

# **Arabic Complementary Schools in England: Language and Fundamental British Values**

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## **Abstract**

Heritage language education is not included in the national curriculum in England and therefore formal learning and teaching of heritage languages is primarily achieved through complementary schools, which are part-time, community-led and linked to various ethnic and national backgrounds. This study focuses on Arabic complementary schools and explores educational practices for teaching Arabic. The study also explores how pupils and teachers conceptualise, construct and manifest their linguistic and social identity, especially with regard to the context that is informed by the promotion of so-called Fundamental British Values (FBV).

Observations are based on data from interviews with pupils, teachers and headteachers from three Arabic complementary schools across England. A qualitative analysis of the data reveals that the schools are strongly committed to tolerance and respect, which are part of the FBV; as well as to inclusivity and community cohesion. The analysis also shows that Arabic plays an important role in the construction of community and linguistic identities in the current political environment of suspicion.

*Keywords:* complementary schools; heritage languages; language maintenance; bilingualism; Arabic; Fundamental British Values



## **Introduction**

Despite the UK society's ethnic and linguistic diversity, research on how 'minority' communities formally educate their children in their languages, values and identities has been slow to emerge (Creese 2009). The majority of formal heritage language education occurs in complementary language schools, which are part-time and community-led (Creese et al. 2008, Li 2006, Rose 2013). While some research exists on UK heritage language education, e.g., for Chinese (He 2004, Francis, Archer & Mau 2009, Hancock 2014) and Central and Eastern European languages (Sneddon 2014, Zielinska et al. 2014, Tereshchenko & Archer 2015), little is known about Arabic complementary schools in the UK (see Mango [2011] and Zakharia [2016] for the US). This article recognises the valuable research that has been done on these schools and brings a contemporary perspective, focusing particularly on Arabic schools.

Within its wider approach to education the current UK government is keen to promote enterprising, community-based schools. It simultaneously promotes a particular national identity rooted in so-called Fundamental British Values (FBV): democracy; rule of law; individual liberty; respect and tolerance; which schools have a duty to promote (DfE 2014; Lander 2016). Arabic speaking communities and their schools are at the centre of tensions around radicalisation (Khan 2014). The Casey Review (2016) mentions 'cultural and religious practices (...) that (...) run contrary to British values' (p. 5). At the same time, concerns have arisen that 'the quality and quantity of education for diversity are uneven across England' (DfE, 2007, p.6) and since 2014 the key elements of the National Curriculum for citizenship education no longer include identities and diversity (they are currently: understanding of government,

legal system, volunteering, personal money management). We are clearly witnessing a significant struggle around what might broadly be referred to as multiculturalism. Cameron (2011), when Prime Minister, advocated “a lot less of the passive tolerance of recent years and a much more active, muscular liberalism”. This was followed up in educational policy, in part, by a requirement that in order to qualify, teachers should not undermine Fundamental British Values. This has been controversial across the UK (and elsewhere) with Lander (2016) suggesting that we are witnessing “the insidious imposition of a political securitisation agenda, onto an unsuspecting profession and pupil population” (p. 274). This, she claims, is part of the development of “a stratification of citizenship into those who really belong, namely the indigenous majority, those who can belong, namely those of minority ethnic heritage who have assimilated or integrated and those who really do not quite belong, or those we tolerate up to a point, namely the Muslim ‘Other’” (p. 275). There has been disquiet over this policy in Scotland (Johnson 2018) and Northern Ireland (McCully and Clarke 2016). A recent report on civic engagement from the House of Lords (2018) has been in agreement with guidance from Education Scotland (2018) over the latter’s argument that “this language [of Fundamental British Values] is problematic because the concept of ‘British values’ can cause offence and could play into the hands of groups who seek to assert that there is an inherent conflict between being British and being Muslim”. In light of the rise of Islamophobia in the UK (Marsh 2018), we suggest that the concerns that are being voiced about the policy of promoting Fundamental British Values are valid.

The work reported here is the result of a qualitative study involving three Arabic complementary schools in England. The research asked, firstly, what educational

practices the schools employ; and secondly, whether and how these practices relate to debates about the term ‘Fundamental British Values’, and how students and teachers relate to and enact FBV. A related area of interest included questions concerning students’ and teachers’ construction of their ethnic, national and social identities in the context of the school community, which were relevant both to educational practices and schools’ stances towards values. In the following, existing research on heritage language maintenance through complementary schooling is reviewed and the context for complementary education in the UK is set out. The findings from the current study are presented with regard to educational practices and the construction of values and identities. The paper ends with a number of concluding observations. The authors argue that the complementary schools in the sample are concerned through their teaching and other aspects of their work to promote community cohesion in ways that value inclusivity, tolerance and respect.

### **Complementary Schooling in the UK**

The National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education (NRCSE) approximates that there are between 3,000-5,000 supplementary schools in the UK (NRCSE, 2018). The schools make a range of educational contributions, such as, for example, the teaching of culture, history, language, religion, or – in the case of non-heritage as well as heritage supplementary schools - working to supplement mainstream education (Li, 2006). This paper refers to heritage language schools set up specifically for the teaching of language, culture and history of the demographic population in question, but not religion. In line with Martin et al. (2004) and Francis et al. (2009), the term ‘complementary schools’ is used here, as these schools are distinct from other types of supplementary schools in that they are not set up principally to support mainstream

education, but instead focus on complementing and adding value along cultural and linguistic dimensions. Although complementary schools do not generally offer the national curriculum directly, they do support mainstream education in that they offer, for example, GCSEs or A-Levels in lesser-spoken languages such as Arabic, Urdu, Gujarati, Cantonese, Polish and others. Thus, while situated outside of mainstream schooling, complementary schools make up an essential part of many young people's education. Debates around the promotion of FBV are highly relevant to Arabic schools in particular, who not only offer supplementary education but are also part of precisely those communities that are currently suspected of lacking support for them (Casey Review 2016; Richardson 2016).

Complementary schools do not receive funding from the UK government, and the majority of complementary schools are not registered with Ofsted, because they are not required to do so by law.<sup>1</sup> They are therefore not inspected in the same ways as other schools (NRCSE 2018) and do not come under the same obligations to promote Fundamental British Values as mainstream schools. Some schools may receive financial support from charities, private donors or embassies, and some apply for Local Authority grants (Martin et al., 2004). However, the majority of income is generated through fees charged to parents (Mirza & Reay, 2000; Issa & Williams, 2009). Fees allow schools to cover rent, teaching resources and, where possible, modest teachers' salaries, although teachers are often recruited as volunteers (Hall et al., 2002). Partially as a result of this inability to pay appropriate salaries, teachers working in complementary schools frequently do not hold formal teaching

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<sup>1</sup> The Department for Education is currently considering compulsory registration (DfE 2015; NRSCE 2015).

qualifications but may be parents whose children are attending the school (cf. Wang, 2014 for an extensive discussion about teachers in complementary schools).

### **Heritage Language Maintenance through Complementary Schooling**

The term ‘heritage language’ is used here in its original inference (see Cummins, 1991) to mean a language spoken in addition to a society’s dominant language (here: English), by speakers whose links to that language are due to family and heritage. Although terms such as ‘community language’ and ‘home languages’ can also be useful and do well to project neutral non-hierarchical connotations of the languages in question, the term ‘heritage language’ best describes the type of learners and their communities this research describes. Research on heritage language learning routinely focuses on linguistic development and language acquisition (e.g. Montrul 2016), bilingualism (e.g. Blackledge & Creese 2010), multilingualism in society (e.g. Creese 2009) as well as wider issues around ethnic identity (e.g. Tereshchenko & Archer 2015) and language policy at national and family level (e.g. chapters in Brinton, Kagan & Bauckus 2008; see also MacAlister & Mirvahedi 2017). Another significant area for heritage language studies are specific languages and communities, with a large amount of work globally devoted to Spanish (e.g. Pascual y Cabo 2016) and Chinese (e.g. Li 1994). To date, research on Arabic language learning and maintenance is extremely limited (but see, for example, Sawaie & Fishman 1985; Ibrahim & Allam 2006; Bale 2010; Albirini 2013), as is research that links Arabic as a heritage language to issues beyond language acquisition. Similarly, work on Arabic complementary schooling hardly exists, especially in the UK, despite highly charged debates surrounding Muslim communities and the places in which they maintain their heritage culture. Some limited work has been done in the USA (Mango 2011;

