

EDUCATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Annual Report 2013-14

The overall objective of the Education PDS Committee for 2013-14 was, as in the previous year, improving pupil, school and governance performance. To this end the Education PDS Committee had, at each of the five meetings, a report on Ofsted inspections and where necessary the steps being taken by schools to respond to matters highlighted in the inspections. The Education PDS Committee commissioned a number of reports to assist its work in this field, including an updated risk analysis based on a wide range of data on each school. The School Governance Working Group was reconvened and its conclusions for improving the work of Local Authority Governors are to be considered shortly by the Education PDS Committee.

The Education PDS Committee also considered, with members of the Public Protection and Safety and Renewal and Recreation PDS Committees, a report on those young people 'not in education, training or employment' (NEET). The Committee Members were impressed by the wide range of targeted opportunities that are being provided for this group and the substantial reduction in young people in the Borough with no purposeful employment. The Education PDS Committee also received a report on the progress of young people looked after by the Local Authority, although due to the small number of Looked After pupils in Year 11 no meaningful conclusions could be made.

The Education PDS Committee's second objective was to encourage schools to become academies and for there to be an expansion of pupil places across the Borough to meet rising pupil numbers over the next few years. Significant progress has been made with supporting schools to move to academy status, and by the end of the academic year the majority of schools in the Borough will be academies. A number of primary schools have had expansion plans approved and four 'free schools' have been approved by the Secretary of State for Education. Positive discussions with the Catholic Archbishop of Southwark (Rt. Rev Peter Smith) took place at Bromley Civic Centre, and it is hoped that a Catholic Secondary School can be established in time for the 2016-17 academic year.

As schools convert to academies, the Local Authority is considering its future role as an education authority. Although it will cease to have operational control for the Borough's schools, it will still have more than 250 statutory responsibilities including pupil place planning, child safeguarding and school improvement. In July 2013, the Full Council, having received a report on the future role of the Local Authority in education services, agreed the Education PDS Committee's landmark '*Education Covenant*' – the first in the UK. The Education Covenant sets out what the local community has a right to expect from everybody involved in education and what the community may also contribute.

One of the key changes which this new role brings is a radical re-examination of the traditional service provided by the Education, Care and Health Services Department. Should the Education Service continue to be provided by the Local Authority or be undertaken by contract by other providers? To establish whether they can be run at

lower cost whilst at the same time maintaining and improving standards of service, a market testing review is taking place. Before any decisions are taken, the Education PDS Committee has committed to a full public consultation and debate on the findings, and has made clear that better value for taxpayers' money means provision as good or better than already in place, or it will not be considered better value.

Two key areas of current provision have been subject to scrutiny by the Education PDS Committee - the Pupil Referral Service and the Bromley Adult Education College. The Pupil Referral Unit is converting to academy status, and it is hoped will be run by Bromley College of Further and Higher Education from September 2014. The Council's 17 Education Commitments includes support for 'Lifelong Learning' and the key role of adult education, and in the coming months, it too will be market tested.

As a result of a review by the New Technology Working Group which showed that applications for school places were largely paper-based and that only 26% of applications were made online, the Education PDS Committee placed great emphasis on channel shift to computer-based applications and in the current year 96% of Primary admission applications and 94% of Secondary admission applications were made by this route.

The Education PDS Committee has also kept child safeguarding, the Special Educational Needs Pathfinder project, literacy in early years and provision of speech and language therapy under close review. Areas which will be examined in the remainder of the municipal year include children's Special Educational Needs transport and education welfare and truancy.

The Education PDS Committee has expressed its concerns about the Darul Uloom School in Chislehurst which has been judged 'inadequate' by Ofsted. Representations have been made to the Department for Education on the Local Authority's behalf by the Leader of the Council.

This brings to an end the second report of the Education PDS Committee and the current Council. I should like to pay tribute to all the Members of the Education PDS Committee for their dedication and harmonious co-operation. I also thank Councillor Neil Reddin for his support as Vice-Chairman and Chairman of the Education Budget Sub-Committee, and Councillor Sarah Phillips for chairing the School Places Working Group. The Education PDS Committee also places on record the work of Dr Tessa Moore, Assistant Director: Education, who retired in October, her successor Jane Bailey, Interim Assistant Director: Education, Terry Parkin the Executive Director: Education, Care and Health Services, and all his staff. Finally none of our work would have been possible without the cheerful and efficient hard work of our committee clerk, Kerry Nicholls.

Cllr Nicholas Bennett JP
Chairman, Education Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee