Beyond School Gates:
How local policy can enable children's contribution to community integration

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Executive Summary

The findings presented in this report have been generated through one strand of a project that aims to provide crucial insights into the contribution that children's social cognition, experiences and networks make to community integration. Focused on three towns in the North West of England (Bolton, Blackburn with Darwen and Preston), our research has looked through a local policy lens at the contribution that children are enabled to make to community integration and cohesion in these areas. We gathered data through 50 interviews with a total of 57 local policy-makers and stakeholders across the three towns, all of whom had some connection to work with children, youth or families. Through our interviews, we sought to understand more about how individuals and organisations conceptualised the contribution of children to community integration and how their work could be understood as enabling this contribution. A consultation event with 20 of the interviewees supported us to gather further perspectives on the issue and to guide further our analysis of the data.

Our findings suggest that:

- Local policy-makers and stakeholders across the three towns agree that children's experiences represent an exciting opportunity for connection and interaction across diverse communities. Children, with their open-minded approach to interacting with others, can act as key agents in leading other family members to be more open in their interactions.
- Despite this enthusiasm, there is a lack of local confidence in envisioning and planning for the contribution that 5-12 year old children can make to the landscape of community integration. Creating a clear vision alongside workable plans to enable children's contribution is a key area of development going forward.
- Plans to support children's contribution depend on involving schools, hyper-local organisations and central teams. Schools as sites of day-to-day interaction can proactively foster connection across diversity either as a result of the diverse communities in which they are situated, or through exchange programmes such as *The Linking Network* (one of the official partners in this project). Hyper-local organisations are key sites of belonging and trust for children and families. To capitalise on this for the sake of community integration, central teams are needed in order to create fruitful partnerships between diverse hyper-local organisations and to build capacity for this work through targeted funding and training.

We hope that our findings will support local councils and associated stakeholders to:

- Envision the contribution that 5-12 year olds can practically make to community integration and cohesion

- Reflect on the current work of schools, hyper-local organisations and central teams in enabling children's contribution to community integration

- Identify opportunities to extend the work of schools, hyper-local organisations and central teams in order to further enable children to impact positively on community integration and cohesion

To this end, we present a Framework for Action that can be used to prompt visioning, reflection and planning among local policy-makers and stakeholders.

Framework for Action

Step 1: Define your vision

What does children's contribution to community integration and cohesion in your town look like?

SCHOOLS	HYPER-LOCAL ORGANISATIONS	CENTRAL TEAMS
Step 2: Reflect on current realities		
• What do schools do to support community integration and cohesion? • How do you support schools in this work? • What programmes operate across schools e.g. The Linking Network?	• What hyper-local organisations exist that children and families trust (e.g. local libraries, community centres, faith organisations)? • What partnerships exist between hyper-local organiastions to connect diverse communities in the town?	• What central events and activities are designed to draw in diverse children and families from across the town? How popular are these events and how welcomed do children and families feel? • How do central teams work to connect hyper-local organisations to one another?
Step 3: Identify opportunities to extend		
• Is community integration and cohesion uniformly seen as part of schools' remit or are there select schools taking this approach? • How could schools share learning around enabling community cohesion? • What programmes could be implemented across schools to support community integration and cohesion?	• How can trusted services operating at a hyper-local level make links to support connections across geographical segregation? • How are local services supported centrally to make these connection? • What training is available for hyper-local organisations to enable them to support community integration? • What funding opportunities exist for grassroots community-based organisations?	• What would support children to be part of and make better use of centrally planned activities e.g. transport links, parents' confidence? • How could central teams build on the trust communities have in hyper-local organisations? • How could central teams be involved in fostering partnerships across diverse hyper-local organisations?

