

# New In Class:

How schools can help  
children and families  
from Hong Kong to  
settle and integrate

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Future...

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About the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers:

The Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers is an umbrella organisation helping to coordinate the UK's welcoming efforts across civil society, communities, business, education and government. It is conducting research to inform policy and shares best practice around the integration of Hong Kongers. It also supports welcoming organisations working to help new arrivals from Hong Kong to settle and integrate in the UK. It is housed at the thinktank British Future, registered charity number 1159291

About British Future:

British Future is an independent, non-partisan think tank engaging people's hopes and fears about integration and migration, identity and race, so that we share a confident and welcoming Britain, inclusive and fair to all. Registered Charity number 1159291

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Aims and objectives

For the second phase of its research project, the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers is looking in greater depth at education and schools, a key issue for Hong Kongers which is especially important for the UK to get right. The purpose of the research for this report was to gain the perspective of schools, and to understand more about how they are welcoming and integrating children and young people from Hong Kong. Our objective was to identify good practice which could be adopted by schools more widely.

### Key questions

Our report looks at all stages of the process of welcoming and settling children and young people from Hong Kong into UK schools. Key questions we ask are: how do families choose a school? How are pupils welcomed into the school? What do schools do to engage parents? How are pupils' English language skills assessed, and how are their Cantonese language skills maintained? What funding is available for EAL support?

## Methods

The research was carried out in two stages. First we conducted interviews with stakeholders from education charities and local authorities, alongside three meetings of a specially convened education network. We then carried out visits to five schools in different areas of England, interviewing senior leaders and staff responsible for welcoming Hong Konger pupils and their families. In three of the five schools, we also had conversations with parents and pupils from Hong Kong.

## Headline conclusions

Schools demonstrated a positive attitude towards pupils from Hong Kong and expressed a wish to see adequately-resourced support for the academic, social, and pastoral development of Hong Konger pupils. We found that more could be done to ensure that procedures for welcoming new pupils from migrant families are implemented in accordance with best practice, with **thorough information on the school provided to new pupils and their parents**, and proper training for 'buddy' schemes.

Hong Konger parents often have a cultural expectation of involvement in their children's education, and are committed to helping their children flourish both academically and socially. Schools should **assist parents in becoming more familiar with school life**, the curriculum and expectations of pupils.

We found evidence that there were clear benefits to Hong Konger pupils when children and their parents were able to communicate in Cantonese with staff members. Where possible, schools with a significant number of pupils from Hong Kong should consider **employing Cantonese-speaking staff members**, as teachers, teaching assistants, mentors, or other roles within the school.

We also found that the government could introduce **changes to funding policy and teacher training requirements** in order to better support the needs of migrant pupils, including but not limited to the provision of English as an Additional Language (EAL) tuition.



## Top recommendations

- Schools should be provided with **information about why Hong Kongers are coming to the UK** to help inform teachers' awareness of some of the mental, social and other pressures faced by children and families from Hong Kong.
- Where possible, schools with a large population of Hong Konger students should recruit **staff members from Hong Kong**, whether as teachers, teaching assistants, or in other roles within the school.
- Schools should be more **proactive in inviting parents to take part in school events and activities**.
- Schools should consider organising **services to help parents learn English**, and schools which are already helping parents to learn English should be supported in delivering this service.
- To support schools and the children of BN(O) visa holders, the government should **re-introduce the ring-fencing of EAL provision**.
- The government should also consider **reintroducing proficiency codes**, with a requirement to report on English language proficiency in the census.



## Next steps

The Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers' research programme is now working on a large-scale survey of Hong Kongers, conducted in collaboration with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, focusing on BN(O) Hong Kongers' plans and hopes for employment and the reasons for moving to particular areas of the UK, including school choice.





## INTRODUCTION

Securing a good education for their children is a strong motivation for many Hong Kongers moving to the UK via the BN(O) visa programme. Many were reluctant to leave Hong Kong for their own sakes, yet were concerned about increasing political involvement in their children's education. They believe that their children will have freer lives and better opportunities in this country, and as such wish them to succeed educationally and to make the most of what life in the UK can offer them.

Schools have an important role in the personal development of BN(O) children beyond academic achievement. School provides an environment in which children can settle into their new lives and make connections with local UK students as well as with other students from Hong Kong. The friendships and interests that BN(O) children develop in school help structure their new lives in the UK and allow them to settle in. Schools are also places where the needs of newcomers can be identified and addressed and equal participation in society can be facilitated. Successful integration of migrant children into schools benefits the wellbeing of migrant pupils, helping to address disadvantages stemming from the disruption of moving or negative life experiences they may have undergone before or after arrival in the UK.

Areas of the UK with a reputation for good schools tend to attract more Hong Konger families than other areas. Areas with a high number of school applications include Solihull, Sutton, St Albans, Milton Keynes, Leeds and Surrey (see Appendix 2). However, Hong Kongers have moved to locations across the UK: many schools will not have welcomed new arrivals from Hong Kong before and some will have little experience in welcoming migrant pupils more generally.

The findings presented in this report are drawn from Stage 2 of our research project funded under the Government's welcoming programme, delivered through the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). By including schools and education in our project, we aimed to identify the various ways in which schools are welcoming and helping to integrate pupils and their families. We aimed to identify good and promising practice towards successful integration across all areas of learning and school life.



## What our previous research has found

In the first stage of our project, between February and July 2022 we carried out one-to-one interviews and focus groups with Hong Kongers, numbering 62 in total, alongside discussions with 35 stakeholders with an interest in Hong Kongers in the UK, including national and local projects, strategic migration partnerships and institutions including colleges and churches.

The research found that schools are commonly a key factor in the decisions of Hong Konger families about where to live. Parents often select areas with highly rated schools and then seek permanent accommodation within the catchment area. Academic results are important, but not the sole consideration: parents pay attention to the provision of extra-curricular activities and to the school's guiding ethos, including approaches to behaviour.

Parents who we interviewed in 2022 generally said that their children had settled down well in school. There were, however, some reports of bullying, some of a racist or discriminatory nature, which were largely dealt with effectively by schools. Parents also noted that children get less homework than in Hong Kong, and that UK schools offer much less in the way of extracurricular activities.