Zakharia 2016), where Arabic bilingual community education has been identified as a space in which Arabic speaking populations negotiate their ‘multiple subjectivities as Arab Americans’ (Zakharia 2016: 157). This study begins to address the need for work on Arabic heritage language maintenance by focusing on the context of complementary schools, while also considering the societal context for this form of education.

In the most recent Census (ONS, 2011) 240,000 individuals in England and Wales self-identified as ‘Arab’, which represents 0.4% of the population. 159,000 reported speaking Arabic. The maintenance of Arabic as a heritage language occurs within families, but also in complementary schools. According to Li (2006, p.80) ‘complementary schools are an important social context for developing identities for the immigrant and ethnic minority children attending them.’ Identity and cultural legitimacy are also identified as being at the heart of complementary schooling by Papavlou and Pavlou (2001), Martin et al. (2004), Creese *et al.* (2006) and Kenner and Ruby (2013), among others. Creese (2009) describes complementary schools as ‘safe spaces’ (p. 268) for children to ‘connect the languages of the home and community’, providing ‘an alternative discourse to the *minority language as a problem* orientation apparent in much of the current UK political discourse’ (p. 272, emphasis in the original). Research shows that complementary schools and their community networks support children’s bilingualism (Li, 1994; Lytra & Martin 2010; Conteh 2011). In addition to the language educational work, concrete examples of community impact include close relationships with the schools from which buildings are rented, helping recently arrived parents settle in and supporting transnational families (Otcu, 2010). Zhou and Li (2003) report that heritage schools ‘foster a sense

of civic duty in immigrants, who are often criticised for their lack of civic participation' (p. 69). The establishment of heritage language schools can suggest a deficit within educational provision: if languages were equally catered for it would seem unnecessary to establish schools with the purpose of maintaining heritage languages (Li 2006; Hornberger 2002). There are also ideological preferences that are relevant to issues of equality, as the existence of heritage schools suggests preferences for a form of liberalism where all groups have the right to establish what schools they wish (Szczepek Reed et al. 2017).

The nature of heritage schools as distinct units is of great significance in practical political terms at a time of heightened tensions within and between communities, with cultural connotations for groups and individuals and also with important theoretical implications. Tajfel and Turner's (1986) references to the importance of membership of social groups and Allport's (1954) contact theory are just some of the long-established work which has inspired research on the conditions that may reduce prejudice (e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp 2006). Reflections on the nature of intercultural interaction (e.g., Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009) and work on intercultural competence (e.g., Deardorff 2006) have led to the development of instruments (e.g., the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity, Bennett 1986) that scale responses to intercultural situations from the most negative involving rejections of others to a fairly unsophisticated undifferentiated position of benign intent that people are the same, to a nuanced and positive awareness of difference. There is potential in researching heritage schools to explore some of these issues (see Szczepek Reed et al. in preparation). Heritage schools may allow for the opportunity for – and to think about - maintaining and also developing distinctive identity in specific cultural

contexts without, necessarily, inappropriate segregation or negative opposition to others.

The possible connection between the processes of teaching and learning and issues around Fundamental British Values are perhaps as important as the possible connection with the substantive issue of learning Arabic. In other words, pedagogy is as important as curriculum. This small-scale project did not set out to explore all issues concerning pedagogy, but instead undertakes an analysis of overarching perceptions or statements of intent about the nature and purpose of complementary schools generally and the teaching that occurs there; describes and analyzes the processes of teaching and learning in the sample of schools; and by so doing, develops a discussion of issues that are pertinent to highly charged debates about Fundamental British Values and education in England.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection and analysis were guided by the desire to establish and maintain dialogic relationships with Arabic schools. Data were collected from three Arabic schools across England, one located in London, one in a large city in the North of England and one in a large city in the North West of England. In the discussion below, excerpts are marked L (London), NE (North of England) and NWE (North West of England) to indicate the origins of interview citations. All three schools were situated in communities with significant numbers of Arabic heritage speakers, and all operated as Saturday schools that are open to all nationalities, which meant their student population was highly multicultural and to a certain extent multilingual. Schools focused primarily on learning Arabic (rather than, for example, religion);

none of the schools were linked to a mosque. Students' age range was 5-16. All schools had mixed gender classes and intakes with neither gender clearly in the majority; and all schools explicitly recruited children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

The data were collected by two members of the team, one of whom is a bilingual Arabic speaker and has personal experience of teaching Arabic in complementary schools in London. Each site was visited for one day after prior conversations between the schools and the above mentioned team member. The team approached ten schools listed on the NRSCE webpage (NRSCE 2018). The voluntary nature of participation led to a sample of three schools who were interested in engaging with an external audience and who were open to a team of academics filming and interviewing staff and students. The remaining seven schools were not willing to take part, although they explicitly supported the aims of the study. Some made reference to the current socio-political climate, while others were concerned that possible misunderstandings could lead to children being referred to the Prevent programme. Given these barriers to school recruitment it must be noted here that the sample cannot be considered as representative of the full range of Arabic complementary schools in England. For the purposes of this project the small and non-representative sample of schools was not a problem, as the aim at this stage was not to reveal patterns across the whole sector. Rather the project aimed to inform future engagement with - and research on - heritage schools.

In those schools that agreed to take part, parental consent was secured for video recordings and student focus groups, and teacher consent was sought for interviews and the recording of Arabic lessons. The data consist of ten semi-structured

interviews and three focus groups: three interviews with headteachers (one per school), six interviews with Arabic teachers (three at L, two at NWE, one at NE), one interview with a religious studies teacher (NWE), three student focus groups (one per school), and three video recordings of Arabic lessons (one per school). The findings reported here are based on the interview and focus group data. Questions dealt with schools' approaches to and practices for Arabic language education, as well as their perspectives on the role schools played in the community. Teachers and headteachers were asked specifically about values in the context of the schools, but the term Fundamental British Values was not used by interviewers. Interview questions also probed teachers' and students' constructions of their ethnic, social and national identities.

While the study's focus on educational practice and FBV presented an overarching guideline for the coding of the interviews, the approach to data analysis was iterative and inductive (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The data were transcribed, and the qualitative data analysis tool NVivo was used to access the data in the first instance through content analytic measures to find themes that were salient to the participants; and to develop a categorical, thematic and conceptual organisation of the findings, which were developed into initial coding categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018, Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2015). Values coding was employed to explore intra- and interpersonal participant experiences. In addition, since interviewees were asked to elaborate on their personal experience and the situation for themselves and others (students, parents, etc), versus coding was employed to account for social division and any perceived asymmetries in the analysis (Saldaña, 2015). The codes were refined in a second cycle to consolidate themes and findings and then re-assigned to the relevant research questions (Fereday, & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

The section below discusses respondents' reported perspectives. We consider the views, commitments and identities expressed to be socially and interactionally performed in the context of current societal debates and the interview situation. As such, participants' responses are seen as emerging from society as well as from specific interactional sequences, and the themes identified as discursively achieved. Ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Education at the University of York.

## **Findings**

The following two subsections present, first, the three schools' educational approaches and practices for teaching Arabic; and, second, how students and teachers relate to the so-called Fundamental British Values (FBV) in the context of their schools. The second section also considers how schools promote and enact values school-internally as well as in the community.

