

EDUCATION PDS COMMITTEE Annual Report 2014-5

1. Overall Objectives

During 2014/15, the overall objective of the Education PDS Committee remained, as in previous years;

Improving pupil, school and governance performance.

To this end the Committee considered, at each of its 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 Committee appointed an *Improving Schools Panel*, under Councillor Mary Cooke, to meet if the Assistant Director: Education felt a reference was required - to date, it had not been necessary to call a meeting.

The Committee commissioned reports on *Looked After Children, Truancy and Missing Children* and *Home Education*. The latter report would be considered at our March meeting and was therefore outside the scope of this report as was the update on those young people '*not in education, training or employment*' (NEETS).

The Committee received a report providing an update on progress in implementing the recommendations of the *School Governance Working Group* which included proposals on recruitment, selection and training process for Local Authority Governors, the development of best practice and work to promote the benefits of Local Authority Governors to academy schools.

An interview panel had met twice, as a result of these recommendations, to interview potential LA governors.

2. Progress towards all schools becoming academies

Our second major objective was:

To encourage all Bromley schools to become academies.

The Committee had established a *Progress to Academy Status Member Panel* under the chairmanship of Councillor Keith Onslow, to meet if schools were identified as not making progress towards academy status. There are now only nineteen primary schools, the four special schools and one secondary school still under Local Authority control.

3. Extending provision and diversity of choice

The continued rise in pupil numbers required a meeting of the *School Places Working Group* under the Chairmanship of Councillor Judi Ellis. For the 2014/15 academic year, applicants for reception class places exceed previous forecasts and it was necessary to supplement the agreed changes by 225 places to ensure that every on-time applicant received a valid offer. The total number of places originally available for 2014/15 had been 4023. This has subsequently increased to 4204 places by the addition of eight bulge classes, with 76% of on-time applicants securing their first preference of school in Bromley, which is unchanged from the previous year.

Increased demand for primary places was expected to continue in the long term, with the Greater London Authority forecast projecting a rise of the total number of places in the Borough to 4041 by 2018, and remaining at that level to 2031. This was due to a higher level of birth rate than expected, as well as migration to the Borough and increased occupancy levels of existing homes. In response to this, it was recommended that a margin of 5% be agreed above the Greater London Authority projection for primary place planning to provide for local variations in need and to meet parental preferences. To support the expected increase in demand for pupil places, the overall strategy was to meet forecast growth through a combination of existing surplus capacity, permanent expansion of existing provision, new schools and bulge classes. Work was also being undertaken around secondary place planning to ensure that there are sufficient secondary places across the Borough as the increasing number of pupils at Bromley primary schools reaches 11.

Permanent sites for two free schools (Harris Beckenham and Harris Shortlands) had been approved in the current year. The relocation of La Fontaine free school, currently at the former Education Development Centre remains to be decided.

Progress on the establishment of a new Catholic Secondary School had been slow but it remains one of the Council's objectives to create a new school.

4. Commissioning of services

As noted in our previous annual report, as the Council moves to a position where it no longer has operational control of schools, it will still have 256 or so statutory responsibilities for education, which has led to an examination of the way the education department is organised.

The Committee supported proposals to market test a bundle of education services. These included:

- Strategic management functions;
- The residual functions of the Behaviour Service;
- The Special Educational Needs Service (including the Specialist Support & Disability Service);

5. Education Budget

The Committee's work had been greatly assisted by Councillor Neil Reddin's chairmanship of the *Education Budget Sub-committee* which has undertaken an in-depth examination of the savings required to meet the Council's balanced budget for 2015-6. The most controversial decision was the end of the grant to Bromley Youth Music Trust. This had been achieved. The reduced and final grant for the coming year will be from underspends in the Council budget with the expenditure no longer falling on the Education budget. Another area reviewed, in a short, one-off working group meeting under my chairmanship, was the future of the Children and Families Centres. It was agreed to maintain the current four centres, as the cost of claw back from the Department for Education would outweigh any savings. The Children's Centres were, however, required to find savings of 10% in coming year and a further 10% the following year.

6. Adult Education

The Committee was presented with a report at its January 2015 meeting on the future provision of the Adult Education service. The service had a predicted overspend of £264k for 2014/15 as a result in reduced grant levels from the Skills Funding Agency, which led to the development of two options to bring the budget back on target. Option One proposed a radical restructure and reduction of the Adult Education service under which the Local Authority would cease delivery of all provision funded under the Adult Skills grant at the end of the 2014/15 academic year and Option Two proposed the withdrawal of the Local Authority from all involvement in the delivery of adult education, with the Skills Funding Agency responsible for reallocating grants to an alternate provider under both options.

