

Bright Education Centre

Introduction

Bright Education Centre was founded by Issa Issa in 2006 in response to his experience studying and working at Lambeth College where he witnessed a lack of progression by many Somali students. By this time, the Somali community was already well established in the UK. In the 1980s there was a significant increase in Somali refugee migration to Britain, and today, the UK hosts the largest Somali community outside Somalia. Over 90% of the British Somali population live in Greater London.

Issa was always interested in representing his peers. He was President of the Student Union at Lambeth College and after graduating, became Alumni Coordinator then Liaison Officer to students at the College. As well as noticing that a significant number of the Somali students were repeating years while their peers were progressing and leaving the college, there were constant complaints from staff and students about the behaviour of many Somali students which they considered disruptive.

Issa decided to set up a small project based in Holborn, Central London. Drawing on his professional network within the community, he was able to recruit a number of volunteers to support a group of 30 Somali students aged 11–14 with their English, Maths and Science.

Many more young people heard about the project through word of mouth and through Issa's contacts in the community, and were keen to join. In January 2007, he moved to The Redfearn Centre, next to Lilian Bayliss Technology School (LBTS) in Lambeth. He set up Bright Education Centre "to support children and young people to develop their self-esteem and confidence to achieve and enjoy all aspects of school life, to support them to become responsible and caring members of society and to empower them to achieve their aspirations".

As well as its supplementary school programme, Bright Education Centre provides a range of services to mainstream schools, including translation and consultancy services to enable them to reach the Somali community more effectively. It also provides alternative daytime education for a small group of 14–16 year olds who are at risk of disengaging from school. During the weekend, Lambeth College provides free ESOL and ICT classes for parents based at BEC. This complements the information, advice and guidance and outreach services provided to families by BEC staff on an ad hoc basis.

Bright Education Centre is incorporated as a not for profit company, limited by guarantee, with an annual turnover of between £40,000 and £55,000.

How the Supplementary Schools' programme began

As Issa grew up in Lambeth, south London, he has close links to many people in the local area. Through direct marketing and leafleting nearby providers of Islamic studies, he managed to reach Somali families and interest them in educational support for their children. The Supplementary School programme began as a Saturday School at the Redfearn Centre with 25 students aged 10–14. They received support with core curriculum subjects for one term initially.

Issa knew that many Somali children were attending LBTS, as he had already accompanied a number of parents to meetings with the school to act as an interpreter, helping them to

understand how they could support their children's learning. He wrote a letter to the Headteacher introducing himself and describing the range of support his organisation was already providing to families of the children that were attending the school. He requested use of their premises in order to expand the number of classes that they could offer. They entered into a partnership agreement in 2007, enabling BEC to hold two weekday and a Saturday session in the mainstream school's classrooms and library in return for free tuition for their students. The provision expanded year on year to cope with the rising demand, and BEC now uses their facilities for four evenings per week and on Saturday.

Getting the mainstream schools on board

The success of BEC's first programme did not go unnoticed by other parents in the borough. Soon, these parents were approaching Issa and his co-workers (who were all still working voluntarily), to act as translators at their parents' evenings and asked them to work with their children's schools. BEC used this as an opportunity to send introductory letters to other mainstream schools requesting to work in partnership. In view of their common objectives for improving children's educational attainment, the letters also proposed sharing data relating to students' academic achievements so they could effectively track progression.

They also made links with Lambeth Council's Ethnic Minority Achievement Team (EMAT). At that time, the EMAT included details of BEC's work in its magazine which was circulated to all mainstream schools in the borough. This helped to raise their profile. Since then, the EMAT has closed due to cutbacks by the Council. This makes it difficult to get accurate data about the numbers of students from Somali backgrounds in Lambeth's schools. However, BEC continues to approach those mainstream schools attended by large numbers of its students.

Over time BEC has developed strong links with seven schools in Lambeth (both primary and secondary) and it exchanges information with many more. These partnerships enable Issa and his staff to support students more effectively as they have access to information about the academic targets they are working towards at mainstream school, and their progress.

The programme

BEC's Supplementary School Programme now provides weekly study support for around 300 children and young people, aged 5–19, in Maths, English and Science. It also offers classes in ICT and sport, all year round. Most of its students are Lambeth residents, although many also travel from Southwark, Wandsworth, Westminster and Croydon with a handful coming from as far as Camden, Hounslow, Barnet and Ealing.

Staff also provide mentoring for young people at risk of disengagement or exclusion from secondary school and further education. Supporting students to make the crucial transition onto further/higher education and the world of work is an important element of BEC's work. BEC has achieved the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education's Gold Award in recognition of the consistent good quality of its educational provision. In 2009 it also received the Third Sector/Community Organisation of the Year Award from the London Education Partnership (organised through the Institute of Education) in recognition of outstanding partnership work with local communities and schools.