### ***Arabic Language Education***

The educational practices and realities reported by the three schools reflect the community-led context in which learning takes place. In the schools observed for this study, Arabic was taught by native speakers, typically first-generation immigrants to the UK. All three schools recruited teachers from a variety of ethnic backgrounds: *'We are not a Yemeni school, we are not an Iraqi school, we are not a Syrian school, we are Arabic school'* (Headteacher, NWE, 11.02.2017). All language teachers in the sample schools were female. All schools tried to insist on either teaching qualifications or teaching experience in UK schools, and one school provided staff development in house. These aspirations were not always met; some teachers had

previous teaching experience and only one reported a teaching qualification. The majority of teachers were on paid positions, but it was felt by all headteachers that schools could not afford to pay teachers appropriate salaries. They reported that some of their teachers received no payment, but that their children attended the school at reduced rates. All teachers who were interviewed expressed a strong commitment to maintaining the Arabic language as well as cultural practices and religious values in the community and named this rather than pay as their main motivation to work at the school. Several interviewees mentioned that for women in the community teaching Arabic was a way of making a contribution while fulfilling traditional caring roles in their families. One teacher who had moved to the UK from Iraq, where she had worked as an architect, explained that teaching Arabic part-time *'is better for me and for my family as well, because they are first priority for me (...) and I would like to support my community as well.'* (Arabic teacher 1, L, 3.12.2016).

Students in the schools learned Arabic as a second or foreign language and displayed a spectrum of linguistic competence. This reflects the variations in bilingual family language policies as well as language proficiency in any given community, as well as the limited resources available to schools. Classes were mixed gender and diverse with regard to ethnicity. All headteachers explicitly specified diversity in their staff and pupil intake as a valued characteristic of their schools: *'In here you see a lot of people, different people, different religion, and different culture'* (Arabic teacher 1, NWE, 11.02.2017). Teaching materials were imported from abroad, but none of the participating schools followed a foreign national curriculum. Instead, materials were designed for learners of Arabic as a Foreign Language based outside Arabic speaking countries. One school catered specifically for both heritage and non-heritage learners

and used different curricula and materials for both. Headteachers were clear about their motivation not to use other countries' national curricula:

*'For example, Saudi government supports a Saudi school in Liverpool. They teach the Saudi curriculum. (...) You know, the Yemeni used to send curriculum to teach through the embassy. The books, they are not suitable for the children who have been brought up here. (Headteacher, NWE, 11.02.2017)*

*The material and resources we use, it's especially made for these children. (...) It's a special made for children who born in this, you know, in the UK or any other part of Europe. (Arabic teacher 1, NWE, 11.02.2017)*

Regarding classroom practices, use of English was wide-spread, although many teachers aimed to make Arabic the classroom language for at least part of the time: *'In my class we try to speak to our Arabic teacher, you know, in English sometimes (...) but then she just gets proper angry. She's like- cause she tries to make us, but we just keep forgetting, she's like, speak Arabic, the more you speak it the better'* (Student 5, NWE, 11.02.2017). Speaking skills were being given priority by most interviewees and in most classes. Teaching methods included whole class teaching, group work, pair work and silent work. Teachers worked extensively with individuals in all three schools; one teacher relied exclusively on an alternating system of one-to-one tutoring while the remaining students worked silently or in pairs and explained this with her students' varying degrees of linguistic competence. Two classes that catered for younger children used a rewards system based on stars and certificates. Several

teachers and headteachers expressed a desire to facilitate student-led classroom learning:

*'I wanted the students to be involved, I wanted the students to lead the learning.'* (Headteacher, L, 3.12.2016)

*'When I want to start with the student the new lesson I try to ask him about what we learned last time. If he understands everything, he can start a new lesson. If I feel he has not understood well, so I have to repeat it again.'*

(Arabic teacher, NE, 26.3.2017)

Headteachers articulated their wish to educate for critical thinking and suggested that this may present a difference in approach to some of the work undertaken by teachers when they first arrived at the school:

*'Within these four hours the child must be given a different approach and they can make that judgment themselves. (...) And we have to protect our children, not only our children, our teachers from committing mistakes (...) they come here with the way in their mind the way they treat children in Arab schools in Yemen or Somalia or in Sudan. And sometimes that can be other way, shouting or physical pushing or something. So we train them quite at the beginning.'* (Headteacher, NWE, 11.02.2017)

All stakeholders agreed on the wide-ranging benefits of learning Arabic and framed it in terms of a wider contribution to citizenship and integration:

*'In communicating with people who have main language of Arabic we are making friends and we are better people in society.'* (Student 1, NE, 26.03.2017)

*'I think people who speak Arabic can bring something new to the society because they can bring more knowledge and different ways of doing things'* (Student 1, NWE, 11.02.2017)

*'Learning more than one language is- you find the kids tend to do better academically and also sort of socially as well, and I think you know they have a wider perspective and outlook on life as well in their interests and hobbies. And (...) they will find similarities and more tolerance. So learning about any language and cultures you know it only enhances what we call (...) inclusive society. The only way we can do that is if we understand each other basically.'* (Headteacher, NE, 26.03.2017)

Teachers recognised that they are teaching Arabic in a UK context and emphasised that Arabic provides students with access to their heritage culture and a positive Arab identity. Students and teachers stressed that they felt learning Arabic provided intercultural competence as well as supporting academic achievement in other areas.

*'It is very important to learn different languages, to learn about different cultures'* (Arabic Teacher 1, NWE, 11.02.2017). All student focus groups and several teachers mentioned employability and future work opportunities in the UK as well as abroad as a motivation to study Arabic: *'If you have Arabic as a second language then job*

*opportunities are massive out there in the Middle East* (Headteacher, NE, 26.03.2017).

Several pupils and teachers mentioned that learning Arabic allowed them to read and understand the Qur'an and made a link between teaching Arabic and teaching religious values:

*'I think Arabic is very important language because most of them are Muslim, and our religion, if you know Arabic, you will know more about your religion'* (Arabic teacher, NE, 26.03.2017).

*'We need to teach the children (...) Arabic manners, how Islam presented the good manners for them* (Arabic teacher 2, L, 3.12.2016).

While the connection between religion and Arabic was made in all student focus groups and by several Arabic teachers, this point was not mentioned by any of the headteachers as a motivating factor for teaching Arabic. All headteachers expressed strong visions for their schools and their role within communities: *'My vision as a headteacher of the school is not limited to the hours that the students come and learn the language. It's a vision that goes beyond these premises'* (Headteacher, L, 3.12.2016). Schools were conceptualised as spaces for value and identity construction, and Arabic language education was seen as a vehicle in the service of this process and was routinely discussed in connection with wider cultural, community and societal issues congruent with integration into UK society:

*'Our vision for the [NAME] school is to make sure that our children get the right support in terms of their linguistic needs, but we go beyond that, we are*

*trying to support them to become good citizens of the United Kingdom, taking into account the current challenges that the community faces.*' (Headteacher, NWE, 11.02.2017)

### ***'Fundamental British Values' in the School Curricula and Communities***

Further to understanding schools' educational practices for Arabic language education this study aimed to explore whether and how these were connected to debates around 'Fundamental British Values', and how students and teachers related to and enacted FBV. In this context it was also important to analyse how students and teachers conceptualised their ethnic, national and social identity, as well as their school's role in and contribution to the wider community.

The duty and desire to promote what the schools themselves referred to as 'values' was strongly embedded in schools' visions of themselves. Discursively, values were used to affiliate with positive and negative school identities. While participants did not mention the phrase 'Fundamental British Values' specifically, all teachers and headteachers made explicit reference to values in phrases such as 'British values', 'Islamic values', 'human values' and 'universal values'. Among the values defined as Fundamental British Values (democracy; rule of law; individual liberty; respect and tolerance), those mentioned explicitly in the data were tolerance and respect (for others and for public institutions), while rule of law was mentioned implicitly. In addition, one headteacher spoke of discipline and one Arabic teacher spoke of teaching 'Islamic manners' (see quotation above). Love and mercy were mentioned in one interview in the context of tolerance and respect.

