

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SOMALI BOYS: A CASE-STUDY IN AN INNER-LONDON COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

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The experience and achievement of Somali boys: a case-study in an inner-London comprehensive school

Abstract

This study seeks to examine some of the issues facing Somali boys in the context of an inner London comprehensive school. Over the previous few years, there has been a significant gap in the achievement (in the broadest sense) of Somali boys and that of their peers in my school. This is an identified focus in my school and has been the subject of some brief reviews. The current study builds on this work and evaluates a peer-mentoring intervention as a strategy to improve the school experience of Year 7 Somali boys.

Key research questions include:

Review of the literature:

- What is the background to the Somali community in the UK?
- What are the possible barriers to Somali boys' achievement and positive school experience in UK schools?
- What possible strategies can be used to address these barriers?

My empirical research:

- What are Somali boys' perceptions of their school experience in my school?
- What are the possible barriers to Somali boys' achievement and positive school experience in my school?
- Can a system of peer mentoring be an effective strategy to promote achievement and positive school experience for Somali boys?

The published literature details evidence of generalised underachievement amongst Somali boys across the UK, and notes that there are a variety of key factors behind this, such as language, culture, socio-economic factors and a lack of role models in the community. It is a relatively underdeveloped area of educational research however, so I wanted to gain an insight into the experiences of the students themselves and design an intervention that would fit my own context but also be relevant to other schools in the UK with high Somali populations and indeed other minority ethnic groups.

This study focuses not just on academic achievement but also social development and positive engagement in school life. In order to collect rich, exploratory data in relation to these many different aspects, I used a case-study framework and collected predominantly qualitative data gained from student questionnaires and interviews. My intervention, based on the literature and on the data from my questionnaire and interviews, involved the use of Year 12 Somali students acting as peer mentors for all Year 7 Somali boys who chose to participate (12 students). Each mentor met weekly with the same students; the precise focus of the meeting was dependent on individual circumstances but was informal in nature and broadly looking at issues of learning, behaviour and aspirations.

Through the first research phases, I gained a lot of rich data on student experiences, and found a pattern of supportive homes/ parents, with generalised very aspirational sentiment and high academic self-concept. I also found evidence of a generalised lack of role models, students experiencing regular racism and bullying and negative behaviour cycles. Contrary to the published literature, language was not found to be a significant barrier to learning and all students were found to be bilingual. Finally, the evaluation of the peer-mentoring intervention found that this is a positive, sustainable strategy which is of value to both mentors and mentees; the positive relationships between mentor and mentee were the key elements which made this a valuable programme for the Year 7 and Year 12 students.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Rationale and context

I work in a large, mixed comprehensive school in inner-London as an MFL teacher and Director of Studies. During my time at the school, I have become very interested in the experiences of the schools' Somali students, specifically boys, who represent 10% of the school population and who have been the identified key concern group since 2015, as referenced in the school development plan. This was based on achievement indicators such as KS3 and KS4 performance data and GCSE results, but also on less-measurable data such as negative behaviour incidents, parental engagement, and engagement with school life such as involvement with extra-curricular clubs, trips, sports and musical activities. When looked at globally, these factors all presented a very clear picture of a major gap in the overall experience and achievement of Somali boys in our school in comparison to other students in the school, and a gap between Somali boys and Somali girls. It seemed clear that there must be some significant reasons behind this and that this gap needed to be closed and the issues addressed.

The educational achievement of Somali students, and boys in particular, in UK schools has been a worrying but relatively under-researched concern for several years. As Sare (2008) says, "the educational attainment figures for Somali students are shameful...educational attainment is the lowest among ethnic minority groups" (para.2). The largest study, in 2008, by Demie et al, showed a GCSE attainment gap of almost 50% on average between Somali students and the highest attaining ethnic minority group; within that, there was a further gap between boys and girls. While the academic achievement of ethnic minority groups in general has been extensively researched over many years (major examples including the work of Coleman et al (1966), the Swann Report for the DES (1985) and the DfES (2006)), it seems the achievement of Somali students, and specifically boys, has been given far less attention. As well as my own school context, therefore, there is a far broader context here as well which means that there is a wider relevance and importance to this research.

My first involvement with Somali boys' achievement was in 2016, when I was part of the school's themed review looking at the achievement of Somali boys in years 7-9. This was a 2 week process of learning walks, observations and student voice involving 5 members of staff including the Headteacher. A short report of the findings was written by the Headteacher. The review began to uncover some of the possible issues facing Somali boys in our school, but what became clear was that this was something that needed to be looked at not only in far more detail but also on an ongoing basis rather than a very brief insight over a fortnight. Being a part of this review inspired me to want to do this, to really look into some of the background to this and to design an intervention that might be able to address some of the issues facing Somali boys in our school.

1.2 School context

The school is a highly diverse, urban community of 1300 students which serves a densely populated area where 99% of the students live within 1 mile of the school. It is a local authority school which has served the community since 1962. The diversity of the school is on many levels and makes it a very complex environment, one in which students are living almost in two distinct worlds that are vastly different from each other. Firstly, it is characterised by extremes of wealth and poverty which leads to a huge gap between advantage and disadvantage with potential consequences for achievement; the gap nationally between the achievement of students from different socio-economic backgrounds is well-researched and well-documented (for an overview, see DfES report on Social Mobility, 2006) and it manifests itself very clearly in my school. 70% of the students are entitled to Pupil Premium funding, while at the other end of the spectrum there is a large proportion of students who are living in highly affluent circumstances. The Headteacher was very clear in a report in 2015 that “there is a definite correlation between students who find school the most difficult (as evidenced by data on behaviour, engagement and achievement) and the extent of the disadvantages they face” (Sherrington, 2015, para 2). Certainly, while it is important not to generalise, many of the students come from families with a history of academic achievement, are employed in stable professional workplaces and offer high levels of cultural capital as well as a positive environment for home learning. Contrast this with the other end of the spectrum where students may be living in unstable, overcrowded households with huge pressures financially and significant negative draws from the local community such as gangs and crime. The gap is vast and the consequences of this are noticeable in school.

Secondly, the school is ethnically diverse with 78% of students from ethnic minority backgrounds. Of these students, the largest communities are Turkish, Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Black African. Of the Black African students, the vast majority are Somali. The proportion of students who have English as an Additional Language is above average, although in most cases the students are bilingual.

The school is also diverse in terms of achievement, with GCSE attainment across the full range but overall significantly below the national average; in 2016, 40% of students achieved 5 A*-C including English and Maths. There is also an above average number of students with SEN.

When looked at objectively, this shows a school that is highly complex and divided along many lines. It is important to mention that during my time at the school there has been huge disruption and uncertainty; in December 2016 Ofsted inspected the school and judged the school to be inadequate in every area. The school was placed in Special Measures with enforced academy conversion put in place for September 2017. The impact of this inspection was huge – the Headteacher left and conditions at the school deteriorated significantly as behaviour became extremely challenging, staff morale plummeted and there was a sense of uncertainty. Many of the students from the top end of the socio-economic spectrum were removed from the school by their parents; the demographic of the school population changed somewhat even between the inspection and the end of the school year.

It is against this backdrop that I conducted my research and is important to note therefore that the school was in a period of turmoil during my period of research. The context of the students and the issues that I wished to look at remained the same however and I was able to complete my project in spite of the circumstances of the school.

1.3 Aims and objectives

The aim of my research project is to implement an intervention that will improve the school experience of Somali boys' in my school. Whilst this study will be focussed on my own school, it hopes to highlight issues and strategies that can be useful for other schools with high numbers of Somali students (and possibly other marginalised groups) and ways in which these might be developed further. I also hope that my intervention will be sustainable in my school; it is important that the school develops stability (particularly with the current upheaval) and it is vital for these students that the intervention can be used consistently over a period of time.

The objectives of my study are to identify and analyse in detail the perceptions, potential barriers to learning and positive school experiences of Somali boys in my school. The other key objective is to design an intervention that will begin to address one or some of these issues and to analyse its effectiveness. My study will be conducted through the method of qualitative examination and a case-study framework as my aim is to focus on the experience of Somali boys in a real-life context in terms of perceptions, aspirations, motivation and achievement rather than through quantitative examination of grades and other statistical data (Yin, 2014).

My research questions are as follows:

Review of the literature:

- Q1 What is the background to the Somali community in the UK?
- Q2 What are the possible barriers to Somali boys' achievement and positive school experience in UK schools?
- Q3 What possible strategies can be used to address these barriers?

My empirical research

- Q4 What are Somali boys' perceptions of their school experience in my school?
- Q5 What are the possible barriers to Somali boys' achievement and positive school experience in my school?
- Q6 Can a system of peer mentoring be an effective strategy to promote achievement and positive school experience for Somali boys?

Chapter 2: Literature review

The research questions I am aiming to address in the literature review are:

- Q1 What is the background to the Somali community in the UK?
- Q2 What are the possible barriers to Somali boys' achievement and positive school experience in UK schools?
- Q3 What possible strategies can be used to address these barriers?

2.1 What is the background to the Somali community in the UK?

2.1.1 Political overview

Somalia has experienced significant civil unrest since the latter part of the 20th century and continues to be unstable. The country has experienced “one of the most brutal, prolonged, and protracted violent conflicts on the African continent” (Ingiriis, 2016:58) – the Somali Civil War. This can be traced back to the oppressive Siad Barre regime of 1969-1991. Siad Barre instilled military rule in Somalia in 1969 and his regime “had one of the worst human rights records in Africa” (United Nations, 2001:42). A National Security Service was introduced immediately after he took power, which was a system of secret police designed to protect against subversion and enable the state to imprison or execute anyone who engaged in any oppositional political activities. A report in 1990 by the Africa Watch Committee states that uprisings against government control began in the 1970s with the formation of the Somali National Movement, an anti-government guerrilla organisation, and throughout the 1970s and 1980s the government unleashed a “reign of terror” against its own people including “summary killings, arbitrary arrest, torture, detention in squalid conditions and psychological intimidation” (Africa Watch, 1990:9).

As the government became increasingly totalitarian, more anti-government rebel groups formed and fought the government in the late 1980s until Barre and his party were eventually overthrown in 1991. In the power vacuum which followed, the opposition forces fought for power and civil war between the clan-based militias resulted.

The conflict in the early 1990s led to a humanitarian disaster, with mass starvation and famine and the first wave of refugees to leave Somalia. As fighting continued and more civilians were killed, the UN intervened but withdrew in 1995 with order still not restored (Global Security, n.d). 90% of schools were destroyed and infrastructure collapsed. It is estimated that between 300,000 and 500,000 people have been killed (Global Security, n.d), through fighting, famine or disease. The civil war also led to mass migration from Somalia as people fled, with an estimated 2 million civilians fleeing, either internally displaced or as refugees in other countries.

A further consequence of the civil war has been a rise in criminal activity in Somalia, particularly piracy, which is widely reported (e.g. Gibbons-Neff, 2017; BBC, 2017), and the rise of the Islamist militant group, Al-Shabaab (Muir, 2012; Alexander, 2013).

It is clear that Somalia has an extremely troubled recent past which has led to the migration of large numbers of Somali civilians over the past 25 years. It is vital that we keep this in mind; the vast majority of Somali families living in the UK are relatively recent arrivals to the country who will have experienced violence or other consequences of civil war directly or indirectly and there is a potential impact on the lives of the students in school.

2.1.2 Somali clan system

It is important to mention the Somali clan-based system which dominates Somali culture: "Clans play a central role in Somali society, politics and identity formation. Clans not only form the basis of the traditional Somali political structure, but also provide both a system of rights and social support. The system continues to have an impact on the community in the UK, often acting as a pre-existing support network, with clan members feeling obliged to assist a newly arrived refugee from their own clan." (The Change Institute, 2009:6). Whilst the supportive nature of this system can be beneficial, it also conversely presents potential issues of exclusion; it is a system which can be inclusive or exclusive. Such allegiances can lead to hostility between or within clans and can transfer into gangs: "Regional background in Somalia continues to affect boys' behaviour in London, with many boys forming groups around different ethnic identities and becoming involved in gang crime based on inter-ethnic Somali youth gangs" (The Change Institute, 2009: 8). There are therefore potential implications which stem from the clan system for students, especially boys, in UK schools. Furthermore, the clan system creates a somewhat fractured community and this culture could affect the social integration of the Somali community in the UK, which could potentially impact on the social inclusion of students in school. As the report from the Change Institute (2009) says, there is evidence that the most successful integration in the UK has been by people who have lessened their links to the clan system.

2.1.3 Education in Somalia

The education system in Somalia has long been seriously limited and this is worth noting. As UNICEF (n.d.) state "After more than two decades of conflict, a generation of Somali children lost the opportunity for formal education and other benefits of a stable childhood" (para.1). All formal education systems in Somalia collapsed in 1991 (Ali and Jones, 2000), and today UNICEF says that just 30% of primary age children attend school in Somalia, which is among the lowest rates in the world. Many Somali people have never known any system of education, only conflict, and this political and educational instability could potentially have an impact on students' ability to access and engage with education in the UK.

2.1.4 Somali community in the UK and London

The Office for National Statistics (2015) suggests that there are 114,000 Somali people living in the UK, of which approximately 65,000 live in London; the UK has the largest Somali community in Europe. There have been Somali immigrants in the UK since the late 19th century (Demie, 2008) but the vast majority of Somali people in the UK arrived as refugees and asylum seekers as a result of the civil war from the late 1980s onwards, as discussed above. In the early 2000s, there was also a wave

of immigration into the UK from other host countries, such as Sweden, Norway and Holland (Demie et al, 2008). However, it seems apparent that no-one really knows exactly how many Somali people are in the UK, with estimates ranging up to 1 million (Demie et al, 2008). This is significant because without an accurate picture, access to services may be insufficient. The community appears to be “almost an invisible minority” (Sare, 2008, para.1) resulting in social exclusion. As Sare (2008) says, there are “few festivals, little radio and only a handful of Somali restaurants” (para.2), although it should be noted that this was written 9 years ago. The lack of cultural noticeability could certainly act as a barrier to integration into society with the potential consequences for school that this may bring – Diriye (2006:1), describes a “social invisibility”. As Sare (2008) concludes: “the social exclusion of British Somalis is unparalleled and mirrors the isolation of Somalia itself” (para.2). Evidence of another angle to social exclusion is found in an article by Muir (2012), who quotes a young Somali woman: “The young live and go to school in mixed communities, but find there is no immediate affiliation, she says “The indigenous population says we're black. And then the black kids will say 'you're not black – you're Mali'.” (para.3). This shows again the isolation and possible identity issues which can make integrating extremely difficult.

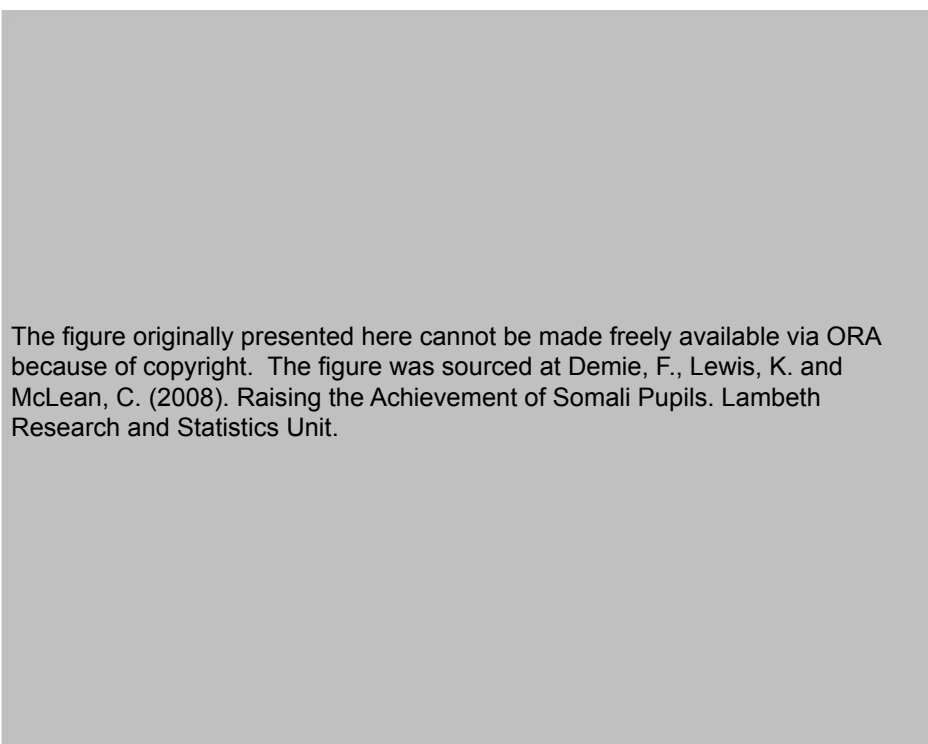
Unemployment statistics also suggest that social exclusion is prevalent. The Somali community has the highest rate of unemployment of all London communities, reaching 78% for women and 50% for men (“Worklessness by country of birth”, 2014). As an article in *The Economist* in 2013 says, “Most Somalis—Britain’s largest refugee population—do not work. They are among the poorest, worst-educated and least-employed in Britain.” (“The road is long”, 2013, para. 1). Prior to this, a report from the Department of Communities and Local Government in 2009 (cited in Muir, 2012, para.9) also confirmed that of all groups unemployment is highest amongst Somali migrants; little has changed between 2009 and 2014. The Change Institute reported in 2009 that 50% of the community have no qualifications and only 3% have a higher education qualification. If we look at the reasons behind high levels of unemployment, it seems very likely that educational experience is the principal cause, and so we need to look at the reasons behind this, which is the key motivator of my study.