BEC is supported by a combination of twelve paid staff (including three qualified teachers and nine learning support and teaching assistants) and up to twenty volunteers. They work on a sessional basis, organised flexibly around their education, employment or other commitments. The majority of the lessons at the Centre are planned and delivered by qualified teachers. Many of the volunteers are young people who have themselves been students of BEC and come back to support the organisation. Up to 30 business professionals also commit three hours a year for a careers' fair to which all students are invited. Its management committee has five members with a range of skills who support the strategic direction of the organisation.

Recruitment of students is by online marketing, word of mouth or referral from the mainstream schools. Each student undergoes an initial functional skills assessment and is

asked to submit a personal statement. This enables the Centre to collect information about each student's academic level when they start tuition, and ensures staff can measure progress. Parents on low incomes are asked to provide evidence of this to determine how much they should pay in fees: those that are employed pay £5 per session; those that are not are asked to contribute whatever they can afford, usually around £2 per session. Due to its strong reputation, BEC now has a substantial waiting list for the programme made up of young people from increasingly diverse backgrounds.

Classes either take place at Bright Education Centre's premises or at Lilian Baylis School, which provides space at no cost. The school also provides six-monthly updates on student progress in Maths, Science and English. BEC's students often progress at a quicker rate than the average predicted by their mainstream schools, and most (86% in 2012) achieve a minimum of five A*-C grades. In 2006, less than 7% of Somali students in Lambeth were achieving A*-C grades; the figure has increased significantly to 61%, partly due to the impact of BEC's work.

Issa thinks that the culture of the Centre is key to its success – volunteers provide excellent role models and support students to raise their aspirations. Rigorous assessment and excellent dialogue with the partner mainstream schools are also critical components to the success of the programme. In 2013 LBTS received an overall outstanding grade from Ofsted, and the enrichment activities provided by BEC were specifically highlighted.

BEC has developed such a level of trust with its partners that Issa has been asked to attend exclusion panel meetings with parents and students. He has often been able to negotiate for the mainstream school to give a final chance to students at risk of exclusion, as long as they attend the supplementary education programme. BEC has offered its volunteers help with job applications, and a few have moved on to teaching assistant positions at LBTS.

Finances

Like many supplementary schools, Bright Education Centre faces a number of challenges in providing services on a limited budget. BEC has not received many grants, but continues to develop its services for mainstream schools, earning a significant portion of income in this way. Previous funders include: The Walcot Foundation, which provided a year's funding in 2009 to cover rent, Trust for London (£10,000) and Amal Express Somali Bank (£4,000).

In 2012, the Centre had a total income of just over £53,000. Fees and donations from parents made up 18% of income; fees charged to mainstream schools for daytime education provision for young people at-risk of exclusion contributed around 16% and further interpreting services contributed around 10%. Small grants still contribute 17% of total income, but the largest success has been the provision of enrichment and cultural sessions paid for by mainstream schools. This contributed over 35% of its total income in 2012.

BEC's main expenditure is for staff (40%). However, the costs of adult education courses are met by Lambeth College and the contribution of up to 20 volunteers weekly helps to keep costs low. Another big cost (30% of total expenditure) is rent for its Redfearn Centre premises. In 2012 rent costs rose so steeply that the organisation could no longer afford it. BEC has moved to new premises but the rent is still considerably more expensive than previously.

Financial year	Income	Expenditure
2009-10	£52,080	£42,460
2010-11	£40,898	£40,483
2011-12	£56,779	£52,779

What next for Bright Education Centre?

The Centre has achieved considerable success so far. Aside from improving academic attainment, a number of students are going on to further and higher education which Issa sees as crucial in helping them build a successful future. Many adults who study at BEC are also opting to pursue formal qualifications elsewhere.

Issa and his team have great ambitions for the centre, mainly to develop its programme of enrichment activities for young people and to extend its support for public sector organisations to engage with the Somali community. Given the increased costs associated with moving to new premises, another priority is to fundraise to meet these costs in future.

BEC plans to increase its provision of alternative education, expand consultancy services for mainstream schools and apply to various trusts and foundations. It has slightly increased the fee for classes – following a consultation with parents, the minimum cost per hour will be £2.50 (for low income families). They will also have to cut expenditure by reducing the number of outings/trips as these are currently unfunded.

In spite of the challenges ahead, the management and staff team at BEC remain optimistic that with the right funding and partnerships, the organisation can continue to grow from strength to strength. With a number of projects in the pipeline including partnership work with London Youth and Lambeth College, Issa is confident that the Centre's future will be "*Bright* no matter what the obstacles are on our way."

<http://brightcentres.co.uk/>