Beyond School Gates: Aims and Objectives

The findings presented in this report have been generated through one strand of a project ('Beyond School Gates: Children's Contribution to Community Integration') which aims to provide crucial insights into the contribution that children's social cognition, experiences and networks make to community integration. Focused on three towns in the North West of England (Bolton, Blackburn with Darwen and Preston), the project has sought to understand more about how children contribute to integration:

1. Historical research has focused on archival records of children's contribution to community integration

2. Psychological research has probed the social cognition and experiences of children relating to integration and cohesion in their local community

3. Social networks analysis has identified how children's movement through their community relates to the experiences of whole families and wider society

4. Policy-focused interviews and workshops have examined policy-makers' and local stakeholders' choices, levers and hurdles when they seek to enhance community integration through schools, children's services and youth work

In this report, we focus on the findings from the fourth strand of the research – looking through the local policy lens at the contribution that children are supported to make to the landscape of community integration. Our research explores how the contribution of children to community integration can be more effectively supported by local stakeholders and policy-makers, who shape the conditions in which children's experiences and networks are constructed.

Our Research

This research was designed to be most useful to those local stakeholders who were involved in the project as participants. We aimed to influence local policy dialogues through the research by transforming the findings into a tool or resource that could support local authorities and other stakeholders in enabling and maximising children's contribution to community integration.

Our research was carried out through a total of 50 interviews with local stakeholders and policy-makers to probe experiences and perspectives on children's contribution to community integration: 20 interviews with stakeholders in Blackburn with Darwen, 18 interviews with stakeholders in Bolton and 6 interviews with stakeholders in Preston. There were an additional 6 interviews that spanned two or more of the towns or related more broadly to the North West of England. Across the interviews, which were mostly conducted on a one to one basis but were sometimes a group interview, we heard from a total of 57 individuals.

Of the 57 individuals involved in our interviews, 26 were based in the community and voluntary sector (CVS), 17 were based in the local authority, 4 were based in local schools and 10 in faith organisations. While we had initially planned to distinguish between those interviews with 'local policy-makers' and those with 'local stakeholders', we found that in reality these roles were not clearly demarcated. Those working in

CVS often had responsibility for the implementation of key policies and were able to feed back into the design of these policies. Our final research design did not therefore distinguish between these roles.

Our participants were recruited through social media and email. Our recruitment strategy relied heavily on introductions made in the local community; this started with the project advisory group but grew each time we conducted an interview. We asked in every interview about who else we should speak to and this approach yielded a positive response to the research. This approach also enabled us to target some areas more specifically. In the second round of recruitment, after preliminary analysis of the interviews, we focused on increasing recruitment on Preston and among faith organisations. We had considerable success in recruiting more faith organisations to share their perspectives and experiences in the research, but we continued to struggle to recruit interviewees in Preston, with a total of just 6 interviews at the end of the project. This was in part due to the fact that the town of Preston sits within the Lancashire local authority and as such there were fewer specific individuals to reach out to regarding the situation in Preston. In this respect, it was not comparable to the situation we found in Bolton or Blackburn with Darwen.

Through our interviews we sought to understand more about how individuals and organisations conceptualised the contribution of children to community integration in their particular local context (or more generally where this was appropriate). We asked interviewees to reflect on whether there was a shared local sense in the town where they worked regarding how children and families might influence and be involved in community integration and if so, where this conceptualisation of children's contribution had emerged (e.g. key policy documents or local authority agendas). We asked them to consider their own work in relation to this focus and whether they had any examples of this local model of children's contribution being put into action. Interviewees were also asked to comment on enabling factors and barriers in the local policy landscape and whether there were any future developments that they anticipated being important.

Ethical approval for the research was obtained via Middlesex University Research Ethics Committee. In reporting the findings, we have opted to anonymise illustrative quotes. While some participants were happy to be identified as part of our research, others were clear that they would only feel comfortable sharing their authentic perspectives and experiences if we could guarantee anonymity. We therefore decided to anonymise our data in the context of publication. Having said this, we recognise that there are often limits to the anonymity we can offer, since town names, organisation descriptors and positions within these organisations can often be traced back to particular individuals. Where we have deemed this to be a risk, we have returned to the participant with the draft report and asked for their explicit approval in sharing the quote. For all other participants, we shared a draft report and asked for feedback but did not wait for explicit approval regarding particular quotes.

In order to draw out shared perspectives and experiences across the data, we carried out an inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2020). This involved an iterative process, identifying keywords and key phrases in the interview transcripts, which in turn led to a set of codes that could then be organised according to a thematic map. The keywords, codes and themes were generated bottom-up from the data. While there were important points of comparison across the three towns of interest, we did not organise our analysis according to this comparison. Our themes relate more

to what is common between the three towns than what is different, but there are details in each theme that demonstrate the importance of local context and what parameters shape the experience in one town compared to another.

Our preliminary thematic analysis was shared with stakeholders in a one-hour online workshop described as a 'stakeholder consultation', to which all interviewees were invited. This consultation was attended by 20 individuals. In addition, we shared a short video about the findings with all of the project participants and fielded additional comments and questions about the project. The dialogues generated in this way fed into the development of our analysis. While the consultation did not lead to new themes, it did change the way that we thought about the themes in the research and the extent to which we prioritised particular themes. For example, the stakeholder consultation focused heavily on the role that schools play. While we had only four schools participating in the interviews, it became clear that we needed to focus on the potential of schools (particularly primary schools) to support children's contribution to community integration. As is clear in this report, this has shaped our presentation of the findings and the framework for action (see p. 4).

Findings

How we have organised our findings is shown in Figure 1. Our first level of analysis focuses on how children's contribution to community integration is conceptualised at a local level by policy-makers and stakeholders. Following this, our analysis shifts to focus on the work of three key players in this field. These are:

1. Schools
2. Hyper-local organisations
3. Central hubs

Figure 1. Structuring our data analysis
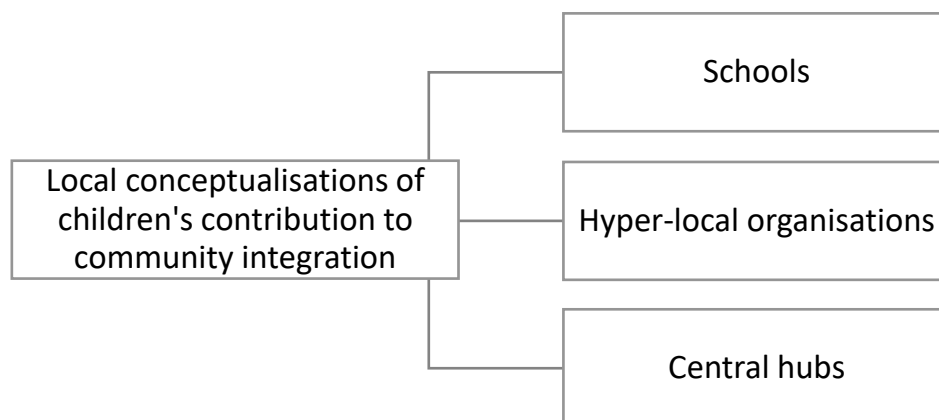
Local conceptualisations of children's contribution to community integration

In discussing community integration, there was a shared sense among participants that effective community integration depended on the potential for connection between individuals of diverse communities. There was a recognition that communities in themselves could be strong and tightly knit without this constituting a threat to wider integration; what mattered was whether individuals' day to day connections could go beyond just those within a particular community:

> It doesn't mean that you have to push communities to live together and that's what frustrates me sometimes about policymakers. People are allowed to live where they feel comfortable. [...] And it's natural… but it's about when you're out and about in the wider context, when you're in the park or downtown, can you feel comfortable? If you see somebody, can you say 'hello how are you?' Can you have that conversation without that barrier? It's about communities. Knowing each other and just being able to have those conversations learn about each other as well. And it's just planting those seeds or making those connections. (Local Authority Engagement Officer)

From this perspective, what matters most is not where individual children or families live or go to school but their sense of belonging as they move through spaces and activities in the town. Participants saw reticence in this respect as the main barrier to overcome:

> A lot of the people we work with initially, they will look at that group there and think 'That's not me, I can't go there.' Whereas, if they work with us and suddenly realise, 'Oh I'm getting lots of positive feedback on me being creative, maybe I can do this.' And then staff are saying, 'You'd be great in this group.' And then it's the same staff in that group that bring them there… that's again how like we're trying to <u>shift people into realising they belong in other spaces.</u> (CEO, local arts organisation)

Generating a sense of belonging was typically seen as a by-product rather than the main focus of organisations' work in this field. Participants advocated bringing people together for specific reasons, whether for a service, activity or celebration, rather than explicitly making integration or cohesion the main focus.