2.1.5 Educational context in the UK

There is no doubt that many Somali students, and boys specifically, are underachieving hugely in UK secondary schools – this is evidenced over time from schools and from the small range of studies which have been undertaken (Strand et al, 2010; Demie et al, 2008; Diriye, 2006, Ali & Jones, 2000), As Demie et al said in 2008 “the achievement of Somali heritage pupils lags far behind the average achievement of the majority of their peers” (p.5).

The study by Strand et al (2010) has data from 2006 GCSE performance (reproduced below), and makes it clear that Somali students are by far the lowest achieving group, with 32% of Somali students achieving 5A*-C (compared to a national average at that time of 59%) and this is also significantly lower than the 55% of Black African students who achieved 5A* -C. This is particularly interesting as

Somali students are aggregated into the Black African subset for national statistics. Demie et al (2008) have data from the same year which shows the comparison to other ethnic groups (Figure 1):



A major issue over the past few years, acknowledged by several researchers (Demie et al, 2008; Diriye, 2006 Harris, 2004; Ali & Jones, 2000) has been a lack of data specifically focussing on Somali students: “Because of a lack of available data there is little research into the achievement of Somali pupils. The underachievement of many Somali pupils in British schools has been masked by government statistics that fail to distinguish between African groups. There are no reliable statistics on the Somali population as a separate ethnic group in Britain and there is little clarity on the number of Somali pupils in schools” (Demie et al, 2008). This is obviously concerning in itself, as without accurate data it is difficult to identify and address issues. As Demie’s study in 2008 was one of the most recent large studies, it seems that since then not a lot has changed. Somali students are not recognised as a distinct ethnic group in terms of national statistics, which may mean that there is a danger that the specific needs of these students may simply not be addressed. It seems paradoxical, too, that such a large ethnic group, and one which has been in the UK for some time now, is not acknowledged in this way; this links back to the notion of social invisibility discussed earlier. While there is extensive research and clear data available on Black African students (and many other ethnic groups) in UK schools, Somali students are not identified as part of the Black African group. As Harris (2004) says “Both groups suffer racism, but African Caribbean are perceived to be part of British society... It is not the volume of research on African Caribbean (although this is considerable) that gives them a public presence, but their high visibility in a wider society. But the social distance between Somalis and... British culture increases their isolation. There is therefore a dissonance between the

amount of information which actually exists, and what is believed to be known” (p.13). Diriye (2006) also suggests that while Somali students are black and Muslim, they are not identified as being part of either group: “The Somali child happens to be a Muslim and Black, but these two characteristics do not necessarily ‘normalize’ them neither with other Muslims in UK who are predominately Asians as they do not share their colour, language, food or culture, nor with other black communities in UK who are different from the Somalis in terms of culture, religion and language despite the fact that most of the Somalis are currently categorizing themselves as black Africans” (p.2). The lack of position in school could certainly have an impact on school achievement, but also the lack of available data restricts our ability to address potential issues.

2.2 What are the possible barriers to Somali boys’ achievement and positive school experience in UK schools?

It would be helpful here to look at some of the characteristics of Somali students in UK schools. The clear trend arising from this is one of deprivation. Socio-economic status has long been acknowledged as the key driver of educational inequality and low attainment. Strand et al (2010) used data from the Office for National Statistics to provide clear evidence of the high levels of deprivation amongst this community, and they provide evidence of the link between low socio-economic status and low attainment, which is particularly stark amongst boys. As they say “From this analysis we can conclude that social class substantially accounts for the overall low attainment of the Somali group. Because over 84% of Somali students are in the low SEC group, compared to only 34% of White British students, the average GCSE score for the Somali group as a whole is well below the White British average” (Strand et al, 2010:72).

Some of the headlines in terms of Somali disadvantage I will summarise here:

- 84% of Somali students are in the low socio-economic classification (SEC) group¹
- 75% of Somali students live in a household where no-one has ever worked or is long-term unemployed, and only 7% come from households with people who work in professional arenas.
- 83% of Somali students have mothers with no educational qualifications (compared to 16% of White British)
- 90% of Somali students are entitled to free school meals (against 13% of White British and compared to 15% nationally)
- 1% of Somali students’ families own the house they live in compared to 75% of White British students
- 57% of Somali students live in single-parent households compared to 23% of White British students
- 80% of Somali students live in the most deprived neighbourhoods and 1% live in the least deprived neighbourhoods

¹ SEC defined by family employment status

Although this information is from 2010 and it was comparing Somali students with Turkish, Bangladeshi and White British students, we can see that on every measure Somali students are at a significant disadvantage socio-economically. If we accept the link between socio-economic status and school achievement, there is an obvious and immediate indicator that Somali students are at a disadvantage, even before we look at the specific barriers to Somali students' educational achievement. However, Strand et al (2010) note that "Somali students achieve significantly higher results than expected when accounting for social disadvantage" (p.75) which points to an inherent resilience to deprivation amongst these students – in spite of the extreme social disadvantage, and low achievement, it seems that in fact Somali students are achievement much better than might be expected given the extent of the disadvantage.

Strand et al (2010) also looked at some positive indicators for attainment, and a very different picture emerges:

- 99% of Somali parents want their children to continue in education after 16
- 19% of Somali students are accessing private tuition
- 94% of Somali students want to continue in education after 16
- 40% of Somali students were in the highest group for academic self-concept
- 55% were in the top quartile for attitude towards school

In all of these variables which can be indicators of positive academic achievement, Somali students were higher than other groups. This should lead to higher achievement, but in fact Somali students perform significantly lower than might be expected with this in mind. This might point towards a lack of understanding of the UK education system but it certainly shows a discord between educational motivation and parental aspiration, and achievement.

2.2.1 Language

Several researchers have identified understanding of the English language as a barrier to Somali student achievement in UK schools (Rasmussen, 2009; Demie et al, 2008; Diriye, 2006; Harris, 2004). Indeed, Rasmussen (2009) states that "There is near unanimous agreement within the literature and from the interviews conducted that the language barrier is the biggest issue Somali pupils face" (p.10). As the majority of Somali families are relatively new arrivals to the UK, the majority of parents have low levels of English fluency. In these families, they speak Somali at home and only use English when speaking to non-Somalis in transactional activities (Diriye, 2006; The Change Institute, 2009); thus, the lack of language proficiency may be primarily with parents, which of course has an impact on student achievement. In fact, the Somali language only devised a written script in 1972, so the idea of writing is a relatively new concept and one of which some parents in the UK will have no experience; clearly, this makes the notion of learning English even more challenging. It seems obvious that if a parent has limited English, they may not be able to help their child with school work in the UK, or be able to engage with the UK education system, even down to parents' evenings and school reports. Additionally, some Somali students who were born in the UK might find their level of

English affected by only speaking Somali at home, and there is a clear potential for negative consequences here (Diriye, 2006). This can be added to the fact that many of the families who fled to the UK will have had no education themselves in Somalia following the collapse of infrastructure during the civil war. All of this may well mean that some Somali parents do not want to visit the school or engage with school life; it is yet another example of how the children of Somali parents with little or no formal education and limited English are excluded from our system.

It is worth noting that some Somali families first moved to other European countries (Sweden, Norway, Netherlands) before arriving in the UK, meaning that in fact they may not speak their mother tongue or English very well (The Change Institute, 2009) which can have an impact on their ability to integrate not only into British society, but also Somali society.

Somali students themselves have varying levels of English proficiency, depending on when they arrived in the UK and depending on parental language proficiency – in 2008, Demie et al suggested that 87% of Somali students in London are not fluent in English. Many Somali students speak only Somali at home and then are required to speak English at school, which is a further challenge and can present issues with accessing the curriculum. As Diriye (2006) says, the idea of bilingualism is new to most Somali families, and spoken Somali is often the only language that parents can use.

There is evidence too that low levels of English fluency amongst Somali parents and students, and the subsequent lack of engagement with school life, can lead to low teacher and school expectations of these students (Ali & Jones, 2000) and the formation of a negative stereotype. They suggest that from their interviews with staff at various schools there is an assumption that Somali students cannot achieve well, primarily due to language issues. This can perpetuate therefore the cycle of underachievement and further contribute to social exclusion.

There is however solid evidence that language barriers for EAL students can be addressed and do not necessarily need to be an impediment to achievement (for an overview, see Strand, Malmberg and Hall, 2015); in fact other factors, particularly socio-economic status, represent a potentially more significant barrier.

2.2.2 Historical and cultural context

The circumstances of the civil war which led to mass migration from Somalia have been looked at earlier. Aside from the fact that the unsettlement, the fleeing and the extreme disruption to life that this war entailed, and the potential for this to affect school achievement in a profound way, there is evidence that exposure to violence and trauma on this level can have a huge impact, even if experienced indirectly (Diriye, 2006; Ali & Jones, 2000). As Diriye (2006) says, although the majority of Somali students have no direct experience of the violence of the war themselves, they may still be affected indirectly by the behaviour of the adults they live with. Ali & Jones (2000) add that some older students or students who were not born in the UK students may have experienced violence and killings directly, and are uncertain of

where some family members are. The potential for this trauma to be a barrier to school achievement is clear.

Diriye (2006) also cites a report by the United Nations investigating the mental health of Somali children in the UK, which suggested that Somali children “demonstrated a tendency towards aggression and violence in London schools” (p.2) as a result of indirect trauma. This report also suggested that Somali parents can be dismissive of the concept of mental health disorders in children. We must be careful here, however, not to judge that any aggression from a Somali student is a result of indirect trauma as of course there are a variety of reasons why young people might exhibit aggression; there is a danger of creating a negative stereotype here of which we must be wary.

Culturally, too, there are difficulties for Somali students in UK schools which I have already looked at: issues of identity and where Somali students feel that they fit into the system; linguistic culture (oral versus written); clan systems. All have the potential to accentuate the difficulties of integration for Somali students. One further cultural issue is that of the difference between the Somali education system and the UK system. Harris (2004) highlights that in the UK students are grouped by age; in Somalia, they are grouped by ability. This can create difficulties for parents to comprehend but also for students themselves, and can have a negative impact on integration. A lack of awareness of these cultural and historical issues amongst schools and teachers is seen as fundamental by several authors (Diriye, 2006; Rasmussen, 2009; Demie et al, 2008) – without at least a basic understanding of the issues, it can be hard for schools and teachers to direct support appropriately.

2.2.3 Racism

Several authors highlight the issue of racism facing Somali pupils in UK schools (The Change Institute, 2009; Rasmussen, 2009; Diriye, 2006; Ali & Jones, 2000). This can be directed against Somali students specifically, resulting from the identity issues discussed earlier whereby Somali students may not identify with either Black or Muslim students (Sare, 2008; Diriye, 2006). The Change Institute (2009) mentions that the Somali community has experienced considerable prejudice from other ethnic minority communities, and there are reports that in some areas the Somali community has not been made welcome in some mosques. A lack of English may also make reporting such incidents more difficult. Against this backdrop of feeling excluded from society, there is the potential for this feeling of exclusion to be brought into school and to affect achievement.

There is also the generalised hostility towards refugees and immigrants of which Somali students are a part (Rasmussen, 2009), and which is often perpetuated by various media outlets (Ali & Jones, 2000). Rutter (2004) quotes a Somali student who said that one of the reasons why Somali students often withdraw from school life is because they feel different and unwelcome. Diriye (2006) also makes a suggestion that teachers, as part of wider society, may have cultural prejudices and racist attitudes, which may manifest itself by having lower expectations of certain students.

2.2.4 Poverty and deprivation

As we have seen above, the vast majority of Somali students live in disadvantaged households, and in UK schools 90% are entitled to pupil premium funding (Strand et al, 2010) and the consequent barrier to educational achievement that this may cause is well-documented. One extra element mentioned by Diriye (2006) is that of overcrowded housing- he explains that many of the students who live in these households have little or no space to organise home-learning, often no computer and high noise levels. He also mentions the potential mental health issues related to this, and that there is evidence of increased levels of aggression amongst students in overcrowded and noisy households. This may lead to aggressive incidents in school, exclusion and the negative cycle continues. The Change Institute (2009) also discusses mental health difficulties in the community, which can be caused by any of the factors affecting the community: poverty, isolation, trauma, racism.

2.2.5 Masculinity

There is evidence from a study by Demie et al (2013) in Lambeth that Somali girls significantly outperform Somali boys in every measure at KS2, 3 and 4. Other researchers have also discussed the fact that Somali boys are more likely to be excluded, be involved in aggressive incidents and be more easily drawn into external negativity which might affect school achievement. The Change Institute (2009) says that “clan affiliations and regional background in Somalia continues to affect young Somali male behaviour in London... many boys form groups around different clan and regional identities, and become involved in gang crime based around these identities”(p.43). Again we see the issue of finding an identity for Somali boys in particular, and we can see very clearly that gang involvement will represent a significant barrier to educational achievement. They suggest that the lack of male role-models within the community is significant. Diriye (2006) talks about the significance of having unemployed parents, as even the few “educated adults found themselves in an unfortunate position after the qualifications they gained outside UK and their previous experiences were not recognised by the employers. When some children see their parents in such a situation, they may doubt the benefits of going to school.” (p.2) In Demie et al's study in 2008, and Rasmussen's in 2009, they too noted the lack of role models and some Somali boys finding it difficult growing up in female-led households. A lack of role models can have a serious impact on educational achievement.

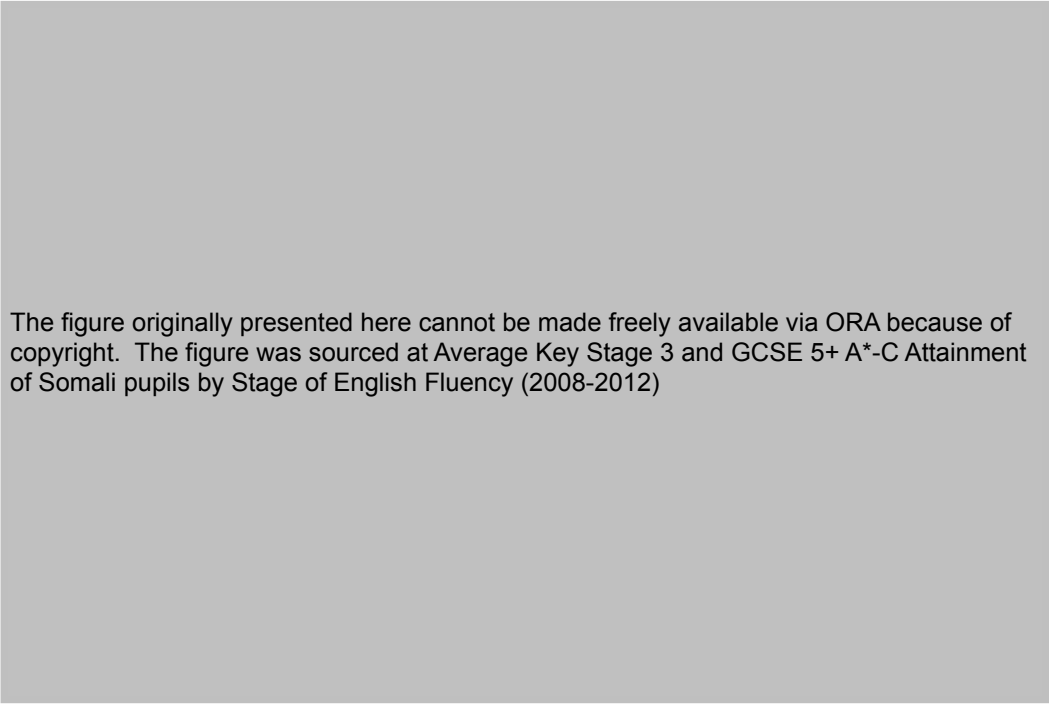
There is a negative stereotype of Somali boys which permeates through and which we can see here. Several studies have cited this negative stereotype and the extent to which this can have an impact on school achievement, particularly through expectations from staff – Demie et al (2008) are very clear: “Somali boys often come to secondary school with a reputation for poor behaviour” (p.22), but that these stereotypes can be challenged by addressing the barriers that these students face.