Tolerance and respect were mentioned in the context of students' and teachers' diverse ethnic backgrounds in the school, and the community more widely. *'It does not matter where you come from. What type of skin you have got or what's your background. We all have to respect each other'* (Arabic language teacher 1, NWE, 11.02.2017). The fact that schools recruit students and staff from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds (Shia / Sunni) was in itself presented as an enactment of these values, as well as a basis and vehicle for their learning:

*'We are very I would say very close to inclusive as we can get basically. Because we have kids from all sorts of background. (...) Even within the different sort of nationalities, within their different sort of tribal, citizens whatever you know. So, there are differences there we respect and tolerate and learn about each other's differences as well. (...). Plus, what you said about British values, I don't know what that is but in terms of tolerance of other cultures, we try to invite that as well.'* (Headteacher, NE, 26.03.2017)

Values were also linked to individual behaviour within the family, as well as in society more generally:

*Interviewer: 'What would you say it is that you are promoting?'*

*Headteacher: 'Tolerance, respect, valuing other people. If a child says something that is unacceptable and we think that he heard it either on the telly (...) or from family we try to explain that's not accurate and that's not a reflection of your culture or your religion (...) We cannot be the parents. We only have four hours. Within these four hours, what we give the child is a*

*different approach and they can make that judgment themselves. (...) We try to say look, we are one nation, human beings, with different religion, different approach to life but we do value each other and we have to (...) support each other. (...)*

*We ... teach them ... about tolerance, about supporting the other, about looking after your family, and mercy, love, care you know, a lot of Islamic values. They are the same, they are international values' (Headteacher, NWE, 11.02.2017).*

Respect was also mentioned by students as something they considered a value they learnt in the school: *'When you respect people, they respect you. So, if you act kindly, like I said, other people act kindly to you'* (Student 2, NWE, 11.02.2017).

References to the rule of law were implicit when interviewees commented on the need to follow British 'rules' within the context of foreignness and immigration:

*'We always you know teach our children, anybody, from any part of the world if you are living in this country, you need to follow the rules of this country. (...) We all have to follow the rules of the land. (...) I know this land has freedom and everything so the country is providing everything for people and we have to know how to use it. Use it, don't abuse it.'* (Arabic Teacher 1, NWE, 11.2.2017).

This positioning of students in the school as immigrants who must to be taught to follow British law was interesting, since none of the three schools in the sample stated

that they had many first generation immigrant children amongst their intake. Some schools also offered other services to the community, such as providing a support network for new arrivals; thus, some comments in the data concerning values and integration may have been referring to the wider community beyond the children being taught at the school. The comments may also reveal a self-perception of participants as newcomers irrespective of their length of stay in the UK.

The values democracy and individual liberty were not mentioned explicitly, except for the brief reference to ‘freedom’ in the above extract. Potentially, schools’ objective to facilitate critical thinking through their educational approach represents an implicit aim to further these values. In addition to FBV, discipline was mentioned once in the context of values and rewarding practices within the school:

*‘Our values I think are (...) one, we want our children to be happy and fun basically. (...) Kids who do well, they get stars and they get rewards and stuff like that, certificate, praises, whatever. At the same time, we have discipline messages as well. They know what kind of behaviours and languages or anything like that you know things we do not tolerate (...). So, there is a limit to how much freedom they have basically.’ (Headteacher, NE, 26.03.2017)*

Schools presented themselves as different from other types of schools in their communities that might have a different approach to values. They described their multi-ethnic school communities, which they actively build through diversifying recruitment strategies, as representative of inclusive values (tolerance, respect), and as a way of furthering these values within the wider Arabic speaking community. All

three schools actively positioned themselves in contrast to other non-mainstream schools regarding the values supported by their curriculum and the overall approach to building a school community. *'There are other kind of supplementary schools or Madrassas maybe who- maybe don't pay heed to this kind of wider British values thing and may push different values'* (Religious studies teacher, NWE, 11.02.2017).

One headteacher in particular described conflicts that may arise from such a strongly held stance with regard to inclusive values:

*The children here themselves come from different backgrounds. (...) We try to bring something in common to them all, common set of values. If there is an incident we deal with it quickly. If there is racist expression or a teacher has something, we are quite close, we got very strong relationship with the Prevent people in (CITY) (...).*

*Sometimes because of our approach, we are being seen as not following the message in terms like we are not a Qur'anic school. (...) We are not sheep. (...) So we have to accept that sometimes we are not the flavor of the month for some members of the community because they want their children to be taught in certain way and they take their children to go to the local mosque.'*  
(Headteacher, NWE, 11.02.2017)

It is clear from the data that the three schools place tolerance, respect and diversity at the core of their agenda. The fact that values featured highly in headteacher interviews, often without prompting, shows a keenness to present an inclusive and respect-led orientation to an external audience.

