



Cabinet – appendix: Brent Education Commission Review

Monday 16 June 2014 at 7.00 pm
Boardroom - Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley,
HA9 0FJ

Membership:

Lead Member Councillors:

Portfolio

Butt (Chair)
Pavey (Vice-Chair)
Denselow
Hirani
Mashari
McLennan
R Moher
Perrin

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Lead Member for Employment and Skills
Lead Member for Regeneration and Housing
Lead Member for Children and Young People
Lead Member for Environment

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The press and public are welcome to attend this meeting

Agenda

Introductions, if appropriate.

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The Council commissioned a review of education in Brent to see how progress and performance might be accelerated for children and young people in schools. This review was chaired by the interim chief executive of Brent Council working with three other independent members. The report of the Commission is attached for consideration by the Cabinet.

Ward Affected:
All Wards

Lead Member: Councillor Moher
Contact Officer: Christine Gilbert, Interim Chief Executive
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Date of the next meeting: Monday 21 July 2014



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Education in Brent

Ambitious for all: a shared responsibility

Brent Education Commission

March 2014

Final Draft

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Foreword

One of the most famous landmarks in Brent is Wembley Stadium, an awesome, modern monument to the country's most popular sport. Disappointed England football fans have even been heard to remark that if our national team were as good as our national stadium, we would have an awful lot more to celebrate. Sadly, Brent's responsibilities only extend to providing football with a home. It's not responsible for the players. The same isn't true of education.

Education in Brent is as outwardly impressive as its stadium. It outclasses the provision available in the rest of the country on many measures. It manages to achieve this despite enormous social challenges: wide income disparities, poor living conditions, pockets of dreadful deprivation, late arrival in the education system and a rapidly increasing school-age population. Indeed, although Brent is classed as an outer London borough and is funded accordingly, the demands made on it are similar to those faced by many inner London authorities.

You may well ask, if education in Brent is in such robust health, why the need for an education commission? The short answer is that though Brent is good it could be better. Although its performance nationally is strong, compared to London it's only average. Boroughs with greater problems are doing better. Its overall achievements mask worrying disparities and if these aren't addressed, Brent will fall further behind.

Brent boasts impressive results in early years education and at key stage 1. Its GCSE results are close to the London average and its key stage 5 results are higher than the London average. But these achievements obscure less flattering statistics.

Given the excellent education the youngest children in Brent receive, it would be reasonable to expect progress would be equally impressive by the time they reach key stage 2.

Unfortunately, it is not. Brent lags the London average at key stage 2 and its position relative to the other 32 boroughs is getting worse: it slipped from 15th place in 2012 to 22nd last year. This trend cannot be allowed to continue.

A few years ago, Brent outperformed most London authorities at GCSE, now it barely manages to be average. Although overall its youngsters perform creditably, disproportionately few of them get the highest grades. And even though a third of the authority's secondary schools are classed as 'Outstanding' by Ofsted – compared to less than a quarter nationally – it has the highest proportion of 'Inadequate' schools in London.

Unfortunately, these failings are magnified by a lack of shared vision and the absence of a strong, energetic relationship between the local authority and its schools. All want the best

for the children in their care but too often good intentions are unsupported by good practice. And where good practice it exists it is too rarely shared.

In short, education in Brent is muddling through; scrambling reactively to avoid immediate problems when it should be planning ahead, pulling together and setting its sights on becoming one of the highest performing boroughs in London so that children and young people thrive in all Brent Schools.

There is no reason why it shouldn't get there. Even though the education landscape has changed greatly in a short space of time, local authorities continue to have an important strategic role to play. It is to Brent's credit that the Council realised it had a problem and set up a commission to investigate. It is not short of ambition. Nor, as our recommendations make clear, is it short of options. It now needs the determination to bring about change.

The best schools in Brent are the equal of the best anywhere. The commission was enormously impressed with the dedication shown by many teachers, despite often challenging circumstances, to provide an excellent education for their children. We would like to thank them for their suggestions and for giving so freely of their time.

If Brent succeeds in harnessing their resolve and their imagination, if it encourages them to work more closely and effectively together, if it is "ambitious for all", then there is no reason why Brent cannot be not only one of the best education authorities in the country but also one of the best providers in one of the highest performing cities in the world. Children and young people in Brent Schools should expect as much and deserve no less.

Professor Christine Gilbert

Chair of the Education Commission

Professor Toby Greany, Professor of Leadership and Innovation at the Institute of Education, London

Robert Hill, Visiting Senior research fellow at King's College, London

Gerard Kelly, freelance writer and journalist

The Education Commission

Context and aims

Brent is an ambitious Council. Although it is proud of the many successes in education in Brent over the last few years, it feels more needs to be done to ensure all schools provide a good education for all pupils. Given the magnitude of the changes happening in the school sector, Brent Council set up the Brent Education Commission to review education in the borough and to make recommendations for development so that improvement could be accelerated. The overall aim of the Commission has been to build on existing effective practice, to identify areas of concern and to enhance the extent to which schools and academies learn from each other, so that every school succeeds, every child thrives and performance in Brent schools is accelerated.

Members of the Commission

Christine Gilbert, Brent's Interim Chief Executive, is the Chair of the Education Commission.

Robert Hill is a visiting senior research fellow at King's College, London. He is an independent researcher and adviser on education and schools issues.

Professor Toby Greany is Professor of Leadership and Innovation at the Institute of Education. He was previously at the National College for Teaching and Leadership.

Gerard Kelly is a freelance writer and journalist. Until recently he was the Editor of the Times Educational Supplement.

Evidence gathered by the Commission

The sources of evidence considered by the Commission have included:

- an independent review of school performance data
- contextual and performance data supplied by the local authority
- discussions with a range of stakeholders, including head teachers, school governors, the Brent Schools Partnership (BSP), and trade union representatives
- visits to a cross-section of schools by members of the Commission
- individual discussions with the Leader of the Council and the Lead Member for Education on the Council
- briefings provided by Council officers, especially in relation to school improvement and place planning
- submissions from individual stakeholders
- data and reports from the DfE, Ofsted and national agencies
- examples of good practice from other Councils.

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Key findings

Performance of Brent schools: Educationally, Brent outperforms local authorities nationally but not those in London, where it is close to the average. Many other London boroughs are performing better, including some with higher levels of deprivation. Moreover, its ordinariness masks significant challenges: the inability to improve on the apparently excellent results at EYFS and key stage 1, for instance, the relatively low percentages of children attaining higher grades, the disproportionate number of schools rated ‘inadequate’ and the wide variation in the quality of educational provision. The average for Brent masks unacceptable disparities between the best and worst performing schools.

Some schools, notwithstanding the social disadvantages of many of their pupils, do excellent work. They show how well pupils can achieve, even overcoming disadvantages such as late arrival in the education system or poor living conditions. But the practices of the best must be adopted by the rest if Brent is not to fall further behind its London neighbours. Indeed, if the worst performing schools were at or close to the London average, Brent could be one of the highest performing boroughs in London.

Education strategy and leadership: Key local stakeholders agree on the need for a new approach that responds to the changing education landscape. The local authority itself, in setting up the Commission, has recognised the need for change if progress in Brent schools is to be accelerated. The local authority should state unequivocally that its main role should be strategic: becoming the guardian or champion of the needs and interests of Brent children and their parents. This means it has a strong role in providing assurance that all schools, including academies and free schools, are performing well and improving and that effective action is being taken where this is not the case. This quality assurance role should support school improvement.

The local authority has a role in facilitating and supporting school-to-school improvement and ensuring that no school is left behind but, beyond that, the local authority should, over time, be stepping back from the delivery of improvement services.

There needs to be a clearer and stronger shared overall strategy shaping the direction of education in Brent, endorsed by all key education partners. Such a strategy needs to be challenging and ambitious to drive forward performance across all schools in Brent.

Key areas for development: There were five recurring issues from the evidence presented to the Commission which require further development. These concern: planning school

places; knowing Brent schools; promoting and supporting school-to-school networks; providing challenge to address weaknesses; and improving school governance. The main messages were that:

- Providing sufficient school places of good quality is a responsibility of the entire educational community. The quality of education must become the main priority for determining decisions about school expansion.
- The local authority does not know all schools sufficiently well to be able to pinpoint the main weaknesses or the areas of best practice. There is an urgent need to establish better data systems so that clear information is provided to schools, the community and the secretary of state.
- The local authority should work together with all education partners to build the capacity and effectiveness of the Brent Schools Partnership.
- All schools in Brent should be encouraged to be part of school-to-school partnerships that are focused on developing and sharing effective practice in teaching and learning and providing focused mutual support for improvement and raising standards.
- The current arrangements for developing the roles of governing bodies do not have sufficient focus on their key roles, in particular their accountability for the performance of pupils in their school and their roles in supporting and challenging the school's leadership.