> We often use food as a method by which people come together, enjoy the food and naturally begin to understand a culture… Our message is 'let's eat together, let's enjoy food together' rather than 'let's do something about cohesion'. (CEO, faith-based local charity)

Within this model of community integration work, children's experiences were seen as an opportunity for engagement across communities. When children interact with each other, there is the potential for parents and carers to also share in that experience regardless of differences. In the playground for example, children playing together could lead to parents and carers starting a conversation or even just smiling or nodding at one another. This was seen as effective integration work.

> It's children from, you know, with similar interests, similar hobbies, and I think that cuts through the cultural or ethical, you know, it cuts through all that diversity stuff because you're doing things that you're enjoying together, and it

doesn't really matter who that's with does it? The key is what bonds you, not what makes you different. (Local Authority Neighbourhood Manager)

One of the things that we were doing was using drama to bring kids together from different cultures and different ethnicities, different faith backgrounds. But when they were in that environment on the stage, and that all of that just kind of didn't really matter, and they all just kind of got together. (Local Coordinator, National Charity)

The comments above highlight the sense of potential in working with children and young people. Many of our interviewees held the view that children's ideas about the world and other people are less rigid and they can show more open-mindedness than adult members of their families when it comes to interacting with others. In this sense, children were seen as an important 'site of action' for community integration and cohesion. Furthermore, children's own integration can support parents' integration because parenting was seen as something that individuals from different communities have in common. Bringing up children is something that potentially brings families together in a shared understanding:

It all starts with us connecting with the children, connecting with the school, the pupils who are going to different schools, because what we have noticed, and when I speak with different kind of colleagues, and they always say, 'Well, we're going to start with the children' and then that is good to have that effect of bringing the families together as well. (Local Coordinator, National Charity)

There are always challenges in the sense of I think the biggest challenge is making sure both parties understand where each are coming from and once that's overcome, I think overall the outcome is generally everyone wants better for the children. I'm just thinking from a local point of view and if you look at it from a religious parents' point of view, the final outcome is the same. It's just getting them to align those differences and bringing it together, so we can try and come to a middle ground. (Local Faith Leader)

While there was enthusiasm for a vision and model of community integration that started with children, we also found – across all three sites of the research – a general lack of confidence among stakeholder organisations in thinking specifically about the potentials of middle childhood as a time to support integration and cohesion. Visions for early intervention work and youth leadership were much more clearly articulated among our participants, while the connectedness of children aged 5-11 was a hope but not necessarily a plan.

Schools

Primary schools were recognised as fundamental in enabling children to connect with one another because this was where day-to-day interactions were most likely to occur for 5-11 year olds.

I think, from a children and families' perspective, definitely our children's centres and our schools are really important in terms of being able to have a diverse mix of people from different communities and ages and ethnicities, and all that kind of stuff. (Local Authority Communities Programme Manager)

Some schools saw themselves as a community hub for integration, leading the field in terms of enabling community integration via young people. Other schools were less

confident in articulating their hopes and plans for children's contributions to integration and cohesion.

There was recognition among school leaders that children can indeed be more open-minded in how they interact with others than the adults around them. Following from this, parents were often seen and presented as a barrier in enabling children to connect with one another and bring families into connection with each other. Children's interactions can lay the foundation for parents' engagement across diversity but this was not always the case:

> …battling the barriers with parents. That's something we have had to also battle with is parents and their thoughts and their values and how they perceive things. So, you know, one of our cohorts and when we were doing the exchange between the madrasas and the cathedral, we had to have some challenging conversations with parents. The young people were like 'Oh, actually I'd love to do that… I've never been to the cathedral, I want to go' but then we had parents ringing and saying 'I don't know if I feel comfortable with that'. (Community Organiser, Local Youth Organisation)

As well as parents being less open-minded, there was a common appreciation that many parents simply lacked the confidence and, in some instances, trust, to interact beyond what they were familiar with.