A lack of information – about the structure of the school day, extracurricular activities, the curriculum and homework – was also a key concern. Our 2022 interviews found that parents felt their children's school did not provide as much information, and was not as responsive to their questions and concerns, as they would like. Some parents we spoke to in 2022 also said they would like their children's school to understand more about the background of the BN(O) programme and why they have decided to come to the UK. They also wished for schools to understand more about Hong Kong and its culture. However, we also found that many parents wanted to move to areas without an existing population of Hong Kongers, to avoid the development of a 'little Hong Kong', and to encourage their children to socialise and integrate with local pupils while at school.







## Methods

The purpose of the research for this report was to gain the perspective of schools, and to understand more about how they are welcoming and integrating children and young people from Hong Kong. Combining these findings with our earlier research on the perspectives of parents, our objective was to identify good practice which could be adopted by schools more widely.

We began by interviewing stakeholders from education charities and local authorities in wide-ranging discussions about the needs of children, young people and their families and how schools are responding. Our methods included one-to-one interviews and three meetings of a specially convened education network, attended by organisations including the Bell Foundation, Achieving for Children, UKHK, Hongkongers in Britain, Migration Work CIC and local authorities across the UK.

To gain an in-depth understanding of schools' practices and experiences of welcoming children and young people from Hong Kong, we visited five schools in different areas of England. In each we interviewed senior leaders and staff responsible for welcoming Hong Konger pupils and their families. These included those with responsibility for English as an Additional Language (EAL) and for pastoral care. In three of the five schools, we also had some informal conversations with parents and pupils. A summary of the schools is provided in the appendix. The research visits were carried out during January and February 2023. Included in the report are two case studies, looking at particular stories of Hong Konger welcoming that we discovered during the course of our research. One study examines the case of a young pupil with profound deafness, and the specialist SEN provision that has been made available to her at school. The other study examines the case of a secondary school in Partington, in the Metropolitan Borough of Trafford, where 1 in 6 students are from Hong Kong.

## Structure of the report

Our report looks at all stages of the process of welcoming and settling children and young people from Hong Kong into UK schools. We look first at school choice, including the issue of churn resulting from pupil mobility. We then look at all stages in the arrival and settling in process: including introduction to the school, language assessment, social integration through making friends, and maintaining cultural identity in a new environment.



# 1. School Choice

As noted earlier, proximity to good schools is an important factor for Hong Konger parents in deciding where to move within the UK. Areas with a reputation for good state schools, such as Warrington (Cheshire) and Sutton and Kingston in Surrey, have been popular destinations for Hong Kongers with children. Parents have not always obtained places in their favoured schools and pupils will therefore sometimes move schools once a place in a preferred school is offered.

While favoured schools were often those with higher Ofsted ratings and better academic achievement, there were other reasons for parents' preferences and for moving a child or young person between schools. We also found that parents would move children if they felt they were unhappy at their school. Teachers and school staff told us that Hong Konger pupils might start at larger comprehensives with more spaces available, but sometimes move to single-sex and Catholic schools.

Parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) look for schools that can offer specialised resources and support. We found evidence that parents of a child with SEN may only find out about schools with specialist resources once they have arrived in the UK, necessitating another change of school.

Both the concentration of Hong Kongers in areas with a reputation for good schools, and the relatively high level of student churn once they have enrolled in schools, have contingent effects on funding. Funding allocations from the Department for Education (DfE) use a lagged approach, taking student numbers from the past two years to calculate the per-pupil funding allocation of each school. Consequently, some schools have had to find alternate resources, such as support from a trust, to fund the costs associated with a large influx of Hong Konger students. If a significant number of Hong Konger students enrol at one school but leave to join another school, this can similarly lead to discrepancies between levels of per-pupil DfE funding and the actual size of the student body.

# 2. Welcoming new pupils

Case study schools had broadly similar processes for welcoming new students. Children were given a short induction meeting to find out their interests and familiarise the children with the layout of the school. This first meeting is typically conducted with parents present. Eligibility for assistance with uniform and free school meals might also be raised at this point. It was reported that children normally start school within a week of the first admissions meeting. Some schools give children a tour on their first day, but based on our teacher interviews this appears to vary from school to school. One pupil told us:

**“ In my last school I was given a tour, but in this one I wasn't... my friends tried to help me find my way around.”**

Responsibility for welcoming new pupils is usually assigned to a senior member of staff. In primary schools this is usually the headteacher. At several of our case study secondary schools, teachers reported that the Head of Year is responsible for meeting and interviewing new pupils.

Class teachers are provided with a brief synopsis of English competence and buddy details (see below) a day or so before the child arrives in class. Schools reported that children and young people from Hong Kong usually arrive well prepared to start school. As a secondary-school teacher noted:

**“ They always arrive prepared, with uniforms and reading books etcetera, so they're obviously getting information from somewhere.”**

The question of which year group to place pupils from Hong Kong in was raised by some schools. This was particularly an issue given that school years in Hong Kong are different to the UK. One teacher we interviewed raised the specific problem of Hong Kongers aged 16 who are at the equivalent level of Y10 students, despite being a year older. These students are not ready to enter Sixth Form, yet are too old to enter Y10 at the start of GCSEs. This suggests that schools need to exercise flexibility so that students from Hong Kong do not miss out on the years of schooling that are most essential for future progression.





## Buddying and friendship

Buddy systems, pairing a new arrival with a current pupil, were a common method of familiarising pupils with the school. The schools we visited generally try to pair pupils of the same age and, if possible, mother tongue. Schools also reported that, in some cases, buddy systems evolve naturally among Hong Kong children, as new arrivals are welcomed into pre-existing friendship groups. This tendency was particularly pronounced among children with less proficiency in English.

Some teachers expressed a preference for these informal systems, noting that children do not necessarily become friends with other students from Hong Kong simply on the basis of shared nationality or language. Furthermore, as one teacher noted, the selection process for buddies in many schools can boil down to picking a child who 'needs a friend', rather than on compatibility of interests or personality. Despite an unwillingness

to 'force' friendship between pupils, both teachers and parents were enthusiastic about the use of buddy systems for helping integrate Hong Kong children into the school body.

Interviewees raised the importance of 'buddy training' to ensure that buddy schemes are properly implemented. Instead of trying to artificially create a friendship between buddy and new pupil, the buddy should be aware that they are performing a role with specific responsibilities, and the timeframe for this role should be clearly defined. Schools should also develop an idea of the new student's interests and personality, and select a buddy based upon compatibility with the new student.