Principal Recommendations

The Commission set out a number of recommendations designed to bring about improvement. These are discussed in Sections 3 & 4 that follow. For ease of reference these recommendations are also set out below:

Education Strategy and Leadership

1. The local authority should set out a clear statement about its own role, within the changing education landscape, for discussion with the education community. This should be rooted in ambitious aspirations for and expectations of Brent Children and Brent Schools. The statement should underline the moral imperative for all schools in the borough to have shared ownership for the education of all children in every Brent school.
2. The role of the governing body as an important force for support, challenge and improvement should be recognised and the local authority should invest in the development of governors.

3. A strategic group involving the principal education partners should be established, chaired by the new Director of Children and Young People, to drive forward the education strategy in conjunction with key education partners.
4. This new strategic group should develop and agree the vision for education in the borough. This must not be a protracted process. The resulting vision should lead to a strategy which contains a few key goals that are owned by all key participants and result in well-defined, agreed actions.
5. The local authority, in collaboration with schools themselves, should set out challenging but achievable excellence targets demonstrating high expectations for children in the borough. The Commission believes that these excellence targets should include an expectation that all schools in the authority will be good or better within three years and that outcomes at key stages 2 and 4 will be at least 2% above the London average within three years.
6. The Leader of the Council and the Lead Member for Education should establish a forum for meeting on a termly basis with a group of representative head teachers to ensure the education strategy is being taken forward and to reinforce the importance of education as part of the political agenda of the council.

Planning School Places

7. The local authority should produce an agreed strategy for place planning. The quality of education and the potential for school improvement in any expansions should be the foremost priority when determining the programme of expansion.
8. The Council should appoint one head of service to be responsible for drawing up and implementing all aspects of the place planning strategy across the two departments that currently have responsibilities for place planning.
9. The new Director of Children and Young People should urgently review the authority's arrangements for projecting the future school population and the geographical spread across the Borough to ensure they are rigorous and fit for purpose.
10. The local authority should be proactive in encouraging the best schools in Brent and free school providers to set up new schools in areas where extra places are needed. The Council should encourage open competition in order to establish new schools.
11. The place planning strategy, and future updates about its progress, should be kept under review and progress should be discussed with school leaders, chairs of governors, academies, and faith and community groups, on a regular basis.

Knowing Brent Schools

12. To support school improvement, the local authority should put in place a system to provide each school with a picture of how they perform against both local and national indicators. These would be a range of quantitative and qualitative indicators. The process for designing this system, in particular the evidence used, should be co-produced with schools, both head teachers and governors.
13. To support their role as champions and guardians of the needs and interest of children, the local authority should produce an annual report that should be easily

accessible to parents and the local community. This should set out achievements and progress in education in Brent, as well as highlighting challenges and areas for development. It should be sent to the governing bodies of all schools in Brent as well as academy trusts, Ofsted and the Secretary of State.

14. The local authority should urgently investigate, with schools, the introduction of a data tracking system that can be used to risk assess the progress and performance of schools within the school year as well as at the end of the year. This system should be co-produced with head teachers and school governors.
15. Through the new strategic group, an agreed programme of peer reviews should be established between schools, drawing on best practice in models elsewhere. The peer review model should influence Brent's current Rapid Improvement Groups (RIG) process. Regular development opportunities should be provided for teachers to observe good practice in other schools.
16. The local authority and schools should devise a programme of activities to showcase excellence and interesting practice in education in Brent
17. The local authority, in conjunction with the Brent Schools Partnership and teaching schools, should publish case studies of good practice in local schools, before the end of 2014. This should give a clear picture of what good and outstanding schools look like in practice.
18. An annual schools awards scheme should be established in 2014/15 to recognise and celebrate practice in Brent schools.