With the agreement of the Committee, the report was withdrawn as Members were concerned at the lack of consultation with the Bromley Adult Education College Governing Body and staff and students on the proposals. The Committee was also concerned about major changes to the Adult Education service whilst the market testing process was taking place, as well as the future delivery of adult education provision in Orpington and the northern part of the Borough. The market testing process had now been completed and a further report would be considered at the March meeting. No change will not be an option.

7. SEN Transport

The Committee supported a recommendation that a trial scheme whereby pupils at two Special schools be picked up from a street 'muster' point rather from their home address. Apart from the financial saving, it was expected that such a scheme would give suitable older pupils the opportunity to prepare for adult life by becoming more independent.

8. Looked After Children

The Committee considered a report outlining the education outcomes for Bromley children in care for the 2013/14 academic year. The number of Bromley children in care had fluctuated over the year, showing a steady increase across all age ranges, but most significantly affecting the Bromley Virtual School across Early Years and Key Stage 1. The inclusion of the Year 12 and Year 13 cohorts with over 60 additional young people had brought the total number of pupils in the Bromley Virtual School to over 230. The academic progress of all Bromley children in care was closely monitored by the Local Authority; however the reporting cohort for education outcomes for Bromley children in care was limited to those who had been looked after continuously for a period of one year between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014.

9. Truancy and missing children

The Committee considered a report outlining the legal framework and the Local Authority's processes regarding truancy and children missing education. Truancy figures for Bromley compared favourably to a number of our statistical neighbours and surrounding boroughs. Illness continued to be the main reason for absence and Bromley Education Welfare Service had requested schools be more challenging when looking at illness.

Children missing education was defined as all children of compulsory school age who were not on a school roll, nor being educated otherwise, and who had been out of any educational provision for a substantial period of time. When undertaking inspection of local authorities, Ofsted has broadened this definition to include those young people who are attending alternative provision, been permanently excluded, in receipt of home tuition due to medical needs, receiving elective home education or are looked after by the Local Authority. In Bromley there were currently 74 children and young people accessing alternative provision, 40 permanently excluded, 59 receiving home tuition, 111 receiving elective home education, and 197 looked after children. A report on Home Education would be considered at our March 2015 meeting.

Families and children who could not be traced were placed on a national database which was used by other local authorities to confirm if children reported missing had been identified within their authority.

There had recently been an increase in both secondary and primary schools requesting the Local Authority to issue Education Fixed Penalty Notices in response to unauthorised leave, which were charged at £60 per parent per pupil missing education.

Anonymised details of all pupils who had 'disappeared' and the steps taken to ascertain their whereabouts was given in the report. An updated report giving

anonymised details of those who were reported as having left the country was included in the evidence to the joint Care Services and Education PDS Committee meeting on child safeguarding on 25th February 2015.

10. Joint meeting with Care Services PDS on Child Save Guarding

A joint meeting of the Care Services and Education PDS Committees exploring child safeguarding was held on 25th February 2015, following a similar meeting held on May 7th 2013.

Evidence was heard from the Independent Chairman of the Bromley Safeguarding Children Board, the Metropolitan Police, the Bromley Clinical Commissioning Group and representatives of the Education, Care and Health Services Department. The Leader of the Council, Councillor Stephen Carr, as Lead Member on Child Safeguarding, joined the representatives for a Panel question session. Amongst the issues explored was the grooming of young people for terrorism both at home and aboard. The Committee was able to give a qualified assurance to the Chief Executive on Safeguarding, the qualification was that the Committee was concerned that some partners did not send a representative to every meeting of the Bromley Safeguarding Children Board and that these representatives did not always have sufficient seniority.

11. Thanks

This brings to an end the third report of the Committee. I should like to pay tribute to all the members of the 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 my colleagues who agreed to chair various panels and working groups. The Committee also places on record, the work of Jane Bailey, Assistant Director: Education, Terry Parkin, Executive Director of Education, Care and Health Services and all his staff. Finally none of our work would have been possible without Kerry Nicholls our ever cheerful and efficient committee clerk.

Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP
Chairman Education PDS Committee