### 3. Language and other assessments

Assessment of a pupil's English language ability usually takes the form of an EAL assessment of around 30 minutes. Typically, a child is taken out of English class within the first few weeks of joining the school in order to take the test, which measures their speaking, writing and listening skills. Some schools reported that they use tests developed by the Bell Foundation and the NFER. Teachers we interviewed said that children from Hong Kong generally possess good speaking skills but tend to struggle with the grammar of written English. In one case study school, the Head of EAL reported that a pupil's EAL assessment is then incorporated into a 'strategy sheet', which records the pupil's individual requirements for additional teacher input.

Support is provided formally by schools through the provision of EAL workbooks and Cantonese dictionaries in classrooms, and the use of scaffolding strategies and task-based learning methods recommended by specialists in EAL pedagogy. Given their relatively good

English, it is common practice to teach Hong Konger students in the classroom alongside other pupils. Teachers stressed the importance of 'task-based learning' for EAL students, which allows for an open-ended, results-oriented approach to learning English through problem-solving and cooperation. This also allows teachers to 'free up time' to speak with individual children and help them approach the task, a method that helps children feel seen and improves their confidence while settling into a new environment.

Some schools have Cantonese-speaking staff members or teaching assistants (TAs), while others have EAL volunteers to help support Hong Kongers. One case study school had close to 100 Teaching Assistants who were able to do mentoring in a range of different languages. However, the number of Cantonese-speaking volunteers is currently very small. This provision is clearly limited by lack of resources. In Edinburgh, an employee at a Welcoming organisation reported that a single volunteer from Hong Kong works as Education Language Support for around 30 schools in the region.

Alongside classroom support, schools also offer 'EAL clubs' and homework clubs, for example at lunchtimes or after school, where Hong Konger pupils can get additional help with their schoolwork. In most cases, these were relaxed environments where students could make friends and learn English through board games and activities. In one case, a teacher described how two Hong Konger pupils had come along to the school's lunchtime EAL club, befriended each other and then stopped attending once they had 'built up their confidence' to socialise with the other students at lunchtime. Some younger children also chose to go to science clubs or after-school business clubs to improve their English skills with academic achievement in mind.

EAL provision in our case study schools varied widely. This validates a common sentiment across education stakeholders that EAL provision is a 'mixed bag' across schools and local authorities. Some case study schools offer EAL lessons for Hong Konger pupils during tutor time, although such lessons are not compulsory. Other schools focus on methods for helping students in the classroom, such as vocabulary lists, additional reading, and scaffolding lessons (i.e. providing temporary support for an inexperienced learner to complete a task, then gradually withdrawing that support).

Disparities between schools in EAL provision is explained, in part, by the fact that Hong Kongers are tending to settle in schools with less prior experience of welcoming refugee arrivals, and a corresponding lack of expertise among teachers. EAL does not feature in initial teacher training, so teachers gain experience largely through practice gained in teaching in multilingual schools. As reported by some of the local authorities that we interviewed, there are no formal minimum standards for EAL tuition in schools, which also contributes to the variance between schools.

Some of the education specialists we interviewed also highlighted the removal of proficiency codes as a factor influencing schools' provision of EAL tuition. At present, schools are not required to collect data on the English proficiency of pupils with English as an additional language. In 2018, an additional question on English proficiency for EAL students was included in the school census. Schools were required to assess the position of their EAL pupils against a five-point scale of reading, writing and spoken language proficiency and make a 'best fit' judgement as to the proficiency stage for each pupil. However, this question was removed after only 18 months and there is no longer a statutory requirement to collect information on EAL students and English proficiency.



In the opinion of the education specialists we interviewed, proficiency codes were a useful resource for capturing a detailed picture of EAL learners and their varied needs, allowing teachers to review EAL subject provision, and make links with other schools to enhance EAL provision. Having access to a detailed picture of which schools in the UK have a large population of Cantonese speakers would be a useful resource for schools looking to improve their provision of EAL support for Hong Kongers.

In the case study schools, pre-assessment of Hong Konger children focused largely on their competence in English. Academic attainment was not assessed on arrival, and there were indications that schools may not have been aware when children were underperforming. As one teacher told us:

**“ I’m not yet aware of how they’re performing academically compared to other students.”**

Some Hong Konger students will have Special Educational Needs (SEN) and require additional assessments to identify appropriate support. Teachers

reported that parents tend to be quite proactive about bringing up diagnoses and requirements. However, stakeholder organisations reported that parents may lack information about UK systems or have misconceptions about special schools. Stakeholders also expressed the view that some parents prefer to approach Hong Konger welcoming organisations: one employee of a welcoming organisation reported that parents tend to linger after welcoming events to chat, and enquire about SEN in an informal environment.

Schools generally have the necessary expertise and capacity to assess and deal with SEN, including thorough assessment processes. These include producing an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) specifying the support needed and how it should be delivered. Some conditions, for example dyslexia, are complex to assess, due to Hong Konger children being used to learning a character-based language.

## Case Study: SEND provision for deaf pupils

One school we visited had specialist resourced provision for hearing impaired students. We interviewed the Head of the Resourced Base for Deaf Students, as well as an individual Hong Konger pupil with profound deafness. The pupil was allocated a place in another local school but moved to the case study school when her parents found out it had a special unit for deaf students. After an interview with the pupil to explain the resources and the academic results she received while in Hong Kong, the pupil started at the school within two days.

The school is currently in the process of applying for an education, health and care plan (EHCP) for the pupil, which will entitle the pupil to have support, equipment for their deafness and a teaching assistant in classes, up to age 25. The Head of the Deaf Resource offers curriculum support, as well as a ‘Healthy Minds’ curriculum which aims to foster a positive identity around being deaf.

The Head of the Resourced Base noted the importance of Cantonese language assessments to disentangle the SEN and EAL needs of their students. They noted:

**“ I’ve never had an EAL student who’s profoundly deaf, but I’m very aware of her needs – they are separate but could overlap. Her language might be behind in Cantonese, but it doesn’t seem apparent unless she’s assessed in Cantonese.”**

It is important to record on a pupil’s EHCP if they have EAL needs. In these cases, additional funding can be provided. It is up to the school to pay for an additional assessment in Cantonese, but this assessment is important to gain a full picture of the pupil’s individual SEN needs.

We interviewed the mother of the pupil from Hong Kong to find out how they saw SEN provision in UK schools. The mother was generally positive about her child's SEN support, commenting the following:

**“ I can say, the support in UK is more comprehensive, more supportive than in Hong Kong... in UK, other than the [hearing] equipment, they are also offering a teaching assistant to help her to understand the content... they can talk with the teaching assistant to have more English practice.”**

The mother also told us that it was quite easy to apply for the relevant documents from the hospital authority to show her child has profound hearing loss, and that she felt her child was generally happy in school.



## 4. Whole school approach and activities

Our 2022 interviews found that Hong Konger parents felt their children, on the whole, quickly settled into their new school. Whole school approaches, for example an ethos that welcomes pupils, delivered through assemblies or other activities, can help students feel welcome. Teachers reported that Hong Konger students tend to gravitate towards each other, especially if they are not proficient in English. Case study schools aimed for students to integrate, so that new arrivals make friends and learn well alongside pupils from different backgrounds. In many cases this was described as happening 'naturally' without specific efforts by schools. However, some schools aimed to encourage this process as part of good integration practice.

Primary school pupils were reported to integrate more quickly with pupils from different backgrounds, and this process was also described as somewhat faster in schools with a more ethnically mixed intake. Integration was reported to be slower in secondary schools, and those with relatively few other pupils from minority ethnic groups.

In some cases, initial attempts to help integrate Hong Konger pupils, placing them next to other pupils, were not particularly successful. Schools felt it important for Hong Kongers to make friends other than with other Hong

Kongers for many reasons, including their academic progress. For example, a secondary school teacher reported that a student did not want to leave the lower science set, despite having high grades, because she was part of a small group of Cantonese-speaking friends in her class.

Teachers often expressed that they would like to help students integrate, but felt unsure how to do so in a supportive manner. One teacher commented:

**“ I don't know how to do it but there needs to be a way to organically celebrate their culture or share their culture so that other kids can have an understanding. The other day I did a reading that was about Chinese New Year and it was nice. They could tell other people about it, and that was really nice, but we don't want to make it feel forced and awkward.”**

Extracurricular activities provide opportunities for pupils to mix with pupils across age groups and backgrounds and can help with social integration. Outside of the classroom, teachers reported that Hong Konger children made use of various clubs and activities to socialise. Science clubs, business and finance, origami, chess, tennis, choirs, and boardgames were all popular choices for Hong Konger children.



A teacher at one school related how one child was keen to teach the other children how to play Mahjong. We found that students were generally making good use of available extracurricular activities. As one teacher told us:

**“ They come from families where they are celebrated to do a lot of extracurricular activities. They’re willing to come here and throw themselves into the life of the school.”**

Our 2022 research found that some schools had asked Hong Konger children to share aspects of their culture in assemblies or class. We found only limited examples of this activity. Some teachers raised a concern that the children would find such a focus on them to be isolating or embarrassing, and wished for a more organic way to celebrate and raise awareness of Hong Kong culture. Some schools had organised extracurricular activities around the Lunar New Year, such as lantern-making, which were received positively by the children and their parents. In one case, a pupil observed that, while he was not particularly interested in his school’s celebration of Lunar New Year, his mother was delighted to see the school celebrate this event.

Personal, social, and health education (PSHE) plays an important role in the integration of Hong Konger students. This is potentially particularly important

in schools with less diverse intakes, and where other students will have lower levels of awareness of other cultures. The curriculum is designed to prepare students for life in modern Britain, with a focus on protected characteristics, understanding and respect.

Teachers in our case study schools said they were not aware of cases of bullying involving Hong Konger students, though it may have escaped their attention. It is also likely that bullying is under-reported: research by Hongkongers in Britain indicates that 10% of Hong Konger students have faced discrimination, and 15% have faced bullying<sup>1</sup>. It may be the case that the common perception of Hong Konger children as polite and quiet in class leads to problems being overlooked. As one senior teacher noted:

**“ Students from Hong Kong are ever so polite and if you just ask if they’re OK, they’ll say yes they are. You need to dig a little deeper, to triple-check they’re OK, because they’re very quick to say they’re fine.”**

Some teachers expressed the view that families from Hong Kong prefer schools with a diverse, multicultural student population, as they felt it would be easier for their children to integrate in this environment. This clearly varies, since many Hong Konger families are also settling in areas of the UK with low levels of ethnic diversity, including where there are few other Hong Kongers. At some schools, we were able to talk with some

Hong Konger students and parents, who expressed that they saw diversity in schools as a positive thing: in the words of one parent, ‘if you have so much diversity, you just blend in.’

Some of the welcoming organisations we interviewed expressed concern that, based on their experience working with Hong Konger families, some older children are not integrating well through making new friends. They reported that teenagers were tired during the school day as a result of staying up at night to message friends in Hong Kong.

When asked if they missed Hong Kong, one pupil responded:

**“ Sure, definitely. There will be friends in Hong Kong that we miss, but through technology, even though there are some timezone problems, we can manage.”**

These concerns indicate that maintaining links to Hong Kong is important for many older students, and efforts to encourage integration will have to be mindful of the students’ ongoing social, emotional, cultural, and linguistic ties to Hong Kong.



<sup>1</sup> HongKongers in Britain, Unlocking potential: meeting the educational needs of Hongkongers in Britain (2023)





## 5. Engaging with parents

Our 2022 interviews with parents found that Hong Konger parents are keen to have contact with their children's school and to support their learning, but have often not managed to establish any real contact with schools or teachers. We found that parents found it difficult to engage with their child's education due to differences between UK and Hong Kong schooling. Unlike Hong Kong, learning in UK schools is not structured around textbooks and workbooks. An additional factor is that some common UK school subjects, such as Drama, are not taught in Hong Kong schools.

Education specialists and welcoming organisation employees interviewed for this stage of the research also stated

that a major concern of parents is their lack of involvement in their children's education. They reported that Hong Konger parents remain unaware of the curriculum, the school timetable and homework requirements of their children's schools. One case study school noted that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, parents evenings and all contact with parents shifted online, with the result that parents never physically came to the school. As such, recent arrivals to the UK, such as Hong Kongers, might remain completely unfamiliar with the inside of a British school, and this clearly contributes to the parents' sense that they do not know what goes on inside the school gates.

As noted earlier, case study schools reported the usual practice is to meet parents before their child starts and to give them a tour of the school. Meetings could involve the headteacher, head of year or other senior member of staff. Teachers reported that questions from Hong Konger parents tend to be focused on academic matters and how they can support their child at home. Such contact is likely to be of benefit to pupils, parents and the school, including by equipping schools with more understanding of pupils' prior attainment. As we explained earlier, this information about pupils from Hong Kong is often lacking, and carries the risk of under-estimating pupils' abilities.

On the subject of GCSE and A-level options, some of the teachers we interviewed suggested that parents had 'done their research' on subject options and sixth form places. We did not find much evidence of advice sessions for Hong Konger parents to help them understand the UK system of GCSEs and A-levels. At one school, a senior teacher commented:

**“ They get a big booklet with all the options, so again it should tell them all they need to know.”**

However, it is not evident that providing information in booklet form is sufficient for helping Hong Konger parents. It is only available in English, and without direct contact with parents it is difficult to know whether they understand the information that has been given to them.

It was reported as common practice for parents to be able to contact teachers,

including through email about any aspect of their child's education or school life. Generally, however, case study schools reported that contact with parents was not very frequent. Reasons for this are not clear, but might include English language skills or confidence about raising concerns with the school. In such cases, stakeholders report that parents may be seeking help within communities or through talking to their children, rather than approaching schools directly. An explanation put forward by a member of staff in one of the case study schools, himself a BN(O) Hong Konger and parent, concerns the requirement that visa holders have 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF). It was suggested that some Hong Konger parents take this to mean that they are not entitled to any information or services from public bodies, including schools. As this member of staff told us:

**“ For Hong Konger parents we have a boundary. When we got the BN(O) visa it had a statement saying we couldn't get any benefit within 5 years. So that's why schools should tell the parents that they can have help.”**



It is not clear how prevalent such an attitude is among Hong Konger parents, but one parent echoed a similar concern about approaching public services in the course of our interviews:

**“ We don't want locals to think that we are here to take advantage of welfare. We're working hard to contribute.”**

This unwillingness to ask for help from public institutions has particular salience for pastoral issues such as emotional wellbeing and mental health. Hong Konger parents are not used to seeing schools as a point of contact for dealing with such issues, and could contribute to disparities between the self-reported wellbeing of Hong Kongers and the perception of school staff.

When parents are more present at schools and engaged in school life, they can be a key space for Hong Kongers to meet other families, create links across the community and improve their English skills. At one case study school, teachers reported that the playground had become a key platform for Hong Konger parents to share information and experiences, whether positive or negative, while picking up their children. Hong Konger parents also attended assemblies, allowing them to meet teachers and other parents. The school also invited parents to celebrate cultural events such as Lunar New Year, as

well as arts and music performances held within the school. As a teacher related:

**“ When parents visit the school for events, the Hong Konger parents exchange numbers, so it's an opportunity to network and reduce isolation.”**

Some schools expressed an interest in supporting parents to learn English and improve their integration into the local community. In one school, a teacher reported that the school was looking at organising a project for parents that would provide English language tuition as well as advice on finding a job, settling into the UK and filling out official forms. As the teacher explained to us:

**“ There will be a lot of Hong Konger immigrants coming into this country. We would like to help them blend into the environment.... If we could get some form of funding, not only could we help the child, we can help the family too.”**

One teacher also related that, due to this contact with parents, teaching staff had been able to help the parent of a Hong Kong pupil when they encountered trouble with an employer, offering her advice and support. This demonstrates the broader support role which schools can offer to migrant families: when the parents are supported with settling into the UK, it will help the children settle in also.





## 6. Cultural continuation

For some parents from Hong Kong the desire to see their children integrate into UK schools is balanced against an anxiety over the potential loss of Hong Konger identity and Cantonese language ability. For BN(O) Hong Kongers, the experience of leaving home due to political repression has been a source of difficult and complex feelings and anxieties. This feeling was summed up by a stakeholder from an educational charity:

**“ They are anxious about the loss of their mother language. The burden of a Hong Konger who has left Hong Kong, and who now sees Hong Kong deteriorating... you get the feeling of wanting to hold onto something which reminds you of being in Hong Kong.”**

Specialists in heritage and identity that we interviewed noted that Cantonese language skills are crucial for children to be able to communicate and relate with parents and especially grandparents, who

might not speak English. Similarly, some of the Hong Konger parents interviewed previously had expressed concerns that their children will gradually lose their ability to speak Cantonese, and with it a sense of identity as Hong Kongers. This can be exacerbated by the lack of Cantonese language provision, including through private lessons. It is common for schools to give students the option of studying for a GCSE in their heritage language. This is clearly one way for Hong Konger students to keep in touch with their own heritage.

Schools have limited resources to support Cantonese learning, but we found that systems are in place to help students study for a ‘First Language’ GCSE in Cantonese. At one case study school, Hong Konger students were able to access ‘Chinese club’ during Friday lunchtimes, hosted by a Teaching Assistant, which helped prepare them to sit a GCSE in Cantonese. At other schools, pupils were able to access online resources to prepare for a GCSE in Cantonese, even if there were no classes available during the school day.

The presence of Hong Konger and Cantonese-speaking staff in schools was seen very positively by pupils and parents alike. At one school we visited, pupils had formed a connection with a science technician from Hong Kong working in the chemistry department. His classroom had become a social space for Hong Kong students wishing to speak Cantonese and to meet other Hong Kongers. This allowed students to raise issues which the science lab technician could feed back to other members of staff. We found similar benefits in other schools that employed Cantonese-speaking staff members, teaching assistants or librarians. In all cases, these adult Hong Kongers appeared to perform a vital role in providing a space for pupils to socialise in Cantonese and communicate with a trusted authority figure in their mother tongue. Based on our interviews, we found that schools with Cantonese speaking members of staff also had closer links with Hong Konger parents. As one teacher told us:

**“ The first thing the parents say is, ‘I’m so happy that there’s somebody who can speak Cantonese in the school.’”**

The positivity with which Cantonese-speaking staff members are received indicates that cultural and linguistic familiarity is important to Hong Konger pupils, and that it can help them to integrate into school life and with the wider student body.