> I think for the parents they don't really feel comfortably coming into different situations and similarly, if they are going somewhere, then in a new situation, a new group, and you know, they don't feel confident enough, and that's not specific to refugees and asylum seekers. (Local Coordinator, National Charity)

> Some of our parents, and predominantly our White British parents, we find that some of them don't want to engage. They've come from difficult home lives themselves, they don't trust agencies. (Secondary School Leader)

As is highlighted in the comments above, confidence among parents may be lacking among any of the town's communities and not just minoritized communities. It is not necessarily language that can make parents feel less confident (though this may be important) but may be more broadly a lack of trust and confidence in the agencies that would support moments of connection beyond what is immediately familiar.

Having said this, it was also within schools' remit to be aware of and work around the barriers in parents' engagement. Pastoral leaders within schools had developed intentional approaches to working with parents in a way that would support those individuals to feel greater trust and confidence in the school and engage more as a result.

> I do Mums and Daughters, and that is every six weeks and it is to break down barriers. So, if you were a mum, or a sister, an auntie, any female relation, and we do that because sometimes we have breastfeeding parents who can come, that's why it's exclusively female. They come along and it's to break down barriers because, you know, sometimes have had a bad experience of school themselves. [...] (Secondary School Leader)

> Yeah, a lot of our parents have quite a negative view of school where they've had a bad experience themselves. You don't always know that. But they do tend to stay clear. So it takes a long time to build up relationships with them. And then, once I've got that relationship, then they are willing to come in it a bit

more. They're willing to talk to you, they start to trust you. [...] . It's good to have that experience and knowledge that I know a lot of the people around the area. [...] A lot of our mums, you know, and it just might be their anxiety if go into a group or going somewhere where they may not know anyone. [...] They [the parents / mothers] are all quite young. (Primary School Pastoral Lead)

What is apparent from our conversations with school leaders is that schools typically do recognise that they have a fundamental role to play in enabling children to contribute to community integration. They understand the barriers that need to be overcome in order to achieve this and particular schools have developed intentional and effective outreach programmes that foster more confidence and trust among parents, in turn, enabling moments of connection across diversity. There was notable enthusiasm about the potential to increase collaboration and communication between schools and local organisations in order to better meet the needs of families. Both sectors can work together to develop social integration within their settings.

Hyper-local organisations

Participants were keen to stress that grassroots, hyper-local organisations often have a pull over families that must not be underestimated. Beyond schools, children and families make use of a range of services and organisations that they find in the immediate vicinity of their house.

The local little youth clubs or the Scouts groups or whatever that, it might be a coffee morning for mum, it could be anything, but very grassroots level… they have that really good local knowledge and that's very place-based again. (Local Authority Neighbourhood Manager)

We're not that person who's slightly out of reach. We're approachable… We're not an officer from the council. You're just that person who you see every week at the group, you're a friend. (CEO, Local Family Support Charity)

Hyper-local services and activities were seen as being more accessible and approachable for diverse children and families. Teams working across the town sought to make use of the trust and confidence that families placed in these services by working to connect existing organisations across the town, rather than offer something more centralised:

We're keen to work with all partners across the town to deliver more within community centres… There is a good appetite to keep those [community centre] buildings because they are a central focal point within those communities and are really important, whether it's health and well-being or employability or any service, they tend to be a really good focal point. [...]So there's lots of opportunities to, sort of, link across different services. (Local Authority Community Programmes Manager)

As well as feelings of belonging and trust, hyper-local services are important because physical geography matters. The physical location of activities determines who will get involved in these activities and whether children and families can make use of what is on offer.

I would say that [a barrier are] the locations that these centres are predominately focus on the geography in that local area. So, I guess, you only get the community that's, sort of, in that local area. […] we're trying to do our

best in terms of making sure we provide a range of different services within those buildings because they're the local hub and that local community access those buildings. (Local Authority Community Programmes Manager)

Stakeholders saw the importance of capacity-building in grassroots organisations. Activities and services delivered at the hyper-local level were powerful because of the feelings of trust and belonging that children and families typically associated with these organisations. These groups were also able to focus on training volunteers from that community so that the service felt embedded in the community through its people. Such work depends on smaller organisations in this space being able to access funding and training in order to grow in scale and effectiveness. Cohesion programmes in the local council often saw their main task as supporting such groups to do just this.

> Grassroots organizations that are just starting or they're quite community based and what this program has helped to do was kind of amplify them and give them a platform. (Community Organiser, Local Youth Charity)

> [speaking of mothers in a particular area] We want to train them as peer supporters as with the hope that they would then come on and volunteer for the groups, particularly the Blackburn one in the children's centre and then hopefully in future times, when they get more confident, they can take ownership of this group. So, having those voices within the community is important. (CEO, Local Family Charity)

> There are so many different people who have different skill sets, but they don't really have formal leadership trainings to then be able to continue the work that they would like to. If they have an idea, how do they execute those ideas, and who do they speak to, and what campaigns can they develop to change the communities they're living in? They need support in terms of resources and the knowledge base that they might need to be able to kind of turn their ideas into reality. (Local Coordinator, National Charity)

In summary, organisations working on a hyper-local level represent a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they wield influence because they are more likely to be trusted by the surrounding community who will find their services and activities more accessible, both physically and socially. On the other hand, the hyper-locality of children's and families' activities that go beyond what schools offer can prevent connections across diversity from emerging. If hyper-local services are provided in your local estate and your local estate is ethnically, culturally and linguistically homogenous, there is a greatly reduced chance to use these activities and services as a means to support community integration. Central teams are needed to connect the dots between organisations working around the town in this hyper-local way and support interactions that reach beyond what is most familiar.

Central teams

As mentioned above, one of the key roles of central teams in this field was to bring hyper-local sites of activity together, to create movement and connection between the trusted local services. For example, the Youth Ambassadors programme in Blackburn with Darwen worked through creating links between local groups in different parts of the town and creating the conditions for exchange.

You know we've got we had quite a few great stories and case studies around that kind of work where we were able to actually go into with the grassroot organizations and mix two areas together and be able to promote that. (Community Organiser, Local Youth Charity)

In addition, specialist activities for children and families could have a wider scope for engagement, but this required more intensive levels of investment. For example, outdoor residential activities would interest children from across the town if these were free and accessible. However, putting on such activities required financial investment, not just to allow children to participate in the activities but also to set up the transport links that would enable children from across the town to engage. Activities that relied on parents travelling across town would be less inclusive than those which had the transport links included as part of the activity. In general, across the stakeholders, transport was cited as a major issue and potential barrier to inclusive participation for children and families.

The transport could be a very big issue, you know, if the weather is really bad, which it is in the North, as you can imagine. You don't know when it's going to rain or shine. And the parents can't really take the kids from Blackburn to Darwen, and that's where we were running the sessions and they would either have to take the bus, or if they had a car, then it's extra petrol. So it's the financial situation, the transport for them. (Local Coordinator, National Charity)

Some families can't get the children to places, so, then it's a case of, well, you know, does it meet the requirement for the transport? (Local Authority, Neighbourhood Manager)

As well as transport, families need to feel actively welcomed into spaces that may be unfamiliar to them. This was crucial for public spaces such as libraries and children's centres. Participants agreed that such spaces were important central hubs where children could contribute to social integration. Participants from different organisations reported that a key focus of their work in this respect was to refer and signpost families to the right local or central services, to inform them of what is available to them and to enhance their confidence that this is truly a space and service for them, where they can feel welcome. Some participants highlighted that it was important to match families with the services and activities that they individually could benefit most from.

Creating a warm, sociable and relaxed atmosphere was vital if parents were going to bring their children into a space they had not been before.