## **Concluding Observations**

Despite the small sample, the outcomes from this study are clear. The stated reasons for - and the perceived impact of - teaching Arabic as well as the ways in which Arabic is taught indicate a relationship between complementary schools and community cohesion and more specifically Fundamental British Values. The findings show that the sample schools have a strong, positive commitment to diverse communities including alignment with FBV. The viewpoints expressed by participants in the study are of course those of individuals in specific community settings. It is also necessary to remember that only three of ten NRCSE registered schools that were approached agreed to participate. Nevertheless, the shared commitment to diversity and inclusivity acts as a common denominator across the three sample schools. And while we were not able to collect data from those schools that refused to take part, the reasons given for their refusal revealed a fear of being misrepresented rather than any substantially different educational aims from those found in the sample schools.

In general terms, the schools actively position themselves as a part of British society. Respondents present their work as being beneficial to children and communities and not a threat to community cohesion. There is a focus on producing ‘good citizens’ for British society, as well as a commitment to ethnic diversity rather than national identities. Schools report engagement with government initiatives and with mainstream schools. Importantly, schools explicitly reject other community stakeholders who do not share the same commitment to British society and its values.

Beyond this general position concerning the nature and purpose of the schools there are particular issues regarding the teaching of Arabic. Arabic language education is part of a commitment to multilingualism. The minority status of Arabic is reflected in schools' discursive positioning of their belonging within the community. The preferences for professional forms of education with the promotion of active methods, critical thinking and the ambition to achieve high standards are plain to see. The careful choice of learning resources with a preference to avoid use of foreign national curricula was noticeable. As expected, there are differences between mainstream foreign language learning (such as the teaching of French in a mainstream secondary school) and this sample of complementary schools, mainly with regard to class sizes, resources, teachers' formal qualifications and the use of mixed age groups. But in many ways the sample classrooms were remarkably similar to what could be expected in any mainstream language classroom.

There are questions and issues which should be pursued further. The sample schools presented learning Arabic as a successful vehicle for promoting a positive personal and community identity as well as universal values.

*The school is like a charity. So it has a big role in community (...) Try to connect people together, even children from different region, from different countries, from different languages they came here to learn the same language, the same values. (Arabic teacher, NE, 26.03.2017)*

It seems that through teaching the heritage language, schools engage in inclusive and distinct community development (see also Li 2006; Creese 2009; Otcu 2010). All

schools practiced inclusivity in several respects: internally, pupils and teachers were recruited from a variety of ethnic, national and religious backgrounds, and the teaching materials were not based on any specific foreign national curriculum. Externally, schools promoted to their own students and to their community an understanding of British society and respect for its values. This ‘layered inclusivity’<sup>2</sup> formed the basis of the consensual approach to diversity that clearly underpinned all three schools’ day-to-day educational practice. But if schools’ commitment to critical thinking and diverse communities is to be taken seriously we need to consider that this may not be regarded as a simplistic determination to assimilate to officially legitimated norms, but instead as determination to support a truly diverse and inclusive society. There may be grounds to consider the characterisation of the Prevent strategy and the declaration of Fundamental British Values as not necessarily arising from a commitment to the same sort of diverse, inclusive communities about which these respondents have spoken and which they show commitment to in their teaching (Kyriacou et al. 2017; Panjwani 2016; Smith 2016). On the basis of the findings presented here we assert that charges of radicalisation are entirely unfounded with regard to our sample of schools, and that instead the schools show a strong commitment to a consensual, democratic approach to diversity, which this team of researchers has set out to explore in more detail (Szczepek Reed et al. in preparation).

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<sup>2</sup> We would like to thank one of our anonymous reviewers for suggesting this term.

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