Cultural and linguistic familiarity may also be important for students dealing with the mental and emotional challenges of settling into life in the UK. As mentioned above, teachers and pupils were only vaguely aware of the political context of the BN(O) programme. One teacher, who had come to the UK from Hong Kong, told us that they felt other staff members, though well-intentioned, don’t “fully understand what Hong Kong people have gone through and what we actually need.” In interviews with teaching staff or stakeholders from Hong Kong, they emphasised the stress experienced by children having to leave their home due, in many cases, to political repression. As one staff member, himself a BN(O) Hong Konger, noted:

**“ Hong Konger students may have some kind of stress because they didn’t intend to come to the UK. They may have been forced because of political background.”**

It might be the case that students feel more comfortable discussing these problems with Hong Konger staff members, due to the lack of a linguistic barrier, the complexity of feelings involved, and the sense of having undergone a shared experience as Hong Kongers.



## Case Study: Broadoak School, Partington, Greater Manchester

Our research has previously identified Greater Trafford as a popular location for Hong Konger families, due to job opportunities in Manchester and the high number of state schools with good Ofsted ratings. Many of these schools are oversubscribed, and competition for places is intense.

Broadoak School is a coeducational secondary school with academy status located in Partington in Greater Manchester, rated 'Good' by Ofsted. In contrast to many other schools in the area, it is not oversubscribed and has capacity to admit more students. As such, when BN(O) Hong Kongers started arriving in the UK, it was able to offer places to a large number of Hong Konger pupils. As word spread among Hong Konger communities, the number of applications increased, to the point that one-sixth of the current student body is now from Hong Kong.

Responding to their new intake, the school recognised the need to adapt to meet the needs of Hong Konger families. As the Head of School stated in an interview with Green Bean Media, the first priority is to make the students feel happy and safe in a potentially challenging new environment where 'moving thousands of miles and the language barrier' adds to the difficulty of settling into a new school. The school was keen to take proactive steps towards integrating its new population of Hong Konger students, as the Head commented:

**“ If you don't make it a priority then it's not going to happen. It needs to be [...] a priority for your school to integrate, to welcome, to have a programme that supports pupils from Hong Kong.”**

As more Hong Kongers moved to Greater Trafford, the school received a number of applications from Cantonese-speaking teaching staff. The school has taken on a Cantonese-speaking science technician and two Teaching Assistants, including a volunteer to run induction sessions for new pupils. As noted elsewhere in this report, teaching styles vary significantly between the UK and Hong Kong, with students in the UK expected to show understanding and express themselves in class, rather than simply memorise information.

The induction sessions help students adapt to this change in teaching style, as well as other aspects of school life in the UK. The Cantonese-speaking member of staff also serves as a point of contact for parents, ensuring that Hong Konger parents are informed about the curriculum and daily life in a UK school. The Head teacher says:

**“ That member of staff was really important in terms of the liaison so that those language needs could be identified and met, but also to be that bridge and that link between school and home.”**

As well as informing Hong Kong students about life in the UK, Broadoak also sought to inform other students about the reasons why Hong Kong families, and other migrant groups such as those from Afghanistan, were arriving in Greater Trafford. The school spoke to staff about how to use assemblies and the school's pastoral programme to offer information about the context of the BN(O) scheme and the reasons why families from Hong Kong might be arriving in the UK. As the Head stated:

**“ ...it is that understanding that people don't just choose to leave on a whim, there are reasons and we want to make sure pupils are aware of it.”**

Among the schools we spoke to for this report, Broadoak was the only example of a formal Cantonese-speaking induction session being provided for pupils, and one of few schools where a significant effort had been made to inform teachers and pupils about the BN(O) programme. Both measures are feasible in this case due to the very high proportion of Hong Kongers in Broadoak School's student population, but offer examples of ways in which schools can proactively integrate pupils from Hong Kong into the wider student body<sup>3</sup>. As the Head of School reports, the use of a Cantonese-speaking staff member has also helped students from Hong Kong to raise their academic performance.

Moreover, the Head reported that since the arrival of Hong Kong students, academic attainment had risen for all students in the school. This suggests that support for Hong Kongers can have broader positive impacts on the wider school body.

<sup>2</sup> Green Bean Media, "[A new school 6,000 miles away](#)" (轉校六千哩), 23 February 2023

<sup>3</sup> We would like to extend our thanks to Green Bean Media for consenting to the use of their interview for research purposes. The interview can be found at the following URL: <https://youtu.be/k8pg9kYL9UU>.



## 7. Funding for English Language

Having first introduced a single national formula for school funding (NFF) in 2018, the UK Government is currently transitioning the distribution of all school funding to be in line with the NFF. From 2018 to 2022, local authorities were able to set their own formulae to distribute that funding across maintained schools and academies in their area; from 2023, local authorities will only be allowed to use NFF factors in their local formulae, and must use all NFF factors. Financial resources for EAL are allocated through High Needs funding, which is in addition to the basic per-pupil grant. The NFF allocates funding to EAL pupils entering the compulsory school system in the last 3 years, which equates to £565 per eligible primary pupil and £1,530 per eligible secondary pupil in 2022-23. This represents roughly 1.0% of total funding.

Prior to 2011, funding for EAL was earmarked through the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG), but it has since been mainstreamed into the Direct Schools Grant (DSG) and is no longer ring-fenced. Schools are given a great degree of flexibility over how they use their overall funding to support EAL pupils. However, the lack of specific, earmarked funding can have a negative impact on EAL provision, including for Hong Kongers. Hong Kongers often arrive with some proficiency in English language and are therefore a lower priority for support. Teachers reported making 'difficult decisions' about the disbursement of funds, with EAL money invariably redistributed towards addressing areas of greater perceived need.

As one teacher reflected:

**“ Wouldn't it be lovely to give [Hong Konger pupils] a mentor once a week? But unfortunately, because they don't fall that far down, the money gets sucked up by the more needy.”**

In many cases, Hong Kongers are moving to areas where there have not traditionally been large numbers of migrant or refugee children. This can put additional pressure on schools and local authorities, who may lack experience in this area and corresponding resources. As many Hong Kongers have relatively good English skills compared to other migrant groups, they are not a high priority for EAL support or mentoring when schools are balancing many competing demands on time and resources.

The consolidation of the ring-fenced EMAG into the Direct Schools Grant has seen most local authorities cease or reduce their central support services for schools, including those for refugee and migrant children. Some of the education stakeholders that we interviewed noted that maintained schools and academies cannot identify the funding they receive for EAL, as it is absorbed into the Direct Schools Grant. Local authorities continue to offer central services for EAL in areas with low rates of academisation, with funding obtained through a variety of different streams intended to tackle deprivation, support refugees and fund mental health services, among others.