Promoting and supporting school - to - school networks

19. As part of its changing role, the local authority should work together with all education partners to build the capacity and effectiveness of the Brent School Partnership. This should include its ability to commission teaching schools and other excellent providers in Brent.
20. The Brent School Partnership and the local authority should be encouraged to learn lessons for school partnerships from other authorities and from families of schools, such as chains, federations and trusts.
21. Mechanisms should be put in place across all schools in the borough for school-to-school challenge and support in order to improve practice and build shared ownership for the education of all children in Brent schools. The local authority should play a key role, encouraging schools to consider the benefits of cluster and other partnership arrangements and to break down any barriers that may prevent such collaboration.
22. The local authority should provide funding to the Brent School Partnership to appoint a full time Director, or coordinator, for two years with a formal review built into the end of year 1.
23. The new strategic group (see recommendation 2) should work with the Brent School Partnership steering group to agree a set of priorities and a costed programme for action in the school year, 2014-2015, for all schools. The local education authority should provide financial support to incentivise collaboration and work in clusters or networks. It should also agree a process for how the Brent School Partnership and

teaching schools might be commissioned to provide and broker support for schools causing concern, including use of the Rapid Improvement Group process.

Providing challenge to address weaknesses

24. There should be more forensic examination of the schools that are assessed as being at risk or requiring improvement through investigation of teaching and its impact on learning in the classroom.
25. There is a need for more effective support for schools that are struggling, drawing on the wider capacity and expertise of other Brent schools.
26. The local authority should be bolder in deploying executive heads, NLEs, LLEs, teaching schools, federations and academy sponsors to ensure that schools judged inadequate or requiring improvement have the necessary leadership and governance expertise to drive improvement.
27. The local authority needs to identify underperformance at an early stage and to be prepared to be more robust in how it addresses concerns, including issues relating to underperformance in leadership.

Improving school governance

28. All schools in Brent should review their governance arrangements and consider reconstituting their governing body in line with the new regulations.
29. The local authority should complete and implement its review for nominating local authority governors with a view to speeding up the process, drawing in a wider pool of talent and making the skills and capacity of nominees the primary criteria for nomination.
30. The local authority should produce guidance for schools on conducting audits of governor skills.
31. The local authority should give greater priority within the governor development programme to understanding and using data and to supporting the role of governors in school improvement.
32. The local authority should broker collaborations between pairs of governing bodies to scrutinise each other's performance data and to engender confidence and skill in providing constructive challenge.
33. The local authority should look at opportunities for governors to observe how each other works, perhaps on a cluster or network basis, and through developing contacts in other boroughs to observe and learn about good practice.
34. The best chairs of governors should be encouraged to seek accreditation as National Leaders of Governance and be deployed to support other chairs.

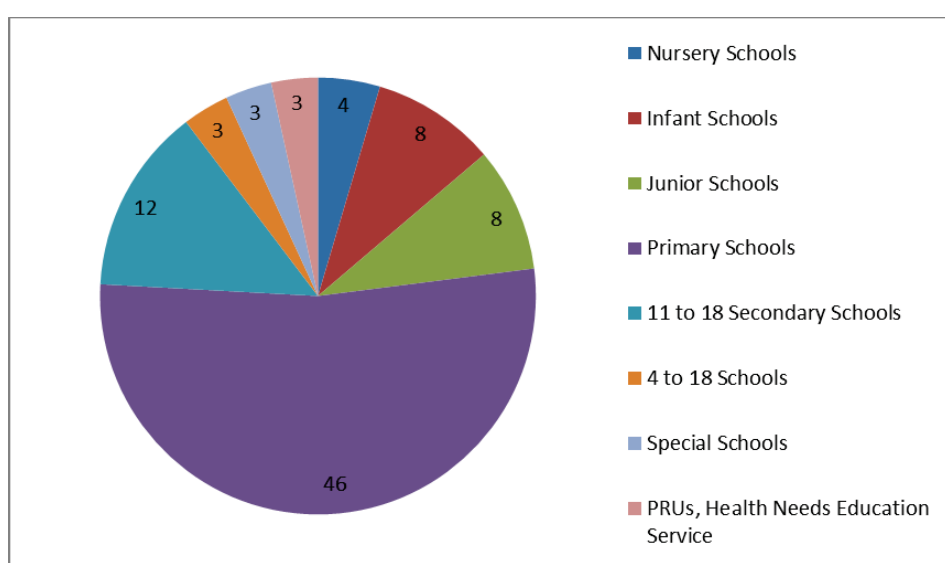
Section 1 Education in Brent

This chapter sets the background for the rest of the report, summarising the number and status of schools in the borough and providing an outline of the demographics of the current pupil population. It highlights the increasing demand for school places as a result of the growing pupil population which will continue to grow rapidly until at least 2020, the significant growth in the Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) population, and a relatively high level of pupil mobility. Deprivation levels in Brent are average for London as a whole, but significantly higher than national levels.

