1. Scale up the study to other schools in different deprived neighbourhoods to test if the findings are consistent across contexts. Include the perspectives of children, teachers, and school staff to provide a fuller view of the challenges.
2. Invest in creating and developing models for community-led parent networks and how schools can effectively collaborate with them.
3. Develop best practices for building and sustaining long-term partnerships between community organisations and public institutions.
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of school-based and community-based health and wellness programs in terms of their impact on school readiness.
5. Develop co-designed, culturally adapted school readiness measurement tools in

collaboration with parents and educators.

6. Co-design a streamlined and culturally sensitive Special Educational Needs (SEN) support pathway with parents, healthcare professionals, and school staff.
7. Targeted support for boys using active, movement-based learning tools. Parenting workshops that encourage emotional literacy for boys.
8. Teacher training on recognising gender bias in school readiness frameworks. There should be more male role models in early years settings to broaden behavioural norms for boys.

**The End**