Some stakeholders in education charities and local authority services expressed frustration with the lack of systemic clarity about funding, and a lack of formal obligations with which to ensure minimum standards for EAL provision in academies and maintained schools. One education professional told us:

**“ We know what strategies work, it's just really frustrating that it's all so splintered, with pockets of funding for Hong Kongers, Ukrainians, refugees in hotels, but it's all over the place.”**

To ensure that the needs of Hong Konger, and all other migrant children, are met, resources need to be placed on a more secure footing. This would enable schools to plan provision, rather than being able to provide short-term solutions to immediate barriers to learning and to integration.



## 8. Conclusions and recommendations for policy and practice

### WELCOMING MIGRANT PUPILS

We found that schools have broadly similar procedures for welcoming new pupils, consisting of an interview with the Head of Year, a tour of the school, and the use of a buddy system to help settle new arrivals. However, more could be done to ensure that these procedures are implemented in accordance with best practice, to ensure that new pupils know where they need to be and when, and to help pupils quickly settle into their new school.

- Schools should put together a welcome pack for all migrant pupils (for the benefit of parents as well as for pupils). This might include information on the layout of the school, the timing of the school day and the names and faces of key support staff.
- Translation and interpreting services should be well resourced so that pupils and parents are able to communicate effectively with the school. When meeting pupils and parents for the first time, it is not advisable to rely on other learners or parents as interpreters, as information must be conveyed sensitively, accurately, and impartially.
- Buddying and mentoring schemes should be developed in detail, with a variety of interventions depending on the linguistic ability and personality of the arriving pupil. The buddy should receive training and develop a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities. Other schemes which could be deployed include mentoring across age groups or the 'circle of friends' approach, which aims to foster a broader social network of peers.

### ENGAGING AND ENCOURAGING PARENTS

The commitment of many Hong Kong parents to their children's education is welcomed by schools and should be recognised and supported. Schools should assist parents in becoming more familiar with school life, the curriculum and expectations. Information about the curriculum, exams and EAL would not only enable parents to assist their children, but improve the confidence and wellbeing of parents anxious about their child's education and future prospects.

- Schools should ensure that Hong Kong parents receive regular monthly school newsletters and other announcements. In areas where there are significant numbers of Hong Kong students, schools should consider translating the newsletter into Cantonese. Newsletters should also include a welcoming element, letting parents know of the arrival of pupils from outside the UK and extending a warm welcome to the new arrivals.
- Schools should be more proactive in inviting parents to take part in school events and activities. In both primary and secondary schools, parents should be encouraged to attend assemblies, concerts and performances. In primary schools, parents should be encouraged to engage in learning through 'stay and play' sessions, sitting in on classes or engaging in playtime with their children.
- If appropriately resourced, schools could play a bigger role in improving English among Hong Kong families. Schools should consider organising services to help parents learn English, through conversation with other parents. Schools that are already helping parents to learn English should be supported in delivering this service.
- Schools can be a key space for parents to meet other families, create links across the community and improve their English skills. Schools have the potential to become welcome hubs where new arrivals can meet other parents from similar and different backgrounds. Stakeholder organisations can help schools to carry out this role by making their own approaches for joint activities.



## CANTONESE IN SCHOOLS

We found evidence that there were benefits to Hong Konger pupils when children and their parents were able to communicate in Cantonese with staff members. As newcomers to the country and to the school, it can be a daunting experience approaching teachers to ask questions or to raise problems. Hong Konger students and parents feel much more comfortable discussing their feelings and problems at school with Cantonese-speaking staff members. Cantonese language skills are also important for preserving the heritage and identity of Hong Kongers, and maintaining family links across the generations.

- Where possible, schools with a sizable cohort of Hong Konger students should recruit staff members from Hong Kong, whether as teachers, teaching assistants, or in other roles within the school. Where possible, schools should also consider arranging for a Cantonese-speaking mentor to visit the school, weekly or fortnightly, to talk with Hong Konger pupils about their school lives.
- Maintaining cultural and linguistic links to Hong Kong are seen as important by parents. Schools should consider purchasing Cantonese books for school libraries, as well as some English-language books on Hong Kong for the benefit of other children who might be interested in the background of their new Hong Konger friends.
- Where schools are not able to employ Cantonese-speaking members of staff, schools should encourage parents to act as volunteers, perhaps offering assistance in the classroom to children who particularly lack confidence in English, or hosting a weekly mentoring session for children from Hong Kong. This would be especially useful for BN(O) visa holders with teaching qualifications, to gain experience of working in a UK school.
- Schools should offer language clubs as a lunchtime or afterschool activity to support those interested in taking Cantonese (or Mandarin) GCSEs. Schools could also invite students who are interested in learning the Chinese language, but who are not heritage speakers, to take part in these clubs.
- Schools should consider reaching out to community organisations, including those focused on welcoming Hong Kongers, to coordinate activities such as cultural celebrations or Saturday schools for EAL, Cantonese study or board games.

## SUPPORTING SCHOOLS

The lack of ring-fenced funding for EAL means that school resources for pupils with English language needs are often absorbed within schools' general budgets and allocated to other areas of support. As such, the EAL needs of Hong Konger pupils, and others with relatively moderate EAL needs, risk being overlooked, with consequent effects on their confidence and level of academic achievement in school. The following changes to government policy would help ensure that Hong Konger children integrate fully and excel at their studies, helping to raise standards overall.

- To support schools and the children of BN(O) visa holders, the Government should reintroduce the ring-fencing of EAL provision. Reintroducing ring-fenced funding might help to ensure support is given to children and young people arriving in the UK with mild or moderate EAL needs, including Hong Kongers, who are currently often left to 'sink or swim'.
- To support migrant pupils specifically, the Government should consider earmarking funds for the non-EAL needs of migrant pupils to ensure that schools with high proportions of such pupils are adequately resourced for additional costs of activities such as welcoming, communications and library resources.
- The Government should also consider reintroducing proficiency codes, with a requirement to report on English language proficiency in the school census. This would capture a much fuller, diverse picture of EAL students in the UK and improve the efficiency of funding allocation for EAL services.
- In schools with sixth forms, a 'pre-sixth' year, that allows Hong Kongers to study the Y12 syllabus in advance of joining Y12, might serve as a useful way to improve the English skills of these students. It may also help to even-out the discrepancies whereby some Hong Konger pupils are not ready for sixth form but are unable to start midway through the GCSE syllabus.