2.3 What possible strategies can be used to address these barriers?

2.3.1 Language support

As language issues can be one of the key barriers facing Somali students, this area is a main focus. As Demie et al say (2008:35): “Language is not only an instrumental tool for communication, but also inextricably linked to identity and the carrier of cultural values and attitudes”. There are two areas here – improving English literacy skills and also improving mother tongue literacy skills and using the mother tongue to support integration.

Supporting English skills for parents and students is of great importance, in terms of accessing the curriculum but also in terms of engaging in wider school life and being socially included. Simply in terms of education achievement, fluency in English affects performance. The table below (Figure 2) is from an empirical study in London which used a dataset of all Somali students in the borough (approximately 1100) and compared English level with exam performance:



The figure originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The figure was sourced at Average Key Stage 3 and GCSE 5+ A*-C Attainment of Somali pupils by Stage of English Fluency (2008-2012)

We can see here the importance of English fluency – at GCSE for example, there is a difference every year between fully fluent and other students. Several researchers advocate high-quality EAL support as being a key strategy (Rasmussen, 2009; Demie et al, 2008; Diriye, 2006; Ali & Jones, 2000;).

In Demie et al’s large study in 2008, they looked at examples of good practice in schools in London. All schools noted the importance of English fluency and described the steps they have taken to address this. One school in London has been successful in improving English proficiency by training teachers in bilingualism and reminding staff that the language development of bilingual students is everyone’s responsibility. Each year they produce a booklet with every bilingual student’s details

including level of English proficiency, what support they receive and strategies for individual students. They also produce all letters and parental communication in English and Somali, including a bilingual guide for all Somali parents and students; this is a strategy also advocated by Diriye (2006). The school has seen best-ever GCSE results for Somali students, and while causality is difficult to prove, a comprehensive EAL programme such as this must be beneficial. Another school offers a structured English course led by an EAL subject leader, with bilingual resources and alternative qualifications. Their work was heavily praised by Ofsted (Demie et al, 2008).

An induction programme for newly arrived Somali students, as advocated by Rasmussen (2009) and Ali & Jones (2000) is also used by another school as an example of good practice; the same school offers an English assessment for new arrivals, bilingual Somali and English translators, parent literacy classes, homework clubs and individual in-class support to successfully raise English proficiency.

While gaining proficiency in English is vital for students and parents, it is also important to remember the importance of mother tongue literacy and the schools above have all recognised this. This is important both in terms of social inclusion in the community but also as a way of celebrating culture. Demie et al (2008) describe how one good practice school celebrates home languages in order to foster inclusion and create a 'family'. Ali & Jones (2000) also cite the importance of "developing the teaching of mother tongue as a means of raising educational achievement, as well as developing pride in pupils' cultural identity." (p.39).

2.3.2 Parental engagement

We have seen above that there is evidence that the majority of Somali parents have high expectations for their children and are ambitious for them educationally (Strand et al, 2010). We have also seen how it can be extremely difficult for these parents to engage with the school due to a lack of English, a lack of understanding of the education system and of how the school works. Lack of parental engagement can represent a significant barrier to student achievement and the most successful schools have adopted strategies to overcome this. In 2000, Ali & Jones advocated parent workshops, training for parents on UK education, parent induction and parent literacy sessions.

One school successfully uses a Somali home-school link worker who acts as interpreter, translator, and learning mentor and who is a go-between for the school and parents – he is described as the "social glue that binds Somali parents and their children to the school". (Demie et al, 2008:19). The school runs an annual Somali parents information event and since the introduction of the home-school link worker attendance has gone from 10 to 40 at this event, and the event is also attended by the Senior Leadership team and staff. Links have also been created within the community and parental confidence has grown. This particular school initiative has also increased the presence of paternal involvement with school which was previously lacking. The school also offer ICT classes for parents, run by the home-link worker. This is a highly successful strategy, although it must be recognised that not all schools would be able to fund or appoint such a worker.

The pattern of good practice schools from this study consists of effectively improving parental engagement through improving language skills, developing confidence and understanding of UK school systems and making school accessible. Several researchers note that the culture of Somali parents valuing education and supporting children to achieve highly is in most cases already there, and so it is a case of harnessing that.

Demie (2008) concludes that successful schools have been able to “challenge stereotypes of underachievement, disaffection and poor behaviour among Somali pupils and low aspiration. There is a growing understanding of family learning cultures that support achievement and that language is a barrier that can be circumvented.” (p.24).

Several authors (Rasmussen, 2009; Demie et al, 2008; Diriye, 2006; Ali & Jones, 2000) have recommended the introduction of specialised Somali support workers, from the Somali community, who are bilingual. As above, this can be a wide-ranging role which involves parents, or it could be a more limited role of learning mentor within school. In various forms, this strategy has been used successfully in the schools cited by Demie et al (2008) and has benefits of language development, cultural development (including promoting cultural understanding amongst staff), improved communication between all parties and the position of role-model, which we saw above can be lacking in some cases. Of course, it also means that there can be direct support for academic study. There are of course funding implications here which would need to be considered but evidence tells us that this can be an effective strategy.

2.3.3 Use of data

As we have seen above, Somali students are not given a distinct ethnic status in terms of national statistics as students are placed under the Black African category. Demie et al (2008), Rasmussen (2009) and Strand et al (2010) have all commented on this. Effective use of data is a well-established tool for raising attainment, and it is harder to do this without appropriate data. It also means that on a wider scale it is difficult to conduct quantitative analysis (Rasmussen, 2009). It could also be seen that this contributes to the invisibility of Somali students. Developing accurate and appropriate data for Somali students is therefore something that needs to be developed as strategy for improving achievement.

2.3.4 Other strategies

Rasmussen (2009) suggests the implementation of cultural training for teachers, which seems important given the cultural and historical specificities of Somali students we looked at above. Ali & Jones (2000) agree that this is of vital importance. Diriye (2006) explains that teachers can reinforce negative stereotypes through their expectations of Somali students, boys in particular, and so it is important that teachers have an understanding of some of the barriers Somali students might face. Ali & Jones (2000) and Rasmussen (2009) also advocate the employment of Somali staff, a strategy that Demie et al (2008) note has been used effectively in one of the good practice schools. There are of course issues of funding

here and also of positive discrimination but the notion of having at least one Somali staff member in schools with high numbers of Somali students can be positive, in terms of language, culture and role-modelling.

Chapter 3: Methodology

My methodology was determined by the three research questions I intended to answer through my empirical inquiry:

1. What are Somali boys' perceptions of their school experience in my school?
2. What are the possible barriers to Somali boys' achievement and positive school experience in my school?
3. Can a system of peer mentoring be an effective strategy to promote achievement and positive school experience for Somali boys?

Having read the literature and looked at some of the previous studies on the achievement of Somali students in UK schools, I was led towards a case-study framework with qualitative data. My reasoning was clear and refers back to the overall aim of my project: I wanted to gain an insight into the perceptions of the Somali students in my school, compare to what the literature says and to develop an intervention that addressed one or more of the identified barriers to achievement that Somali students may face (Yin, 2014). I needed this to be specific to my school context, so my intervention would be based on the findings from an initial, exploratory phase of research. As I had previously been involved in a brief review, I knew that the main underachieving group were Somali boys, so I decided that my focus should be on boys specifically.

The process I went through was as follows (I have not included CUREC approval or ethical considerations in this section as this will be discussed later):

3.1 Phase 1 (September 2016-January 2017)

1. I met with my Headteacher to discuss my ideas and to seek his approval. We discussed at length the issues facing Somali boys in the school and the previous year's review. This was useful in terms of understanding the context and confirmed that Somali boys do face significant issues in our school and that as a research focus it was appropriate and could be highly beneficial for those students as well as the school as a whole. He gave me his full support to proceed.
2. Questionnaires were given to all Somali boys in Years 7-9 to gain an impression of their views on learning, motivation and aspirations as well as their experience of the school (Appendix 1). I designed these carefully following the advice of Cohen et al, (2011), avoiding leading questions and making the questionnaire non-threatening. One of the ways I did this was by making the questionnaires anonymous, as evidence suggests that anonymous testing in terms of attitudinal data enables more honest answering (Ong & Weiss, 2000). I used a Likert scale with closed questions and adapted a motivational survey from Dornyei & Ushioda (2009) to gain some simple quantitative attitudinal data – the advantage of such scales is a simple, accessible way to gain baseline data; the disadvantage is the level of detail (Creswell and Clark, 2011), but this would be developed later in the study. Only KS3 students were used as I wanted my research to be focussed on younger years so that this might be a sustainable intervention. I also knew that many of the Year 8 and Year 9 students were involved in the review last

year so they would already be used to such questioning. In total, this represented 48 students.

3. I decided at this point to focus on Year 7, which represented 14 students. My reasoning for this was that as the youngest year group the biggest and most long-term impact would be with them. I wrote to the parents of these students to inform them and for consent, and invited them to come into school for an informal discussion. I interviewed the Year 7 students (Appendix 2) initially in small groups of 3 or 4 and then individually, and I recorded these interviews, with student consent. I used individual and group interviews as I thought this would give me a variety of rich data, as students may say more on their own, or develop each other's answers in the small group situation (Cohen et al, 2011). I conducted these interviews in school, during school hours to increase engagement. Although I will look at ethical considerations later on, I was aware of potential power issues here as I taught several of the students and they would have felt that they were talking to their teacher rather than a peer or an anonymous researcher. I sought to overcome this through trying to make the interviews as informal and friendly as possible, explaining the reasons behind it and bringing biscuits!
4. Based on the interviews, I decided that the most appropriate intervention would be some form of mentoring for these students – this was an adaptation of one of the suggested strategies from the literature (Demie et al, 2008; Rasmussen, 2009; Ali & Jones, 2000). I knew that funding would not allow the recruitment of a Somali support worker, so I decided to see if I could recruit people in the local Somali community to volunteer to come into school to work with the Year 7 boys as mentors – discussing issues in school, offering advice, supporting with work, supporting with language, liaising with parents, acting as a role model. My view was that the students would be more likely to speak freely than with me (which would lead to more qualitative data and a more accurate picture than my questionnaires and interviews could gain), that language issues would be overcome and that this would be a positive way of involving the community in school life. I made consent letters for students and parents and all but 2 students were happy to participate.
I contacted all staff to see if anyone knew of anyone who might be interested and one staff member told me that he knew a local councillor who was Somali and who had worked with Somali students in schools. I contacted her and she was happy to help, and gave me another contact who I also spoke with. I was also able to contact an author of one of the studies discussed in the literature review who supported my idea for an intervention and also gave me a contact.
5. My idea was for the volunteers to come in weekly and meet with the students. I will look at this in the Difficulties section, but for various reasons, mainly logistical, this did not work. I reflected on this and decided to use Year 12 Somali students as mentors, in exactly the same capacity, to meet on a weekly basis in school. This was more beneficial for several reasons – Year 12s are closer in age to Year 7s so their experience is recent and relevant; the year 12s have all been through the school successfully but have an understanding of the specific issues; Year 12s represent a successful role-model for Year 7s; Year 7s may be less likely to be intimidated by Year 12s, the power relationships are not as great an issue; Year 12s can benefit from this too, and mention it on university applications; this can be a sustainable

school programme that could continue every year; no funding implications; much easier logistically. The positives of this intervention seemed clear and extensive. The idea was that the Year 12 students would meet a Year 7 student every week in a capacity of mentor, similar to that described above.

6. I spoke with my Headteacher and the Head of Year 12 to ask for their input on which students would be appropriate as mentors. Both offered any support necessary, such as collecting students, or supporting in the mentoring sessions. They informed me that there were only 2 Somali boys in Year 12 and 6 Somali girls, so I would only have a total of 8 students who could be mentors, even if they all agreed to participate, which would mean that mentoring sessions would be 2 Year 7s for each mentor.
7. I then met with the 8 Year 12 students individually to explain my ideas and ask if they wished to participate. All said that they did.
8. I contacted all staff to inform them and spoke to the Year 7 and Year 12 students' tutors more extensively. I organised rooms and times for mentoring to take place. I invited staff to join me, but it should be noted (and I will address in more detail in the Difficulties section) that this was at the time of the Ofsted report and the infrastructure of the school had collapsed at this point.
9. To decide how the mentoring sessions should run, I reflected on my aims for the intervention. I decided on using the extended Friday morning tutorial time of 25 minutes (long enough to be meaningful but short enough to keep attention) which I suspected that the Year 7s would not mind missing as much as break for example! The sessions needed to be informal so that the students could develop a comfortable relationship with their mentors and speak openly. I wanted students to be able to speak in whichever language they wanted, partly to help relationships but also in the sense of feeling welcome, part of something and included. I also hoped that the Year 12s would be able to speak about their own experiences and to potentially become role-models. So I decided that for the first few sessions I would provide the Year 12s with topics for discussions (Appendices 7-9) which would give plenty to discuss and enable students to get to know their mentors. This was on a variety of topics which the literature and my own questionnaires led me to look at, such as aspiration, home life, family background and homework. This would have the added benefit of providing me with qualitative data. Mentoring sessions began following the Easter holiday, to run until the end of the school year.

3.2 Phase 2 (February 2017-July 2017)

Prior to the first session, I set up all participants on the school's online platform. This would provide a forum for discussion and information. I was able to set weekly reminders giving the day, time and location of the session and also providing an electronic version of the topic for discussion for the first session. There is also a forum section which enabled students to discuss if they wished. This platform proved to be very useful over the course of the intervention.

Having met all students, I tried to match Year 12s and Year 7s based on what I knew of their personalities and who I thought would work well with who. This was a relatively straightforward but worthwhile task.

Before the first session I met again with the Year 12 students and to brief them, give them the topic for discussion (Appendix 7) and explain what the aim of the first session was: to get to know their mentees, and to start to get an idea of the specific needs of the students.

On the first Friday morning, I collected most of the Year 7 students myself from various different classrooms (3 were absent), and I also had to collect 2 of the Year 12 students. I had arranged to use the library but this was occupied when I arrived as there had been a double-booking. This meant that time was somewhat limited and the first session did seem slightly chaotic, but I was confident that as students got used to it then this would become easier.

The following Monday, I had the first of the weekly feedback sessions with the Year 12 students. This involved them showing me their notes from the session and talking to me about what they had discussed, anything interesting that arose, and their thoughts. This proved to be an invaluable part of the intervention which provided me with a lot of data and kept it as an ongoing, working process. I kept the weekly notes from the Year 12s as this would help me to build up an individual picture of each student. When the Year 12 students were not able to meet with me, they were able to upload any notes or information from the session onto the online platform.

This is the process that the intervention followed over the period of 12 weeks. After 3 weeks or so, mentors and mentees were able to take themselves to the session every week without any need for me to collect them. For most sessions, I supervised in the background, but did not contribute, and on the two occasions when I was absent the students still attended the sessions as usual and the mentors ran them as usual.

3.3 Phase 3 (July 2017)

Over the final fortnight of the school year, I undertook the post-intervention evaluation. I wanted to review and discuss with all students, mentors and mentees, some of the issues related to the Year 7 students' school experience that had arisen over the course of the mentoring sessions. I also wanted to evaluate whether this form of peer mentoring was of value to the Year 7 students, and indeed the mentors. I wanted to see whether the peer mentoring was a strategy that could be used effectively to support the achievement of Somali boys in my school, and if this could be a sustainable programme. Finally, I wanted to gain the students' thoughts on how this process could be improved and developed.