…making sure that we're kind of allowing people to feel welcome and connected and safe and meeting new people… (Football Club Community Team)

People just don't have that spare money. All our stay and play groups are free to attend. You can come inside… you get a hot brew but there's no expectation there… you know it's a big thing just to make it more accessible. (CEO, Local Family Charity)

If you look different then you might not feel comfortable being in different groups. It's just making sure that when we do work with different people, they know this space is for everyone and everyone feels comfortable on the day. (Local Coordinator, National Charity)

Another way to bring children and families together across the town was through large cultural and religious events hosted or supported by the council:

> We have some really big cultural events and religious events across the town that people are used to it, they understand what's going on. We've supported those events in the past, we've been around on the street to explain to people what's happening… we have a long history of that in Blackburn. (Local Authority Neighbourhood Manager)

> We have festivals … all those big town events are really important to showcase the difference and the diversity, but showcase how it brings people together. (Local Authority Neighbourhood Manager)

Such events acted as a focal point for integration and cohesion activities. For example, in the Blackburn with Darwen Youth Ambassadors programme, the Eid in the Park celebration was an opportunity to bring new children and young people to events they had not previously attended.

> One of the partners who delivered the programme, he brought six or seven young lads down, you know, white, not really integrated into the community too much… for them it was like a first time being at the park watching people celebrating Eid the park … one thing they realized when they were there, you had literally the people of all faiths and cultures there. (Football Club Community Team)

In summary, central teams focusing on cohesion and seeking to support children's contribution to community integration could organise and foster connections between hyper-local services and activities, as well as planning larger central services, events and celebrations. When planning their own events, it was essential to ensure that transportation links were sufficient to enable children and families from right across the town to get involved. There was also a focus on ensuring that the spaces were welcoming to all families; it is important not to assume that just because an activity for children is free to access, it is therefore inclusive. Further planning is required to ensure that diverse families get involved and interact with one another.

Conclusions

Local policy-makers and stakeholders across the three towns included in our study agreed that children's experiences represent an exciting opportunity for connection and interaction across diverse communities, and can thereby support community integration and cohesion. Children were perceived by stakeholders as more open-minded when interacting with others and could therefore act as key agents in leading their families to be more open and interact beyond what was most familiar. While there was enthusiasm about the potential of working with children in this way, to support community integration, we also perceived a lack of confidence about the vision underpinning this work. Local policy contexts tended to demonstrate more confidence in models of early intervention and youth programmes for children and young peopled aged 12+, than in conceptualising the contribution of 5-12 year olds in community integration and cohesion. Developing a clear vision for the important contribution that 5-12 year olds can make is therefore the most fundamental area for development to emerge from this research. Ideally, local councils would be able to articulate how they expect middle childhood experiences to contribute positively to community integration

and how this can be enabled through the key players of schools, hyper-local organisations and central hubs.

In our research, schools tended to be cited as the main route through which children's contribution to community integration could be effectively fostered. This was because schools were sites of day-to-day interaction among children, and even when schools were not themselves diverse, there was a practical opportunity to introduce diversity through exchange programmes such as The Linking Network. Such programmes were important because they could happen without the involvement of parents and parents were – unfortunately – most typically seen as a barrier to children's connectedness with each other. Having said this, schools were also seen as having expertise in building trust among parents and supporting them to engage in activities that went beyond what they were familiar with. Thus, activities for children and families put on by schools could support diverse parents to meet one another and connect in a way that would not occur without the school acting as a broker of the contact.

Beyond schools, hyper-local organisations providing activities and services on the doorstep of children and families were seen as important in enabling children's contribution to community integration. Families were more likely to trust hyper-local organisations and this could then become the foundation for experiences of integration and cohesion, for example, when two hyper-local organisations connected with one another and engaged in an exchange of ideas, skills or people. Such exchanges were one aspect of the role of central hub teams, who aimed to support children's contribution to community integration across the entire town. In order for central events and activities to boost community integration among children and families, careful logistical planning was required – particularly in terms of transport. On the other hand, a more direct way for central teams to make a difference was to build capacity in hyper-local organisations and support connections between these groups and activities.

Building on our findings, we hope that our research can support local councils and relevant stakeholders in:

- Envisioning the contribution that 5-12 year olds can practically make to community integration and cohesion

- Reflecting on the current work of schools, hyper-local organisations and central teams in enabling children's contribution to community integration

- Identifying opportunities to extend the work of schools, hyper-local organisations and central teams in order to further enable children to impact positively on community integration and cohesion

To this end, we have developed a Framework for Action (Appendix 1) that can be used to prompt visioning, reflection and planning among local policy-makers and stakeholders.