## SUPPORTING TEACHERS

Our report found that teachers often did not know much about the background of the BN(O) programme or the reasons why Hong Kongers have decided to move to the UK. BN(O) Hong Konger staff members feel it is difficult for other teaching staff to understand the BN(O) experience of leaving home due to political reasons. Teachers should be provided with appropriate training and information to better understand some of the needs of Hong Kongers and other migrant pupils.

- Schools should be provided with information about why Hong Kongers are coming to the UK. A greater understanding of the context around the BN(O) scheme will help inform teachers' awareness of some of the mental, emotional, social, and financial pressures that families from Hong Kong are likely to face. Similar information should be provided about other groups moving to the UK.
- Schools should provide Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in addressing the needs of migrant pupils, so they can improve their understanding of the background and needs of specific groups.
- Evidence-based content related to EAL and the needs of migrant pupils should be selected for inclusion in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) curricula, ensuring that teachers are equipped to teach in diverse classrooms.

While this report is about the needs of students from Hong Kong, many of our findings and suggestions will apply to others from different countries and those coming to the UK under different circumstances. Every child and family needs to be welcomed by the UK school system, as schools are in a unique position to facilitate the settling-in process for recent arrivals to the UK.





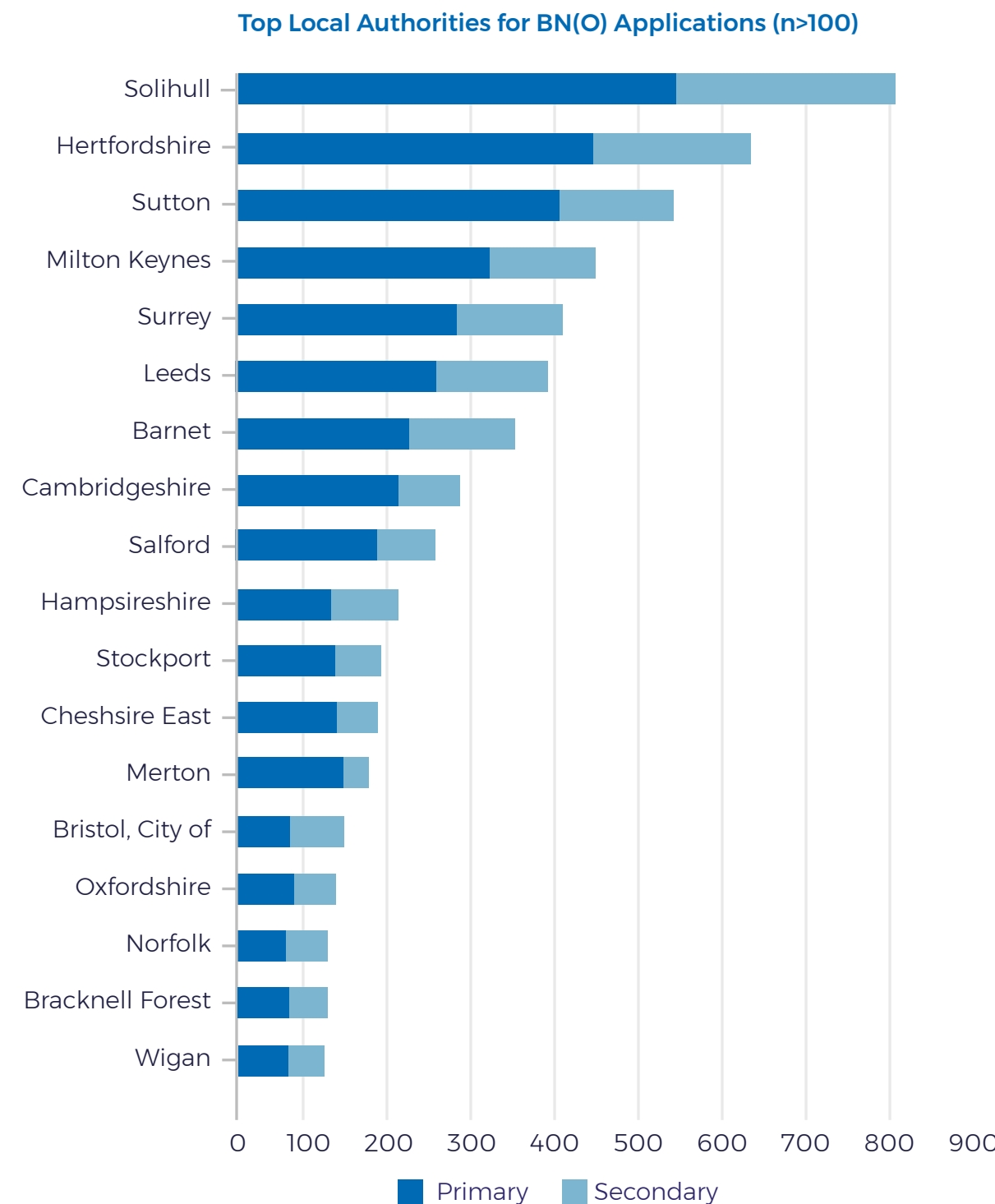
## Appendix I.

Details of case study schools visited for this research

School	Type	Ofsted Rating	Student Body	Hong Kong Students
Epsom and Ewell High School, Surrey	Secondary, co-educational academy 11-18	Good	970	18 (2%)
Twickenham School, Richmond	Secondary, co-educational academy 11-16	Good	600	10 (2%)
Teddington School, Richmond	Secondary, co-educational academy 11-18	Good	1350	40 (3%)
Allerton Church of England Primary, Leeds	Primary, co-educational voluntary controlled school 2-11	Good	701	17 (2.5%)
Comberton Village College, Cambridgeshire	Secondary, co-educational academy 11-18	Outstanding	1940	20 (1%)

## Appendix II.

Most popular locations for school applications by Hong Kongers



Top school locations for Hong Kongers. Number of school applications per Local Authority, where n>100. Data from the Department of Education. NB: data from some local authorities is absent.



The Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers is an independent, non-profit umbrella group for all those who care about the integration of new arrivals from Hong Kong.

We help coordinate the efforts of multiple organisations to support Hong Kongers settling in the UK – from civil society and communities to business, education and government, across the UK's nations and regions.

Website: [www.welcomehk.org](http://www.welcomehk.org)

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