3.4 Why qualitative research?

I was keen to understand the experience and perception of Somali boys and to gain an understanding of what the barriers are and how we can address them. I knew that qualitative research "provides an in-depth, intricate and detailed understanding of meanings, actions...attitudes, intentions and behaviours" (Cohen et al, 2011: 219): I wanted to hear views, opinions and thoughts and knew that I could gain that through

a combination of questionnaires and interviews (Cohen et al, 2011) and of course all of the data gained from the weekly mentoring sessions and my own feedback sessions with the Year 12 students.

The main study which informed my literature review was that of Demie et al in 2008. Although this involved several schools and multiple researchers, I felt that the study was very important to me in terms of the topic but also the methodology; this study examined identified barriers qualitatively and looked at how some different strategies to address these barriers have been successful. The study adopts an ethnographic framework, in that it is studying people and culture, and this is firmly how I saw my own research. The use of questionnaires and interviews as well as small focus groups also matched my own; the qualitative data they collected was similar to that which I aimed to gain. Finally, the lack of quantitative data, both locally and nationally, restricted my ability to undertake quantitative data analysis in relation to national norms, although I felt that this was not the appropriate form of research in terms of my aims for the project.

I wanted to use individual and small group interviews as there are benefits to both – in individual situations, a lot of insight can be gained, but in small group situations a broad range of information can be gained and opinions can be developed (Cohen et al, 2011) Participation can be hard to measure and power dynamics also prevail in such situations. In terms of the mentoring itself, I decided on one-to-one mentoring originally to ensure participation but in fact some mentors had two mentees which could have the disadvantage of having one dominant figure but would allow discussion (Cohen et al, 2011)

I kept the numbers of students relatively small to gain in-depth information. I wanted to keep my interviews with students semi-structured to allow for discussion, and I wanted the same for the mentoring sessions (Cohen et al, 2011)

I used a case-study framework primarily to incorporate as much personal experience from the students as possible; also the study by Demie et al in 2008 showed me that such a method is appropriate for this topic. Yin (2014) and Cohen et al (2011) also suggested that the case-study framework is appropriate for this sort of study.

As seen in the literature review, there is some research which identifies the barriers to achievement facing Somali boys in UK schools, and I wanted to research this in my school to see if there is any commonality. There is also research on suggested strategies to look at this, albeit not very recent. There is however little research which evaluates the effectiveness of any strategies, and this is one of the reasons why I wanted to implement and evaluate a strategy. Finally, the majority of research on this topic is concerned with the barriers to Somali students' achievement in school from primary school onwards – my research focusses solely on secondary level, and indeed post-16, which is another point of difference.

Overall I see my research as a qualitative, ethnographic research study using a case-study framework, in order to generate a lot of in-depth data on personal experience; the data will be generated through structured questionnaires, my own

individual and small group semi-structured interviews, and notes from the semi-structured mentoring sessions.

3.5 Risks, ethical considerations, difficulties and CUREC

There were serious ethical considerations to be considered when undertaking my research. Not only was I looking at a specific ethnic group, but also a specific gender within that group and there were obvious sensitivities to be considered there. My criteria for selecting Somali boys specifically were firstly that this group are the key concern group in the school development plan, secondly that from the previous brief review this had been the focus group, and thirdly that my literature review made it clear that Somali boys face more potential barriers to learning than girls in UK schools, and have the more negative stereotypes attached to them. I selected Year 7 because I felt that that this gave any potential strategies the chance to be effective over their entire school career. Of my selected group, there were no criteria for exclusion as every Somali boy in Years 7 was invited to participate. There was a significant risk that students and their families may respond negatively to being targetted for this intervention by ethnicity and gender and it was important for me to consider how I approached this. My policy, based on the experience of the review the previous year and on my reading on ethical research (Noffke & Sommeikh, 2009; Cohen et al, 2011), was to be open and explicit with all students and parents, giving them the opportunity for informed consent, as well as highlighting the potential for positive outcomes. I also explained that the intervention and possible outcomes are not specifically related to ethnicity – it may well be that any student could benefit from a peer mentor, but this group has been selected as a clear result of school data and evidence which suggests that this group could benefit from this intervention. In fact no students questioned this in any detail and the two students who did not wish to participate simply told me that they did not want to.

I was also open on the gender issue, and explained that should the intervention be successful, then other students will be invited to participate. I had to be clear with the students that research shows that as a group this is a cohort who may have a negative school experience for a variety of reasons.

All students and their parents were given consent forms and information letters (Appendices 3 and 4). I obtained consent from the Headteacher (Appendix 5) to undertake my research following an extensive meeting.

With a programme of peer mentoring coordinated by me as a teacher in the school, there was always the risk of an awkward power dynamic between me, the students and the Year 12 mentors. I addressed this by matching the students carefully with an appropriate mentor and by discussing carefully with all mentors what they were working on in their mentoring sessions and making sure they were aware of the purpose of the study. I also wanted to mitigate the risk of the mentors saying inappropriate or insensitive things, as of course these students have not engaged in such an activity before. There was also the concern that students would see this as a chore or even a punishment - I had to make sure that the students involved saw this as a positive and enjoyable experience by making it a comfortable environment, providing food for the initial sessions and making sure that the students were happy and knew that they can speak to me if they were not happy. Safeguarding concerns

were addressed by making sure that there was always a member of staff nearby during any session and making sure that all sessions took place on the school site during school hours. I complied with the ethical considerations as specified by the British Educational Research Association and I obtained CUREC approval for my research (Appendix 6).

I had other ethical concerns over focussing on one specific ethnic group, so I read extensively about the research of ethnic groups. I had to be careful not to simply perpetuate negative stereotypes and be constantly aware of my own potential to further marginalise or stigmatise the group – I kept this in mind throughout the process. I was also aware of the fact that I was a white researcher researching another ethnic group and the sensitivities that accompany this; there is a lot of research from Critical Race Theorists around White researchers ('cultural outsiders') researching minority ethnic groups ('cultural insiders') which suggests that there is no reason to restrict research of this kind to cultural insiders (Crawford, 2017). The suggestion by Crawford (2017) that "what is most important to education research on race and racism is that white researchers do not ignore the presence of difference between interviewer and participant" (p.27) was important to keep in mind; I felt though that I was in a slightly different position as in fact although I was the primary researcher, the researchers on another level were the Somali Year 12 mentors but nonetheless it was important for me to consider this issue. Finally, an article by Myers (2017) on researching marginalised groups says that "educational researchers are right to want to look at marginalised groups – they are right to try to uncover how education fails people a lot of the time" (p.15). I felt that Somali boys in UK schools were a group who are being failed in our system in some areas which was a principal motivator for this research. This article was also clear that "strategies that reproduce a homogenous model of what success looks like tend not to connect with marginal lives" (Myers, 2017:15) – this was very important to me. I was not aiming to push Somali boys in my school into the model of success that society deems to be of value; moreover, my research and intervention was about improving school experience for these students.

3.6 Difficulties

The major issue I faced was the fact that the school has been in turmoil since December. My initial discussions with the Headteacher prior to this had to be done again as the Headteacher left in January, so I had to present my ideas again to the acting Headteacher; fortunately, she was equally supportive. January to March were particularly chaotic in the school, as the Ofsted report was released and many of the structures in the school collapsed completely, leading to significant deterioration in behaviour across the school and a challenging environment to work in. From March until July huge changes were brought in with the academisation process. Research in this context became very difficult.

3.6.1 Collaboration

My opportunities for collaboration were severely reduced as staff felt pressure from different areas and priorities changed. My original plans included systematic collaboration with colleagues as an integral part of the intervention design: for

example, Year 7 form tutors of the participants were initially invited to contribute to the topic discussions for Y12 mentors to follow and were then invited to the feedback meetings with the mentors so that their input could be incorporated into the shape of the intervention. However in the circumstances this became difficult and unsustainable. I had also hoped to collaborate more extensively with pastoral staff, the EAL team and the Senior Leadership Team, but I was unable to do this against the chaotic backdrop of the school. I was however able to communicate regularly with staff and work closely with the Headteacher and the Head of Year 12, as well as the tutors of the Year 7 students in a more informal way, and I certainly had the support of these staff.

Less significantly, the difficulty I had with my original idea of using mentors from the local community was logistics – it was simply too complex to arrange for outsiders to come into school on a voluntary and regular basis. There were also potential safeguarding issues to consider here. With my actual intervention, there were minor logistical issues at the beginning but these were soon resolved.

Chapter 4: Presentation of findings

I will present my findings in three different sections (phases). I will begin with the findings from my initial, pre-intervention questionnaires which were presented to all Somali boys in Year 7 to Year 9. I will look at this quantitatively in order to get a simple overview of perspectives. I will then present the pre-intervention findings from my semi-structured individual and small-group interviews with the Year 7 students. This will enable me to meet my objective of identifying issues specific to my school and also gaining an insight into student experience in my school; this will address in part my research questions 4 and 5 (student perceptions and possible barriers). As part of this, I will refer back to my literature review in order to see if there is any similarity to my own school context. (Phase 1 research).

Next I will present the findings from the intervention itself – this will include notes from the mentors and my own observations. This will add substantial further qualitative data to address research questions 1 and 3. As part of this, I will compare these findings to my own earlier findings as this will enable me to analyse whether the peer mentoring scheme has allowed students to speak more freely and openly with their mentors than with me (Phase 2 research).

Finally, I will present my analysis and evaluation of the peer mentoring scheme. This will comprise of data from the post-intervention interview notes with the mentors and mentees. This will enable me to address research question 5 (Phase 3 research).

4.1 Phase 1: Pre-intervention questionnaires

I gave questionnaires (Appendix 1) to all Somali boys in Years 7 to 9. This represented 14 students in Year 7, 10 in Year 8 and 11 in Year 9 so a total of 35 students. Based on the literature review, this was in three sections: academic progress, home and school experience and future plans. This was a Likert scale questionnaire to generate some general pictures and to improve accessibility for all students.

4.1.1 Academic progress

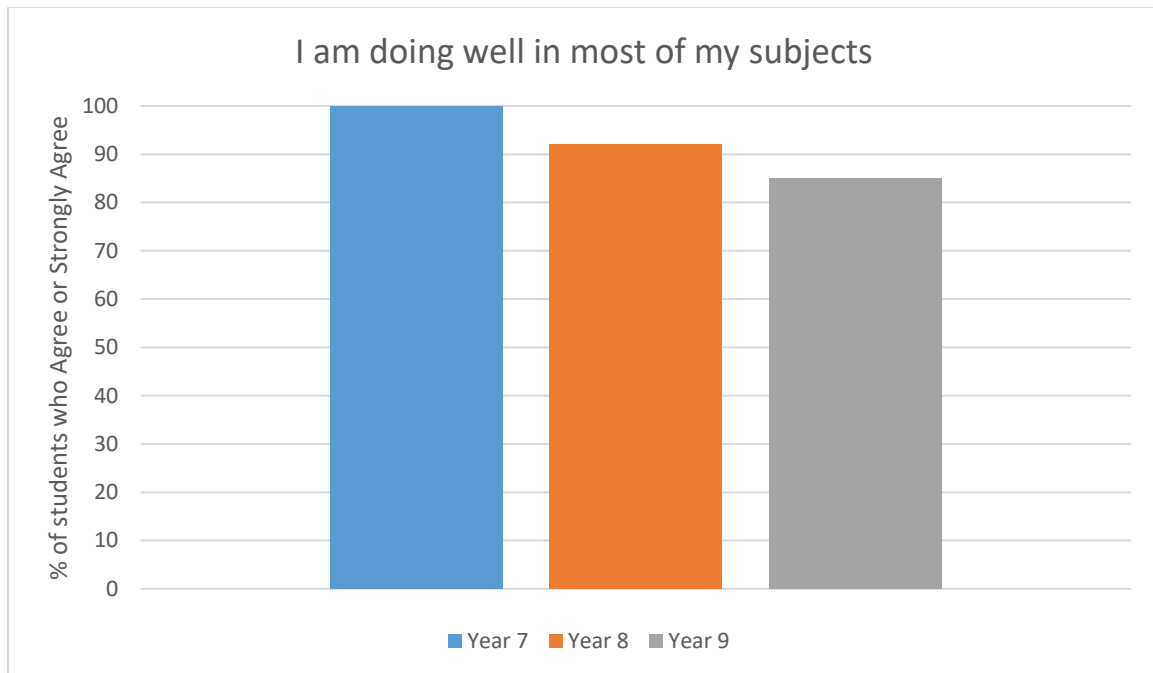


Figure 3

While every student in Year 7 felt that they were doing well across the board, we can see from Figure 3 how this deteriorates as students progress through the years, although it should be noted that the vast majority of students surveyed felt that they were doing well. This contrasted somewhat with the study by Strand et al in 2010 which suggested that Somali students had predominantly low academic self-concept, although this was in comparison to other minority ethnic groups. The deterioration in this through the years suggests that perhaps some students feel that they fall behind as they get older.

The following question stated "I am finding lots of subjects difficult" which drew a more mixed response, with the majority of Year 7 students disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. There was no particular pattern in Year 8, but in Year 9 students were more likely to choose Agree or Strongly Agree. One explanation for this is that almost all of the students surveyed are in low-attaining sets for most of their lessons (an example perhaps of low teacher/ school expectations of them). What we can draw from this is that perhaps although many of these students believe they are doing well, in fact they maybe do not know exactly how they are doing. There is also the possibility that students may be unwilling to admit difficulties across the board. The apparent high academic self-concept is however positive.

In response to the question of being academically supported, I included a question on academic support at home and academic support at school (Figure 4):

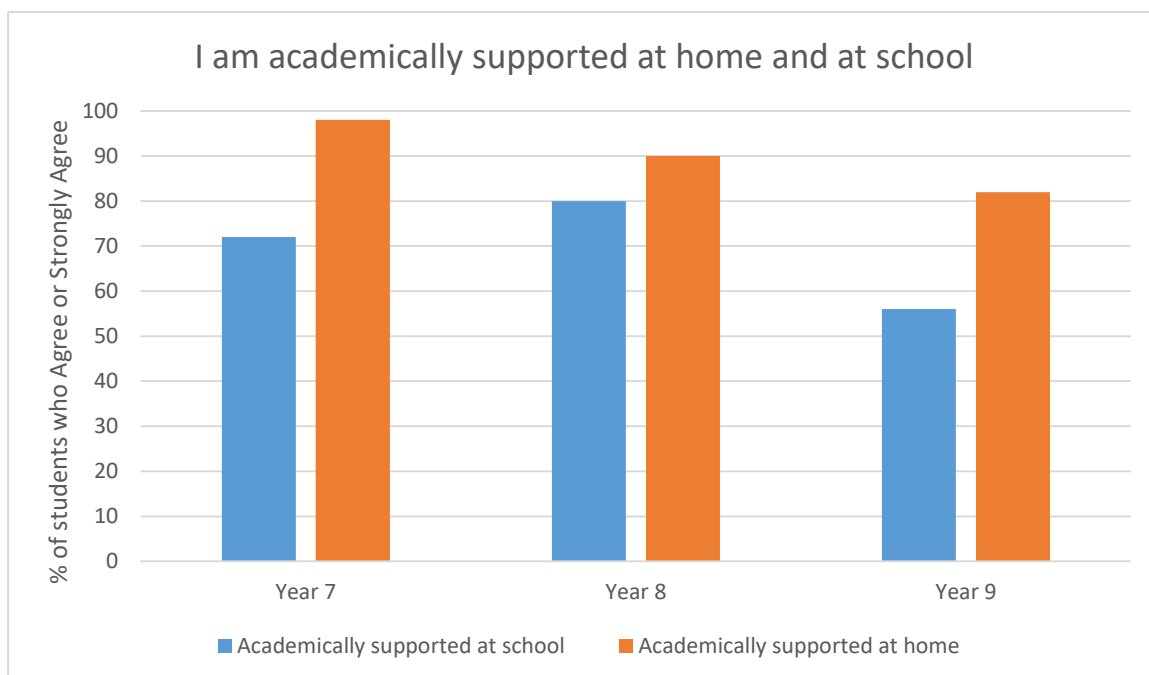


Figure 4

Here we can see no significant variation between year groups, but that all year groups feel better supported at home than at school. This corresponds to the literature, which describes the culture of academic aspiration at home (Strand et al, 2010; Demie et al, 2008; Diriye, 2006). We do not know what the nature of this support is however, and this would be a topic for investigation during interviews. It is a positive that so many students feel supported at school, but again we do not know where this support comes from or how it manifests itself.

The question "I know who to speak to if I'm struggling" drew a mixed response from all year groups. Year 7 students mainly answered "not sure" and there were a roughly equal number of students who agreed as disagreed in this year group. Year 8 and 9 were more leaning towards disagree. This suggests that many students do not necessarily feel that they have a point of contact in the school, or indeed if they can speak to anyone in school if they are struggling academically. The literature told us that good practice schools have a support network around these students (Demie et al, 2013) and it seems clear that this is not the case here.

The overall picture of the Academic Progress section tells us that academic self-concept is relatively high amongst these students, home support is strong but that academic support in school is somewhat lacking. There is also evidence of a deterioration of all of these elements as students move through from Years 7 to 9.

4.1.2 Home and school experience

This section began by asking students some questions about their situation. All but 1 student in Year 9, 1 student in Year 8 and 2 students in Year 7 stated that they had always lived in London. This correlates with the literature which told us that the majority of immigration into the UK was in the 80s and 90s, meaning that we would expect most Somali students in secondary school to be born in the UK. I expected

some students to have moved from other European countries such as Norway and Sweden, as the literature suggested that this process happened in the 2000s, and I would be interested to ask during interviews if this was the case for the 2 Year 7 students who said they had not always lived in London.

All but 2 Year 7 students said that they were bilingual. As we saw from the literature, language was agreed to be one of the most significant barriers facing students, so this surprised me. However, students saying that they are bilingual does not necessarily mean that language is not affecting them in some way, whether that be fluency or the fact that most or all of these students are speaking another language at home. I would investigate in interviews whether parents speak and understand English, as the literature also told us that parental fluency can also have a huge impact on student achievement in school.

The majority of students across all year groups responded with Agree or Strongly Agree to the question of whether they like living in London. This would need to be unpicked further in interviews, but the literature told us that social exclusion and other issues outside school affect student achievement; the literature did not, however, ask students how they felt about where they lived. It may also be that the large Somali community in this area of London is a more tight-knit community than other areas of the UK, and the clan difficulties described in the literature are not so prevalent in this particular area of London; as Rasmussen (2009) says, clan affiliation difficulties are not universal and although they *“likely do still play a role”* (p.25) in London, this is not always the case.

The question of enjoying going to school created a varied set of responses, as shown in Figure 5. The pattern is such that while relatively few students across all years say that they strongly agree, Year 7 students are split between liking and not liking school. While we might expect this with any group of students, the high number of students in Year 8 and Year 9 who strongly disagree with liking school suggests that there is a significant deterioration in school experience from the end of Year 7; again, a reason to implement an intervention with Year 7.

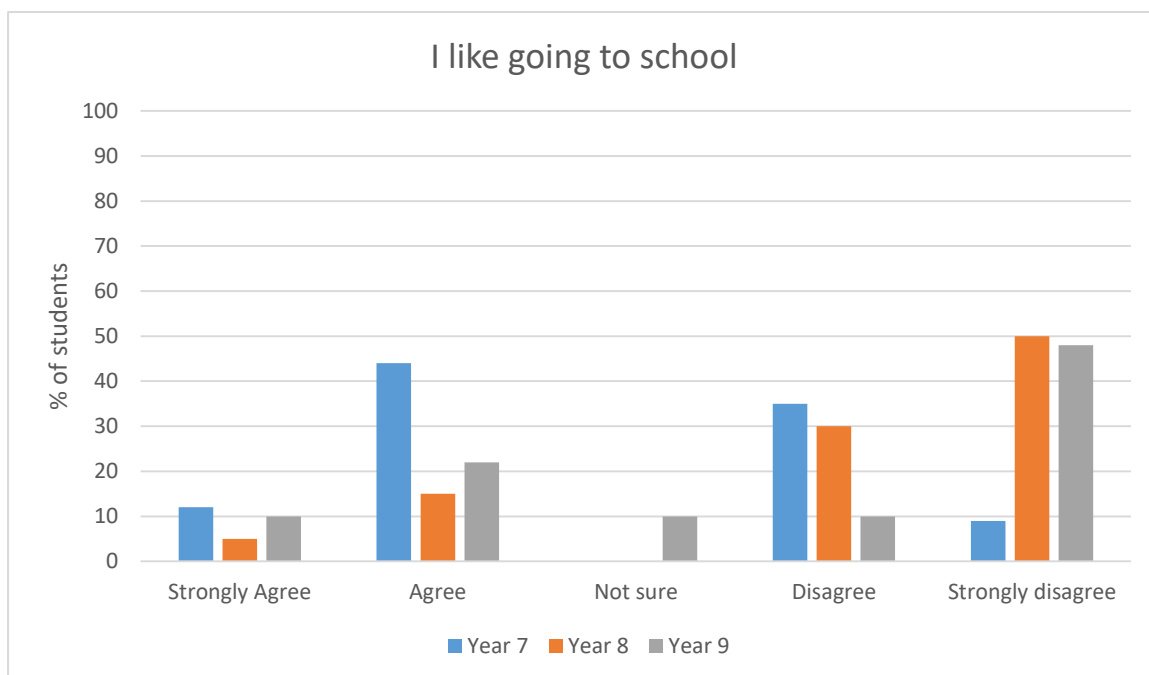


Figure 5

I wanted to establish extra-curricular engagement both in and out of school. The studies by Ali & Jones (2000) and by Demie et al (2008) highlighted the generalised lack of involvement in school extra-curricular activities in particular, and both studies report that the good practice schools have addressed this issue. The table below (Figure 6) shows that attending clubs in school goes down through school (which we might expect with other groups of students too – a report by Get Revising in 2015 surveyed 3000 Year 9 students and found that over two-thirds had given up at least one extra-curricular activity they had been doing. My own anecdotal evidence shows this too.) However, attendance of clubs outside school is high among all years. The study by Strand et al (2010) gave evidence of many Somali parents providing extra tuition to support with school so it may be that this is related; this would need more investigation in interviews. Engagement with in-school activities is far lower and correlates to potential exclusion from school life as described in the literature; it should be noted that due to the challenging circumstances of the school at this time, several clubs had disappeared so this may have had an impact.

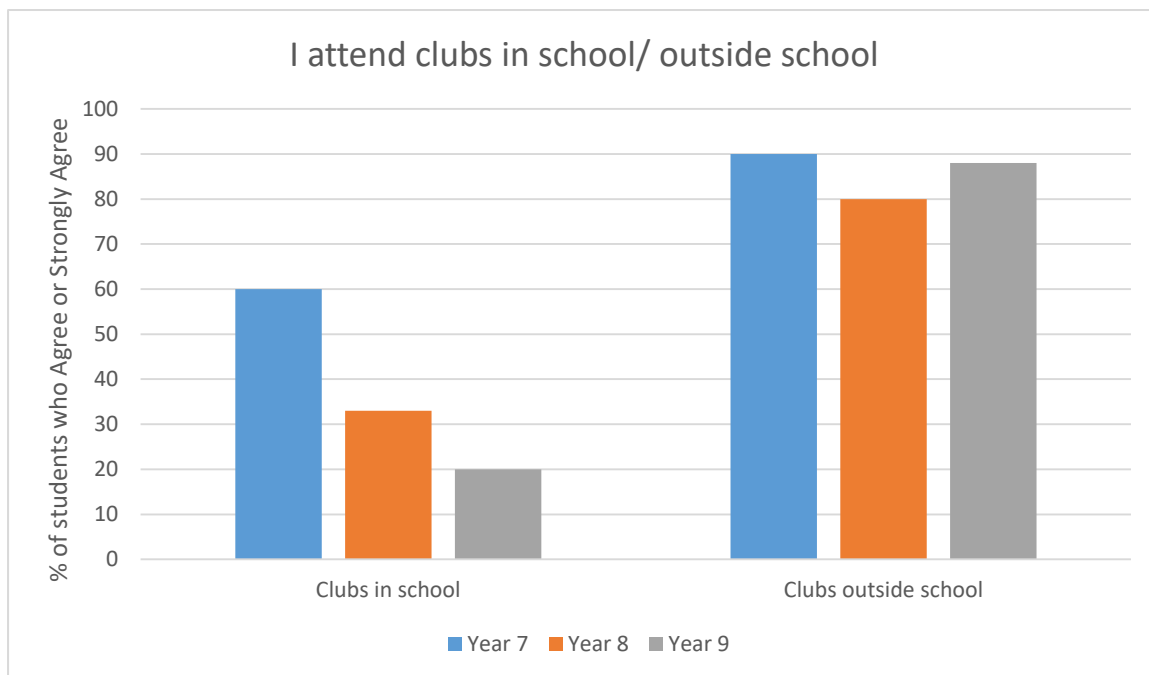


Figure 6

The question of behaviour drew mixed responses, as we might expect, but the vast majority of students did not feel that they received a lot of negative behaviour points or detentions, in all years. The negative stereotype is being challenged here. However, in response to the question of whether students liked the behaviour system, another picture arose (Figure 7). The school behaviour system has long been the major talking point at the school, but essentially it is strict in terms of boundaries and there are central detentions every day.

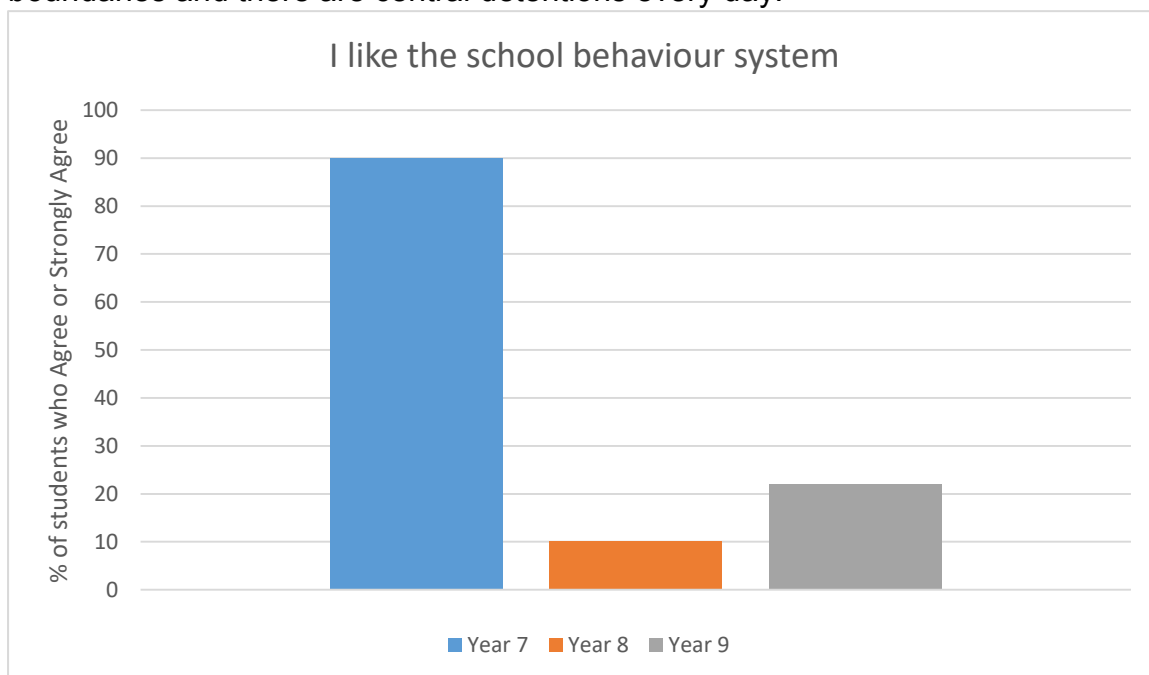


Figure 7

There is a significant difference between Year 7 and the other years. There are several possible reasons for this, but it does again suggest that a focus on Year 7 for any intervention would be beneficial in terms of maintaining positive attitudes.

4.1.3 Future plans

The questions on future plans were largely to see where students' aspirations lie, following the literature which cited high levels of unemployment in the community, few parents with higher education qualifications and a lack of role models but very high parental aspiration for their children.

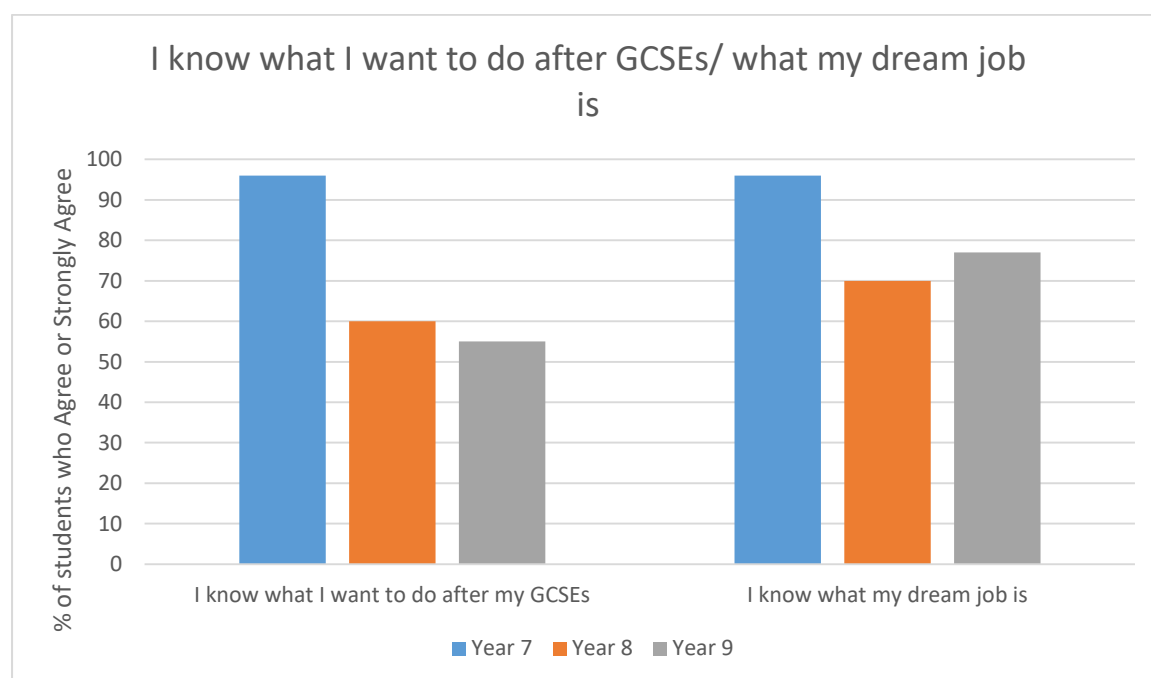


Figure 8

Again all but 1 Year 7 student say that they know what they want to do after GCSEs and what their dream job is – it will be for further investigation in interviews to see what these jobs are. It seems that there is a significant difference between Year 7 and Years 8 and 9. However, the picture here is one of the majority of students having an idea of what their future plans might be (Figure 8).

Similarly with wanting to go to university, all but 1 Year 7 student said that they wanted to go to university (a different student from the 1 student who said they did not know what they wanted to do after GCSEs). Years 8 and 9 were also predominantly keen on going to university, but with fewer 'Strongly Agree'. This correlates with the literature which suggested that the majority of Somali parents have high educational aspirations for their children and want them to go to university – this is clearly the message which is being delivered here.

Without questioning in detail, I asked students if they wanted to do the same job as their parents/carers. There was a range of responses across the year groups, from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, with no real pattern between year groups. Clearly, we might see this range of responses across any sample of students, but given that the evidence from previous studies suggests high levels of unemployment

amongst Somali adults and very few in professional employment (Strand et al, 2010), the student responses here suggest that some do aspire to follow their parents' employment paths. This would be discussed in more detail during interviews.

Finally, several authors talked about a lack of role models for Somali boys. This came out in the questionnaires, with less than a quarter in any year group saying they have someone they consider to be a role model (Figure 9). Interviews would be able to look into this in more detail.

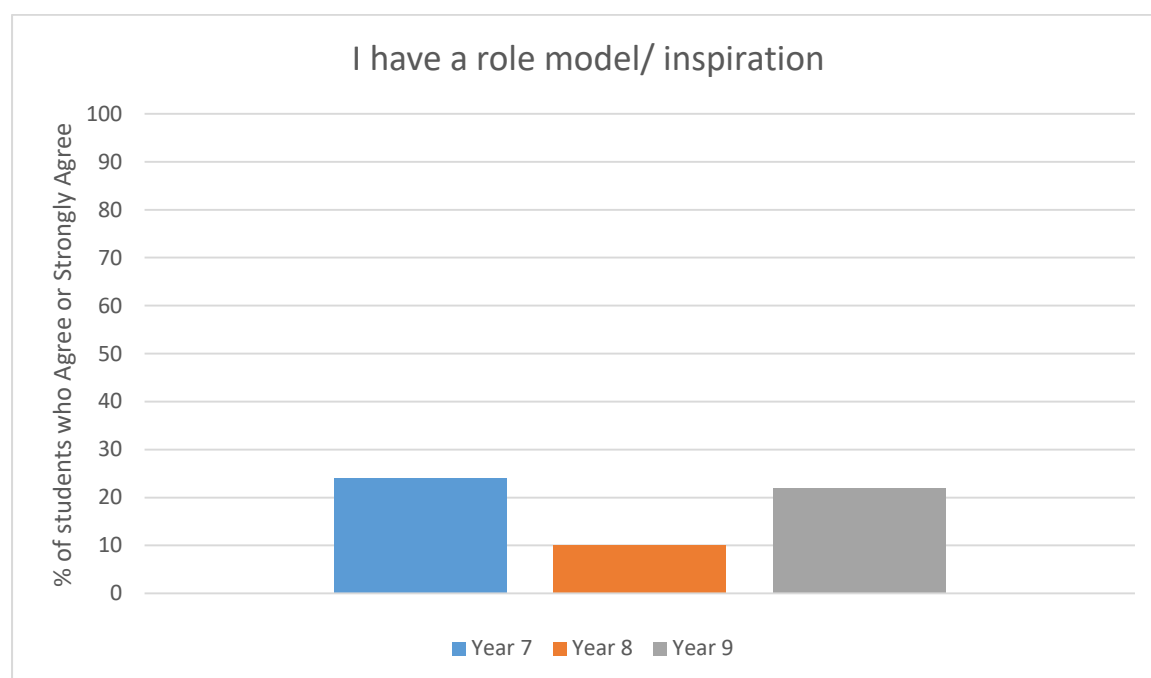


Figure 9

4.1.4 Conclusions from findings from questionnaires

The aim of the questionnaires was to gain a generalised picture of how the Somali boys feel about school, home and their future plans, in relation to the literature. Some key themes arose that matched the literature: supportive home/ parents, aspirational sentiment and a lack of role models. Other areas challenged the literature: high academic self-concept, most students liking going to school and the vast majority saying they were bilingual (although the bilingualism does not necessarily equate to English fluency and does not remove potential language issues at home). This provided me with useful context in which to move on to the next phase of research.

4.1.5 Interviews

I interviewed all 12 of the Year 7 students who had agreed to participate. I did this in groups of 3 or 4 initially and then individually as I wanted to gain a really clear picture of school experience, and to examine in more detail their responses to the questions in the questionnaire. I reshaped some of the questions to reflect the data I wished to

obtain. I have collated the data from the individual and small-group interviews which I present here:

- What lessons do you enjoy and why?

There was almost universal agreement that PE was the favourite subject, mainly because it was considered fun and active. Other than that, responses were variable including Maths, ICT, Drama and French. Students were clear that they enjoyed a subject if they felt they were good at it; when pressed on this, students felt that they were doing well in most subjects, but when asked why, they were less sure, with reasons ranging from *“the teacher always says well done”* to *“I did well in a test”*. The overwhelming sense was definitely one of high self-concept.

There was also a unanimous dislike of Music, which is something which did not come up in the research, and some students were particularly animated. There is a clash between these students' religious practice and the playing of and listening to music. The school policy is that all student must participate in Music lessons, so there is a conflict here. One student was particularly vocal about this:

“They make us do Music even though we’re not meant to. They just tell me I’ve got to do it or I’ll get a C3 [school detention]...it’s confusing”

It seems that anti-Music sentiment has built up amongst these students and it is having repercussions in terms of behaviour, which does put the students in a difficult position. This could be considered a significant barrier to achievement, given that the school is a Music Specialist School.

- What do you think of the school behaviour system?

Some students were very negative towards the school behaviour system, contradicting somewhat the questionnaires. Only 1 student said that he liked it because he never gets detentions and it is fair. All of the other students said that they sometimes or regularly get detentions, usually for disruptive behaviour or talking. 3 students said they *“just get C3s for no reason”*. One student said that he felt *“labelled”* – when pressed on this, he elaborated that he thinks that teachers think he is *“naughty”*. This student does indeed receive a lot of detentions and had recently returned from an exclusion for disruption; the negative stereotypes discussed in the literature may be manifesting themselves here, and it is highly possible that this particular student's needs are not being met.

- How do you find homework?

There was an almost unanimously negative attitude towards homework. Some students said they were unaware of how to access the online platform where homework is set, with some saying they have no computer at home. As suggested in the literature, several students spoke about a lack of quiet space at home to complete homework, but none of these students said they wished to stay at school to complete it. Two students said that they did not get any help at home for homework, but the others all said that they did get help, mainly from brothers and sisters and one student from his dad. Help from siblings rather than parents correlates to the literature which suggested that parents might not entirely understand homework processes. Several students also talked about Arabic School which they attend on a

Saturday, where they are also given homework; some said that they prioritised this work over school homework. There is a pressure here, but what this does show is cultural value as well as parents with high aspirations. One student said they had a tutor who came to the house twice a week. This matches with the literature which frequently mentioned the high home aspirations, especially Diriye (2006) and Strand et al (2010).

- What clubs do you attend?

One student said that he played football in school and one student said that he attended swimming club after school. Other than that, all students said they did not attend any extra-curricular clubs. Reasons for this ranged from *“not interested”*, *“don’t want to”*, *“don’t know what the clubs are”* and *“need to leave to pick up my sister”*. Arabic school was again mentioned as an out of school club, but no other clubs or groups were attended out of school. This could relate to the social exclusion discussed in the literature, but it does certainly show that there is a lack of engagement with wider school life. There is the potential here for the peer mentor to support with this.

- What do you want to do after GCSEs?

This was fascinating. All students said they wanted to go to sixth form and continue their studies. All also said that they wanted to go to university, and many were clear on what they wanted to do: engineering, medicine, law, architecture, business, an apprenticeship. The range of careers was striking, and several students reported that they talked about this a lot with the families. There was however a pattern of STEM² subjects being discussed. One student said he wanted to be a police officer *“to look after people”*. Students were less sure on how to get to university but knew that they wanted to get there; peer mentors would be able to look into this further. Students had universally high aspirations for themselves which shows a discord between aspiration and achievement, and it may be that the lack of experience within the families of how UK education works might be the issue here.

- What do your parents do?

An interesting pattern here was the way in which students talked about their mothers. They all said that their mums worked, and when asked in what job they replied *“housewife”* or *“looks after the house”*. The literature suggested that unemployment is higher amongst Somali women than men, and this came across. This may have implications for language and social exclusion, as well as for student perceptions of female roles in society. All but one student said that they had both parents at home; one boy said his dad works in Norway. Some of the dads were unemployed, but others were taxi drivers, security guards and engineers. I misheard one student and thought he said that his mum was an engineer – he found this idea very funny and could not comprehend this notion; gender roles are clearly significant in the community and this might be something which the peer mentors could look at

² STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

in more detail. None of the students said that they wanted to do the same job as their parents.

One student described in some detail how he wanted to be a doctor and that he wanted to study A Levels in Maths and Science to get to university. He is a highly achieving student and his data (both socio-economically but also in terms of achievement) is significantly different from that of the other students; he is the only non-Pupil Premium student amongst the students. He explained to me that his dad went to university and studied architecture, and that he has 5 older sisters, all of whom are at university and one who is a qualified doctor. He is living in an environment of educational aspiration AND achievement, which separates him from the others. This made me consider whether, as older siblings go through the system, we will see that achievement improves somewhat, as siblings may be able to act upon the aspiration more effectively. This made the idea of peer mentoring even more relevant.

- What do you enjoy and find difficult about school?

I wanted to gain an insight into their experiences. The good elements of school were as expected: friends, breaktime, PE, swimming pool, lunchtime. The difficulties were more concerning. Several students said they had experienced verbal and physical bullying related to being Somali, but that it was *“normal”* or *“calm”*. Only one student would elaborate on this and explained that whenever a Somali boy gets a haircut they get slapped on the back of the head by other students (from any background). Another student told me that he gets called *“pirate”* all the time by other students and that this is something that happens to all Somali boys [a reference to high-profile Somali pirate reports in the media] and he did not regard this as bullying or racist. The term *“Mali”* is also used frequently I was told, but no students regarded this as offensive. Several students told me that they regularly witness this sort of behaviour towards Somali boys but that they would not tell a teacher about this; reasons for this included *“they won’t do nothing”* or *“nothing ever happens”* or *“can’t snake”*. They told me that the people using these terms and behaving in this way were not of any particular ethnic group but that this was just normal behaviour in the school. The literature suggested that bullying and racism was commonplace (Demie et al, 2008; Diriye, 2006; Ali & Jones, 2000) and my impression was that this was absolutely the case here; I wanted to ensure that the peer mentors looked into this further as I was sure the students might be more open with their mentors.

- Do you have a role-model or someone you look up to?

10 out of 12 students did not. When pushed, two students gave me the names of footballers who were their role models but could only give me simple reasons such as *“they’re sick [good]”*. One student, the same student whose father went to university, did say that he looks up to his dad *“because I like what he does, he works hard and looks after us”*. The lack of role models does seem to be generally relevant here.

- Do you speak another language at home?

As we know the issue of language is considered a huge barrier for Somali boys, I wanted to explore this. Every student said they spoke only Somali at home. Half of

the students said that their parents do speak some English but that they never speak it at home, and half said that their mums do not speak any English but their dads do. One student also speaks Swahili and some of the students also speak Arabic at home as well as Somali. None of the students felt that their own English was an issue, and certainly all of the students' spoken English was fluent; I subsequently looked at their written work and other than with one student there were no significant issues there either. About half of the students said that their parents do attend parents' evenings and other meetings in school; this is significantly lower as a proportion than the general school average of approximately three-quarters.

So what conclusions to draw from this given that this challenges the literature? Firstly, parental levels of English are still a concern, especially amongst mothers, and this may affect their ability to engage with the school and help with homework. Secondly, as all of these students have attended primary school in the UK and all but one student was born in London, they have grown up speaking and learning English at school and with their friends. This does appear to represent a change from the studies undertaken by Demie et al (2006) and Strand et al (2010) and I believe that the language barrier is becoming less of a concern.

- Have you always lived in London?

The vast majority of students have always lived in London and were born in London. As per the literature, all of the parents were born in Somalia and left either to go to the UK or to Norway. One student was born in Norway but moved to London when he was 4. No students described disruption or having moved around a lot, but all of the parents had. This matches the literature which told us that students (even in 2008) had not necessarily directly experienced trauma or disruption, but that their parents may well have done. The indirect experience of this is exactly what the students sampled have experienced. This would be another issue for the peer mentors to explore further.

- Who would you talk to if you had a problem at school?

Most students said they would speak to their friends, and some said they would talk to their siblings or parents. One student mentioned a Head of Year, but there was a sense that the students did not feel that they had anyone in school who they could talk to. The literature (Demie et al, 2008) talked about a Somali Support Worker being used effectively in some schools for this, and without this in my school this was one of the reasons for deciding on using peer mentors as this could certainly represent a key part of their role.

4.1.6 Conclusion from interviews and Phase 1 research

I gained a lot of rich data from these interviews and students were generally happy to talk to me. The overwhelming themes were that of high aspiration and self-concept, both from themselves and from their families. Bullying and racism appear to be common but largely unreported. Parental support appears to be strong, but possibly unable to be as focussed as it could be. Role-models are lacking. Parents have experienced disruption and are relatively recent arrivals to the UK. This all matches the literature, but the issue which is more complex is that of language, and I believe that this has changed somewhat since the studies in the literature review. There are

many areas which I could now direct the peer mentors to look at with the students, and the interviews reinforced strongly that peer mentoring would be a valuable experience for the students.

4.2 Phase 2: Findings from peer mentors

The data gained over Phase 2 of my study, would, I hoped, be even more insightful; one of the reasons for implementing this intervention was the potential for the students to be more open with their peer mentors. My findings from this phase of my research would continue to address research questions 4 and 5: student experiences and barriers. I asked the mentors to keep notes which they could share with me at our weekly feedback sessions, which they did. I will present the findings from this thematically, rather than chronologically, as I believe this is the most effective way of answering the research questions. For the opening sessions, I provided mentors with topic forms to facilitate discussion and gain targeted information; examples of these are shown in Appendices 7-9.

Themes and findings

4.2.1 Language

My own research had challenged the literature with this and I was keen to understand why. There were no significant perceptible language issues amongst the students, and, to use Strand et al's definition (2010), I believe we would consider all of the students to be Stage 4 fluent. The mentors reported that during the sessions students mainly spoke in English and were reluctant to switch to Somali, although I asked the mentors to try in order to gauge if there was a difference in fluency. Mentors reported that occasionally students would say some things in Somali to them, but this was usually something such as a joke. The mentors told me that where Somali was spoken, it was of native standard. When students were in pairs with their mentors, they also spoke occasionally in Somali between each other, but again this was to share a joke. There was one student who spoke Swahili, as did their mentor and this particular student was equally happy to speak in Swahili and English.

None of the mentors reported that they felt that language was a barrier for the students. They confirmed what I had discovered, which was that students almost exclusively speak Somali at home and English at school, and in that sense they are genuinely bilingual; although the literature from the mid-2000s suggested that this was a new concept, it seems logical that this is now developing into a pattern. As one mentor explained:

"...they are 100% bilingual and they see this as a positive"

The mentors told me that it was similar for them, and that they too spoke mainly Somali at home and English at school; one mentor reported that he had had some EAL support during his early years at the school, but the others told me that language had never been a concern for them.

One mentor also explained to me that speaking and understanding Somali is considered very important in the community, as suggested by the literature. She said that it is considered an embarrassment if someone in the Somali community cannot communicate in Somali. This might explain the continuation of the language at home.

It seems that over the last decade or so, the language barrier has become less significant. The mentors suggested possible reasons for this: students being born in the UK and having entire education in English; having English tutors outside of school; parents understanding the importance of knowing English in terms of school achievement. This last point is key: mentors were keen to tell me that parents have universally high aspirations of their children and see education as the path to their future. While this is a huge generalisation, this did match the literature and my own research, and it seems that families have understood that being bilingual is important in terms of integration and achievement. As patterns of immigration have changed, so have language patterns. Language issues have changed and developed over the last few years, and since previous studies, and bilingualism, certainly in my own school but possibly in common with other schools and areas of the UK, has become the norm.

Where language continues to be a barrier, however, is in engagement with school from parents, as there is still an issue with parental understanding of English. The mentors informed me that usually but not always it would be the mother who is responsible for the child's school achievement. However, as the vast majority of mothers do not work and live as housewives, their level of English is usually very low and this creates a difficulty and an ongoing cycle of lack of engagement with the school. The mentors suggested that this often means that the students take advantage of this in order to *"get away with stuff"* – this is particularly so amongst boys and this was the case with most of the boys in this programme.

4.2.2 Family and parents

Mentors were able to speak to their mentees on a more sensitive level than I was able to. I wanted to see if the deprivation described in the literature, and which the data on these students suggests, was significant and if it could affect their achievement. The mentors confirmed to me that the majority of the students are living in crowded households in estates with high levels of crime and unemployment. Some of the mentors lived on these estates themselves, and were keen to tell me that it can be difficult and that the dangers are real and varied of being dragged into crime and gangs, especially for boys. One told me that at times you need to be strong and self-motivated and want to succeed for yourself. Another told me that on his estate there are large groups of Somali boys in their late teens who are regularly and openly involved in drug use; these are young people for whom the system has failed, and this is a visible "norm" for some of the students in my school. It is clear, of course, that the mentors are an embodiment of the fact that it is possible to achieve well at school in spite of difficult circumstances; in that sense, the mentors are all positive role-models and offer an alternative path.

Mentors informed me that homework was completed to varying levels by the mentees. Only one mentee said that he was able to do homework in his room on his own; all others were doing homework either in the kitchen, the living room or in shared bedrooms. Many of the families are large and often noisy. The mentors described a mixed picture, different from how students described homework to me. Some never do homework, they told their mentors, either through not wanting to or being unable to access it. Some get in trouble at school, others do not. Some told their mentors they are never given homework. No mentees reported language issues with homework, but several said that they could not use the online homework platforms. The vast majority of mentees told their mentors that their mums ask them every night about their homework; this may show that understanding of school systems is growing.

The mentors elaborated on some of the family backgrounds, which differed slightly from my own research. All but one student was born in the UK; all parents were born in Somalia and left Somalia in the 1990s or early 2000s. The variety of jobs was as I had discovered, with fathers involved in taxi-driving, security or construction (from labouring to architecture) and with none of the mothers employed, but living as housewives. The majority of the families were stable in that the family network was all here living in the same household. Several of the mentors informed me that in many Somali households, the mother is the leader of the household (and often “*very strict*”), taking care of all home concerns such as cleaning and cooking, and the father was responsible for earning money; gender roles appear very defined.

One of the mentors told me that pressure from the family is usually on girls to achieve well at school and go to university; boys are often not pushed in this way, and this can create a lack of responsibility amongst boys which can lead to educational underachievement. This may mean, however, that over the next few years we see this gender polarisation change, as more Somali girls go to university and become employed. Another mentor told me that both of her mentees had no routines at home and were not going to bed until late, while the sisters of these mentees were subject to stricter rules.

It was useful to talk to the mentors about their own experiences. They felt that the gender balance was important, and that Somali girls are more generally pushed by their families to achieve. This was not something which appeared in the literature, but it is something which may have an impact on the achievement of Somali boys.

All of the mentors were keen to stress that education is highly valued in the community, and that this was universally the case amongst their mentees and from their own experience. Most of the mentors reported that parents and siblings helped students with homework, contradicting slightly the information I gained. All mentors told me that the students all had high aspirations for themselves, including university. They felt that this came from parents. One mentor explained to me that her mentee had told her that his parents were clear with him that they had no opportunities at school and so it is vitally important that they take all the opportunities they are given. This mentor also told me from her own experience that “*you can be successful in many ways but education is the most valued thing by Somali parents...so the kids*

know that education is nothing to play around with". This is further evidence of the high aspirations amongst the families which needs to be harnessed more effectively.

The issue of role-models came up repeatedly. One mentor felt that the students cannot relate to anyone in the public eye as there is no-one who represents them, particularly boys. Lots of the boys told the mentors that they look up to footballers but there were no other figures that came up, including parents or family. One mentor felt that this affected their aspirations, and although this was a view not backed up by the students themselves, this does appear to link once again to the issue of where Somali boys feel they fit into society and whether society has a place for them. The mentors universally felt that they were in a position of being able to guide their mentees into positive choices and offer their own experiences as guidance; perhaps this is therefore a form of role-model which could work for these students, particularly in terms of school achievement.

4.2.3 School experience

The mentors were able to build up a detailed description of their mentees experiences in school over the period of the intervention. The overall picture was more negative than that which was described to me by the students in questionnaires and interviews: as one mentor put it *"I think that both my students have a really negative experience of school. They just get in trouble every day, it's a really bad cycle they're in. To be honest, I think that if school was an option they wouldn't come."* Another mentor said of his mentees *"socially, they quite like school, but academically, it's not good."*

This contradicts the questionnaires and interviews which suggested strongly that most students enjoy coming to school, and offers evidence of students opening up more with peer mentors; it does however agree with previous studies (Demie et al, 2008; Diriye, 2006; Ali & Jones, 2000) and my own research suggesting that it is learning which is the issue.

One of the key findings was on behaviour. Some of the mentors reported that their mentees receive numerous detentions and in some cases exclusions. All but two of the students figure in the school behaviour systems. The mentors were divided on why this might be, but did report that the students were reluctant to take responsibility for behaviour issues, often finding other people to blame or saying it was because teachers did not like them. The mentors said that there was a sense of being victimised, as if they were targeted. One mentor said that they felt their mentee had a status to fulfil: *"he's made himself into this naughty personality, always getting detentions and C3s"*. Mentors were able to talk to the students in detail about some of the incidents they had been involved in and work through some of this with them; the majority of incidents were for disruption in lessons, fighting/ aggression and rudeness to staff. In most cases parents were unaware that there had been an incident and in serious incidents where an exclusion had resulted parents did not always attend the post-exclusion meetings; during the course of the mentoring, there were two exclusions and on one occasion the parent did not attend. Whilst all of this

is not unique to this group of students, and not universal within it, there is a general sense of a negative cycle which the mentors identified of behaviour incident, lack of resolution to incident (including parental involvement), lack of responsibility and repeat offence, leading to the creation of a persona and a stereotype in the school. Peer mentoring is a positive way of challenging this and the mentors were enthusiastic about this.

Bullying and racism were also elaborated upon. The mentors gained lots of detail on this, far more than I was able to. Verbal comments on a daily basis include “pirate”, “Mali” and “banana and rice” from various other students, including older students. Some of the mentors felt that this had got worse than when they were in Year 7, but other mentors agreed with the majority student perception that this is just “banter”. Some of the mentors felt that it was deeply offensive racism towards their culture but that the students did not regard it that way. There was universal agreement that this is part of daily school life for these students and that it seems to be normal for them; mentors had different views on whether it was bullying or banter but there was clear evidence that it is going on. There was also a general agreement amongst the mentors that Somali boys in general in the school are a particular target for verbal insults and racism; it is worth considering here the social exclusion and invisibility described in the literature. Somali boys in the school are seemingly a target and yet they are at the same time socially invisible in many ways, which creates further evidence of potential difficulties of identity; the impact on school achievement might be significant. It seems that this sort of behaviour has become so engrained and so normal that it has almost legitimised it to the extent that it is virtually considered to be acceptable behaviour by the Somali boys, and possibly the perpetrators as well.

The mentors were in agreement that none of the mentees would ever tell a teacher about any of the above verbal insults. Again the reasons for this were varied as one mentor said that it is because his mentees do not regard it as serious or bullying or racism and another said that no-one should ever “snake” [tell teachers]. The psychological impact of this should be considered (and it is beyond the scope of this study but we can make a link here to studies on the psychological impact of ‘accepted’ language slurs such as the pejorative use of ‘gay’) and I believe that this would also be a key role of the peer mentors to work through this with the students.

4.2.4 Conclusions from phase 2 research

My analysis of this data develops that from the phase 1 research. Language is less of an issue than first thought, and I have looked at some reasons why. Aspirations are high and the desire to achieve highly is reinforced by a strong aspirational culture at home, although it seems that there may be a discord between boys and girls here; this should challenge the notion of poor achievement in school, but in fact some of the intricacies with these relationships, and the barrier between home and school, mean that the aspirational culture is not being effectively harnessed. The students’ school experience seems more negative than originally thought, mainly due to a negative cycle of behaviour leading to detentions and exclusions and this is a key barrier to school achievement. Verbal harassment appears to be widespread and

regular, but is unreported and not apparently regarded seriously by the students; again, this is likely to have significant consequences in terms of a student's experience and achievement at school.

4.3 Phase 3: Evaluation of intervention

It is important to evaluate whether the peer mentoring programme is an effective and sustainable way of addressing some of the issues above. This would address my final research question. To do this, I interviewed all of the participants individually (mentors separately from mentees) in a semi-structured format and recorded their responses.

4.3.1 Mentors

The overwhelming response from the mentors was that they really enjoyed the peer mentoring programme and were very happy to participate. They felt universally that it had been valuable for the students. Some of the responses are as follows:

"It's been really fun. They have made me laugh and I think it's helped them a lot. It's good that they felt comfortable enough to talk about stuff... I think it's helped that my two students were friends. They don't really get to talk about their experiences in school to anyone"

"I've really enjoyed it, absolutely. It's been nice to see how they experience school, balance school and home. Especially as we could relate really well. I would want to do it again next year definitely"

"I've enjoyed it, the kids were really engaged...it was a bit awkward at first, you know the first session, but they've really opened up now and we always say hi to each other when we see them in the corridor"

The value, the mentors felt, was in the relationships they developed. There was a strong sentiment that over the period of the intervention, the students had opened up and were starting to regard their mentors as people they could trust and ask for help from. The question of "being able to relate to them" is important here, and is likely to be one of the reasons for good engagement. It is positive too that students are seeing their mentors around in school and communicating with them; having a positive relationship like this in a school where often you may not know where you fit in, where relationships with peers may involve verbal insults and with adults may involve being told off, is very valuable.

In terms of guidance, and mentoring, the mentors were unanimous that they felt in a position to be able to do this. They felt that they understood completely the school experience of their mentees and could advise and support them. They felt too that they would be happy to help with communicating with their mentees' parents and supporting with this; this is almost the role of the Somali support worker advocated by several authors (Rasmussen, 2009; Demie et al, 2008; Diriye, 2006).

The mentors were not surprised or shocked by any of the information disclosed to them by their mentees, showing again that an understanding of the school

experience is helpful. One mentor said that all the information he got about his mentees was expected. As well as this, the power dynamics are very different with their peer mentors and mentees were far more trusting of their mentors than they might have been with a teacher; I saw evidence of this with my own interviews, although the students did make a space for me.

The majority of mentors liked having prompt sheets for the initial sessions, with two mentors saying they liked that it gave them a structure, especially while they were getting to know their students. Logistically, the mentors agreed that using extended Friday morning tutorial time was a good time to run the sessions in terms of engagement. Mentors also almost all reported that they felt students had improved in terms of responsibility, being more mature in their discussions and attending on time.

The mentors agreed that it was good to start with Year 7 as they are the most likely to engage. As well as this, the mentors were pleased that they get to work with their mentees for two years.

I discussed with the mentors how they might improve the programme and whether they would be happy to continue next year. They all agreed that they wanted to continue, and we looked at ways to develop it.

Two mentors suggested, independently of one another, the idea of role-plays and workshops. This would involve creating some simple scenarios (they suggested about a behaviour incident) and then work through possible outcomes and different choices that could be made. They suggested that this could be done in small groups and could really help the students with making positive choices and trying to break the cycle of negative behaviour incidents. I thought that this was an excellent idea and would be effective in addressing the question of behaviour which has arisen.

Other suggested improvements included increasing the number of mentors to make it one-to-one (although this was my original plan there were not enough potential students to make this happen), although another mentor suggested that some or all of the sessions could be small groups using all of the mentors together. There are perhaps some combinations here that might work. Another mentor said that she thinks the sessions should be more regular so that it becomes like a second form tutor session. Again, it would need to be considered whether this might be beneficial. Finally, the question of structure was discussed– the majority liked having prompt topic sheets to begin with, and felt that after the first few sessions the mentees could lead the sessions in any way they thought; some mentors liked the idea of helping with homework as it would give a focus. All of these ideas could be developed.

4.3.2 Mentees

The response from the mentees was generally positive and there was clear evidence that there was value for them in all cases. Similarly to the mentors, the students were keen to tell me that they always say hello to their mentors in the corridor and it is clear that they have valued this aspect to it. Again, I feel that the value for these students in having such a relationship is clear and I feel that this relationship is one of the most important elements to the intervention, and one which was slightly unexpected.

Another benefit is increased responsibility from the Year 7 students. In the early weeks, I was having to collect the students for sessions; after 3 weeks, students were taking themselves there. They were asking me in the corridor if the session was running. A tutor reported that the students were talking about it in positive terms during tutor time. One student who was not included in the programme as his data did not show Somali heritage (but in fact he is Somali) came to find me to ask if he could join the programme as he had spoken to his friends about it. This shows engagement and with engagement will come improved school experience. As the evidence tells us that Somali boys often have issues with where they fit in, the sense of belonging and having a safe space that peer mentoring offers is highly positive.

All students said that they would like to continue next year, for varying reasons such as: I enjoyed it, I find it useful and fun, it's different, I would talk to them if I had a problem, I like talking about different stuff with them each week.

It is positive that 10 out of the 12 mentees said they would talk to their mentors if they had a problem; this is one of the key aims of the intervention as this should lead to a more positive school experience. I did not want to engage with post-intervention questionnaires to try to gain quantitative evidence; I feel that the qualitative evidence from my interviews with the students shows that the process has been of value for all of them, but that it is an ongoing process. A qualitative improvement in school experience might also be somewhat difficult to gauge through anything other than direct interviews.

Students had some ideas for improving, but were not in agreement. One student felt that it would be useful to go to a computer room and work on homework; other students also mentioned homework as something that their mentors could help with. Two students felt that it would be good to just meet every week and *"have a chat"* about anything. This is sensible on some levels, as it would develop the relationships, but we would need to retain some structure in order to make the process worthwhile. Another student liked that it was more structured and having different topics to discuss each week. It may be that the programme can be individualised to meet the needs of each mentee. The students unanimously agreed that it was good to have the sessions during Friday morning tutorial.

4.3.3 Conclusion from Phase 3 research

The response to the peer mentoring intervention has been overwhelmingly positive from the mentors and the mentees. The very fact that through their responses in interviews with me both groups value it and are enjoying it is evidence that it is positive and improving the school experience of not just the Year 7 students, but also the Year 12 students. Perhaps the most beneficial element has been the relationships built; the peer mentors are in a position that no-one else can be. They offer a bridge between peers (and we have seen evidence of many of the negative relationships which can pervade here) and adults, who may be associated with discipline. The barriers to achievement we have seen involving behaviour and bullying can begin to be addressed by the mentors in their capacity as advisors, and working through scenarios is a good way to do this as suggested by the mentors. The barriers such as deprivation and home circumstance are harder to address in

themselves, but the mentors offer an embodiment of opportunity that the mentees can relate to. The aspiration in the families is striking, and it might be that the mentors are in the best position to harness this effectively. If we add to this that the students have all requested to continue next year, then the long-term potential is there to have a large impact. There are of course areas where the programme can be improved to meet everyone's needs, and this can be developed in conjunction with mentors and mentees.

The next phase of this is to involve parents and develop their relationship with the school, and I feel that the mentors are in an excellent position to be able to help with this. Some ways of doing this suggested in the literature (Demie et al, 2008; Ali & Jones, 2000) include translating letters and school communications into Somali, offering support at parents' evenings or writing a brief report on their mentees each term in Somali for the parents.

The research question was to see if peer mentoring can be an effective strategy in improving the school experience of these students. The evidence above suggests that it certainly can, and it can be further developed to increase its impact.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

5.1 Limitations of the study

It is important to consider some of the limitations to my study. Firstly, it is difficult to gauge an improvement in school experience over a short period of time; this is an ongoing process and needs to be embedded into the school system to see progress over time.

Secondly, although I was clear that I wanted my study to be qualitative, there was a lack of available background data to frame the study. Related to this, over time it would be useful to look at quantitative data associated with these students in terms of behaviour points and examination data, in order to gauge if there has been any improvement there. However, I believe that as a qualitative study there is more depth here than purely looking at exam results.

Another limitation is the lack of data from parents. Although parents were contacted at the beginning of the study, there were no responses. Parental views would add an extra voice to the study, and as we have seen parental engagement is one of the potential barriers to achievement. This is something which can be developed as the intervention develops next year.

I was limited somewhat by numbers, and this was a small-scale study. As the programme develops, this will increase and provide more qualitative data.

In comparing my findings with the literature, it is important to note that much of the literature is now some years old. The major study by Demie et al in 2008 is the largest and most informative study undertaken so far, but this is now 9 years old, and it is important to remember this when looking at my own results.

One of the limitations of the early parts of the research is that it is difficult to establish whether any of the student perspectives on their experience are different to that of other students. For example, with the question of role-models, it may be that most students in Year 7 do not have role-models. There are several areas like this where it would be interesting to compare to other groups, although even then it would be difficult to prove causality.

Finally, as discussed earlier, collaborating with staff in this study was very challenging for several reasons. My results were shared with staff and there is a member of staff who will be running the programme next year. As well as this I did liaise with the Headteacher, SLT, tutors and Heads of Year, but regular collaboration with staff was not a feature of this study, although it was planned to be. When the school has settled somewhat, I would be confident that the collaborative element to this study would increase considerably.

5.2 Conclusions and future plans

It would be useful at this point to refer back to my aims, objectives and research questions. My aim was simple: to implement an intervention that would improve the school experience of Somali boys. I feel that I have met this aim; the overall school experience of the Somali boys who participated is, even if only in a small way,

improved by this intervention. It can be developed and widened of course, but in terms of meeting that overall aim this is positive. In order to meet this aim, I had to meet my objectives, which were to identify the barriers to a positive school experience in my school and to design an intervention that addressed some of the identified barriers facing Somali boys. Through my research in Phase 1 and Phase 2, I was able to do this, and in Phase 3 I was able to evaluate its effectiveness.

My research questions were as follows:

Review of the literature:

Q1 What is the background to the Somali community in the UK?

Q2 What are the possible barriers to Somali boys' achievement and positive school experience in UK schools?

Q3 What possible strategies can be used to address these barriers?

My empirical research

Q4 What are Somali boys' perceptions of their school experience in my school?

Q5 What are the possible barriers to Somali boys' achievement and positive school experience in my school?

Q6 Can a system of peer mentoring be an effective strategy to promote achievement and positive school experience for Somali boys?

To conclude:

Q4 In my school the students who participated had a relatively positive attitude towards school and quite high levels of enjoyment, and high levels of academic self-concept. They described some of their experiences in school, both with me and in more detail with their mentors, and described some of the verbal harassment they are experiencing regularly, although did not regard this necessarily as being serious. The students also described some of the behaviour they had been involved in, and there was evidence of negative patterns. Students did not talk about language as being a concern, and talked a lot about their families and their hopes and aspirations, which were high.

Q1 & 2 The literature discussed some of the wider issues such as social exclusion, high levels of deprivation, negative stereotypes and cultural and historical intricacies which contribute to a poor school experience. Although not directly discussed, all of these issues have been shown to be apparent on some level and are likely to represent a barrier to an enjoyable school experience. Language was considered to be a major issue from previous studies.

Q5 In my school there was evidence of negative behaviour cycles, lack of parental involvement with school and regular verbal harassment and racist bullying. There was also evidence of high aspiration at home and amongst the students themselves. This was all as suggested from previous studies, although the verbal harassment was more significant than previously noted; it was mainly through the mentoring sessions that this was discovered. The literature suggested that language is a

significant barrier facing these students, and in my school this did not appear to be the case directly; however, there was evidence of a lack of parental interaction with the school and this may be as a result of language difficulties.

Q3 Strategies suggested included increased and more highly specified EAL support, increased parental engagement and the employment of a Somali support worker.

Staff training on cultural and historical issues was also deemed to be important.

Q6 My findings have shown that this is a positive intervention which can be developed and utilised further. It is positive because my findings tell us it improves on several levels the school experience of the students involved, both mentors and mentees. Crucially, it provides participants with a positive relationship in school, guidance and identity. Furthermore, it is sustainable within the school.

5.3 Future developments

The key future plan is to develop relationships with parents and increase parental engagement. This can be done through staff and the mentors themselves. This might increase the impact of the programme. It also needs to now be extended to the new Year 7 and new Year 12, for this to become embedded. Further to this, the programme could be implemented in other schools with similar communities and also research done as to whether these sorts of programmes could be transferrable to other marginalised groups.

Within the school, I feel that having a Somali member of staff would be highly beneficial and staff training of some the potential issues would be useful, particularly so that staff are aware of some of the verbal comments aimed at Somali boys on a regular basis.

On a wider scale, it would be very interesting to undertake a much wider research study looking at the experience of Somali boys across London and in similar schools, in a similar format to that of the Demie study in 2008. I also feel that it would be a positive step to look at implementing a Somali GCSE or similar qualification; many community languages have a qualification and this might facilitate social inclusion as well as giving value to the Somali language and culture.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Participant questionnaire

I am doing a research project with the Department of Education at Oxford University. We are trying to learn more about how to support students of Somali heritage in our school and other schools. There is no right or wrong answer so please be honest! This is an anonymous survey and is only for research purposes – if you do not wish to take part you do not have to. Thank you for your help.

Part 1- academic progress

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	strongly agree
	Question	1	2	3	4	5
1	I am doing well in most of my subjects					
2	I am finding lots of subjects difficult					
3	I feel academically supported in school					
4	I feel academically supported at home					
5	I always complete my homework					
6	I know who to speak to if I am struggling					
7	I get praise and achievement points when I do well					
8	I know what GCSE grades I am going for					

Part 2- General

		Strongly Disagree Not disagree sure			Agree strongly agree	
	Question	1	2	3	4	5
1	I have always lived in London					
2	I am bilingual					
3	I like living in London					
4	I like going to school					
5	I go to clubs outside school					
6	I go to after-school clubs in school					
7	My parents/carers help me with my homework					
8	I know who to talk to if I have any problems at school					
9	I get lots of behaviour points/detentions					
10	I get lots of achievement points					
11	I like the school behaviour system					
12	I like the school praise system					

Part 3- future plans

		Strongly Disagree Not disagree sure			Agree strongly agree	
	Question	1	2	3	4	5
1	I know what I want to do after GCSEs					
2	I know what my dream job is					
3	I want to go to university					
4	I want to do the same as my parents/carers					
5	I have a role model/ inspiration					
6	I want to live in London in the future					
7	I know what to do to achieve my goals					
8	I know where to find out information about my dream job					

Appendix 2 –Student interview

Information received – YES/NO

Parental consent received – YES/NO

Participant consent form signed and received – YES/NO

Before interview begins, confirm that student understands interview will be recorded and receive verbal consent to continue.

General

- When did you start at the school – when did you move to London, were you at other schools previously, have you lived in other areas of the UK?
- What was your first impression of the school?
- Have your opinions of the school changed since you started here?
- Do your parents/ carers speak English? Have they always lived in London or if not when did they move to the UK?
- Did your parents/carers complete education? Do you know where they went to school?
- Do your parents/carers help you with homework? Do they attend parents evenings with you? Do they have high expectations of you academically?

Educational experience – academic

- What subjects do you enjoy? Why?
- What subjects do you really dislike? Why?
- What subjects do you find difficult and why?
- Tell me about your favourite teacher?
- Do you feel supported by the school academically – by tutor, teachers, pastoral team?
- What support does the school offer you if you are struggling in your work?
- Do you complete homework regularly?
- Do you attend any catch-up sessions with departments or DoS?
- What subjects do you think you will choose for your options at Y9/10?
- Do you know how you are doing in your different subjects and what grades you are working towards in GCSEs?

Educational experience – pastoral

- What do you enjoy about school?
- What do you dislike about school?
- Do you attend any after-school clubs? Sports/ music/drama?
- Do you receive a lot of detentions? What for? Do you like the school behaviour system?
- Who would you speak to if you had any problems of any kind at school?

Aspirations

- What do you want to do when you finish HGS? Do you want to work/ stay studying/ go to university?
- Who is your role-model/ inspiration?
- What would your dream job be?
- What do your parents/carers expect/want you to do after GCSEs?
- Do you feel supported by anyone outside of school who helps you to make choices?

Appendix 3 – Participant information sheet - Student

1. Study title:
The experience and achievement of Somali boys – a case study in a London comprehensive school
2. Aim of the study:
Further to the themed review last year, I will be carrying out a further research study as part of my final year assignment for a Masters degree at Oxford University. The study will focus on Somali boys in Years 7-9 at _____ School and how we might be able to support academic achievement, school experience and aspirations. The findings of my study may be able to help students at _____ and also other schools with high numbers of Somali students.
3. Why have I been invited to take part?
You have been invited because you are a boy of Somali heritage in Years 7-9 at _____ School
4. Do I have to take part?
You do not have to take part – this is voluntary participation and even if you agree to participate you can withdraw at any time. If you have any questions about the study you can ask me.
5. What happens if I agree to participate?
If you agree, firstly you must sign the consent form. Then you will be required to answer a short questionnaire and finally an informal interview with me where you can talk about your experience of school. As a result of this, you will have a learning mentor allocated to you who will work with you for one hour a month until the end of the school year. All of this will be on the school site and during school hours.
6. Are there any risks to taking part?
No, there are no risks to taking part.
7. Is everything confidential?
All information you give in questionnaires, interviews and during the mentoring sessions is confidential and anonymous. I will store the information until the report is written up and then it will be destroyed.
8. Where will the study be published?
The study will be written up and handed in to Oxford University and to the staff at _____ School. Everything is anonymous and no one will be identified by name.
9. Who has approved this project?
This study has been approved by the school leadership team including headteacher, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee and by my supervisor at the university.
10. What if I have any questions or concerns?
If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please feel free to contact me by email, in person, by telephone or in writing. I will usually reply to you within a week. If you are unhappy about any aspect of the study, or if you wish to make a formal complaint, please contact my supervisor in the first instance (_____ @education.ox.ac.uk). You can also contact the chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford (Chair, Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Hayes House, 75 George Street, Oxford, OX1 2BQ, UK). They will aim to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

CONSENT

1. I have read the information sheet and had the opportunity to ask questions
2. I understand that participation is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time
3. I understand who will have the information I give and what will happen to it
4. I understand how the study will be written up and who will see it and that names will not be used in the study
5. I understand who to speak to if I have concerns

Participant name:

Signature

Date:

Appendix 4 – Participant information sheet – Parents/ Carers

1. Study title:
The experience and achievement of Somali boys – a case study in a London comprehensive school
2. Aim of the study:
Further to the themed review last year, I will be carrying out a further research study as part of my final year assignment for a Masters degree at Oxford University. The study will focus on Somali boys in Years 7-9 at _____ School and how we might be able to support academic achievement, school experience and aspirations. The findings of my study may be able to help students at _____ and also other schools with high numbers of Somali students.
3. Why has my child been invited to take part?
Your child has been invited because they are a boy of Somali heritage in Years 7-9 at _____ School
4. Do they have to take part?
They do not have to take part – this is voluntary participation and even if you agree for them to participate they can withdraw at any time. If you wish to discuss this further you can contact me via email at _____ @ _____ .sch.uk
5. What happens if they participate?
If they participate, firstly you and they must sign the consent form. Then they will be required to answer a short questionnaire and finally an informal interview with me (which will be audio recorded) where they can talk about their experience of school. As a result of this, your child will have a Year 12 learning mentor allocated to them who will work with them weekly until the end of the school year. All of this will be on the school site and during school hours.
6. Are there any risks to taking part?
No, there are no risks to taking part.
7. Is everything confidential?
All information given in questionnaires, interviews and during the mentoring sessions is confidential and anonymous. I will store the information and recordings until the report is written up and then it will be destroyed.
8. Where will the study be published?
The study will be written up and handed in to Oxford University and to the staff at _____ School. Everything is anonymous and no one will be identified by name.
9. Who has approved this project?
This study has been approved by the school leadership team including Headteacher, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee and by my supervisor at the university.
10. What if I have any questions or concerns?
If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please feel free to contact me by email, in person, by telephone or in writing. I will usually reply to you within a week. If you are unhappy about any aspect of the study, or if you wish to make a formal complaint, please contact my supervisor in the first instance (_____ @education.ox.ac.uk). You can also contact the chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford (Chair, Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address:

Hayes House, 75 George Street, Oxford, OX1 2BQ, UK). They will aim to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

Please sign below if you do not wish for your child to take part in this study. You can return it via your child or via email to me at [@](#) [.sch.uk](#). If I do not hear from you I will assume that you consent for your child to participate.

Student name.....

I do not consent for my child to take part in this study

Signed.....

Appendix 5 – Headteacher consent

1. Study title:
The experience and achievement of Somali boys – a case study in a London comprehensive school
2. Aim of the study:
Further to the themed review last year, I will be carrying out a further research study as part of my final year assignment for a Masters degree at Oxford University. The study will focus on Somali boys in Years 7-9 at _____ School and how we might be able to support academic achievement, school experience and aspirations. The findings of my study may be able to help students at _____ and also other schools with high numbers of Somali students.
3. How will the study work?
The study will be in 3 stages: questionnaires to all Somali boys in Y7-9, interviews with the same students following these questionnaires, and then my intervention which will be involving learning mentors from the Somali community working with students who agree to participate on a monthly basis between February and June. All of this will be on the school site and during school hours. Students will be given a consent form to read and sign and parents will also be invited to give consent.
4. Are there any risks to anyone?
No, there are no risks to this study.
5. Is everything confidential?
All information you give in questionnaires, interviews and during the mentoring sessions is confidential and anonymous. I will store the information until the report is written up and then it will be destroyed.
6. Where will the study be published?
The study will be written up and handed in to Oxford University. Everything is anonymous and no one will be identified by name.
7. Who has approved this project?
This study has been approved by the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee and by my supervisor at the university.

Appendix 6 – CUREC Application Approval

Title:

The experience and achievement of Somali boys – a case study in a London comprehensive school

Researchers:

& (supervisor)

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly, approval has been granted.

Please note that CUREC approval does not guarantee access to participants, and it is your responsibility to check whether countries or contexts in which you plan to conduct your research might impose additional requirements.

If your research involves participants whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question (this includes those under 18 and vulnerable adults), then it is advisable to read the following NSPCC professional reporting requirements for cases of suspected abuse

<http://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/information-service/factsheet-child-abuse-reporting-requirements-professionals.pdf>

Should there be any subsequent changes to the project which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application you should submit details to research.office@education.ox.ac.uk for consideration.

<u>Appendix 7 – 1st meeting mentor forms</u>	
<u>Discussion Point</u>	<u>Response</u>
What lessons do you enjoy and why? What do you not like? <i>[are they well supported in their lessons? Are they doing well in their opinion?]</i>	
Is behaviour generally good in your lessons? Do you get a lot of detentions/behaviour points? Do you like the school behaviour system?	
Do you get lots of epraise points? Do you like the praise system? What are you saving up for with your points?	
Do you get a lot of homework? Do you generally do your homework? Do you get help with your homework at home or at school, study centre etc? Is it easy?	
Do you attend any clubs at school or after school – which ones?	
What are you hoping to do after Y11/GCSEs? Do you want to go to university? What job would you like to do when you're older? What do your parents do? Do you want to do the same job as them? <i>[for this question we are trying to understand their hopes and aspirations for the future-do they have someone they can look up to?]</i>	
What do you enjoy about School ?	
What do you find difficult? Is there anything that we could make better for you at school? Have you had any difficulties since being at the school? <i>[for this question we are trying to understand if they are ever the victim of bullying/racism in school, particularly verbal insults etc]</i>	
Do you speak another language at home? Are you bilingual? <i>[is this difficult for them?]</i>	

Is their level of English affecting their learning or integration in school?]	
Do you have a role-model/ inspiration who you look up to? Why is this?	
Have you always lived in London/UK? Where else have you lived? Have your parents always lived in the UK or anywhere else? <i>[have they had a disrupted or unsettled time with lots of moving around? Have their families experienced a lot of moving around?]</i>	
Who would you talk to if you had difficulties in school with your work or a behaviour issue? How about outside of school? <i>[for this question we are trying to see if the students feel supported or feel they have someone they can talk to]</i>	

Appendix 8 - Outside of school- mentor notes

1. What are your interests outside of school? Do you go to any clubs? Do you attend any clubs in school? Are there any clubs you would like to go to in our out of school?
2. Do you play a lot of computer games? Which ones do you like and why? Do you have a console?
3. Do you play lots of sports? Do you watch sports?
4. How about Music – do you listen to music or play an instrument or anything separate from school?
5. Do you attend any study clubs like Saturday School? Do you like this?
6. Are there any clubs or activities you think we could offer as a school that you would like?

Appendix 9 – Homework - mentor notes

How much homework do you do every evening?

Where do you do your homework?

Which subjects do you get homework in?

Do you find it easy or hard usually?

Do you enjoy doing homework? Which subjects?

How is google classroom- can you use it fully?

Do you get any help with homework? From your parents/ siblings? Are they able to help using google classroom? Do they ask you a lot about your homework/ support you with it?

Do you think you get enough or homework or should you have more? Does it help you to learn?

What happens if you don't do your homework? Do you get in trouble at school/ home?

Are there ever any language difficulties with homework?

What homework have you got at the moment? Is there anything I can help with?
How else could we help you with homework? Teachers/ mentors/ parents