Schools in Brent

At present there are 87 schools in the borough.

Nursery Schools	4
Infant Schools	8
Junior Schools	8
Primary Schools	46
11 to 18 Secondary schools	12
4 to 18 Schools	3
Special Schools	3
PRUs, Health Needs Education Service	3



Two of the primary schools, eight of the secondary schools and the three all-through schools are academies. Four of the academies were established before 2010 and eight were academy convertors after 2010, with one primary recently becoming a sponsored academy (ARK Franklin). There are 20 voluntary aided (Church of England, Roman Catholic, Jewish and Muslim) schools and three voluntary aided secondary schools (Roman Catholic and Jewish). There are also three primary and two secondary foundation schools. The three Pupil Referral Units are about to be amalgamated into one school.

The picture continues to change. One primary (Gladstone Park) and one secondary school (Copland) are scheduled to become sponsored academies and Woodfield Special School is converting in April 2014. There are hard federations in place between infant and junior schools, for example at Lyon Park Infant and Junior Schools and between Oakington Manor Primary and Furness Primary Schools; there is a soft federation between Byron Court Primary and Oliver Goldsmith Primary Schools.

There are also plans for amalgamation of infant and junior schools, for example at Kilburn Park Foundation Junior School and Carlton Vale Infants School. The borough looks at amalgamation of infant and junior schools as opportunities arise.

There are three free school secondary schools approved to open in Brent in September 2014, though two have no identified site and only one has a signed funding agreement.

The profile of the local population

Brent is designated as one of the 19 Outer London boroughs although it has some features¹ that are similar to the 13² Inner London boroughs. Brent is the most densely populated of the outer London boroughs and continues to increase in density. The 2011 Census showed that the population had increased by 18% in the previous ten years, accompanied by a decrease in owner-occupied and an increase in rental accommodation. The 0-4 age band increased by 38% in that period, requiring expansion of primary school places and having ongoing consequences for school provision in the borough.

Over a quarter of households were deemed overcrowded in 2011, with 18% having insufficient bedroom space.

Pupil population

The Brent pupil population has been increasing steadily over the last few years, as illustrated in Figure 1.1. The total Brent school population has increased by 3,151 pupils in less than four years.

Figure 1.1 Children on roll in Brent schools

	Primary	Secondary	6 TH Form	Total
January 2010	22,069	14,197	3,665	39,931
January 2011	22,845	14,409	3,746	41,000
January 2012	23,660	14,649	3,558	42,939
January 2013	24,428	14,616	3,495	42,539
October 2013	25,087	14,570	3,425	43,082
Increase since Jan 2010	+3,018	+373	-240	+3,151
% increase	+13.7%	+2.6%	-6.5%	+7.9%

The rise in the school population is due to many factors including: migration into the borough, increasing birth and fertility rates and new housing stock. The largest increase can be seen in the primary sector (up by 13.7% between January 2010 and October 2013). The 6.5% drop in the 6th form pupil numbers is partly due to one secondary school, Copland

¹ Brent 2011 Census Profile

<https://intelligence.brent.gov.uk/BrentDocuments/Brent%202011%20Census%20Profile.pdf>

² The City of London is excluded from this analysis since it contains no maintained primary schools.

Community School, adjusting its 6th form capacity. Nevertheless, Brent is a net exporter of pupils to other education authorities in both the primary and secondary sectors.

For the 2013/14 academic year Brent received 3792 applications for Reception places from Brent residents by the closing date. 2946 of these pupils were offered their first school of preference, which represents 78% of the total. In the secondary sector 2996 applications were received from Brent residents for September 2013 by the closing date. 2015 of them received an offer from their first preference school. This represents 67% of the applications.

Projections from the Greater London Authority (GLA) suggest that the demand for school places will continue to increase in all sectors, as illustrated in Figure 1.2:

Figure 1.2 Projected demand for school places in Brent

	Primary	Secondary	6 TH Form	Total
	Based on Oct 2013 count	Based on Jan 2013 count	Based on Jan 2013 count	
January 2016	28,024	15,168	3,541	46,733
January 2018	29,560	16,186	3,409	49,155
January 2020	30,425	17,389	3,600	51,414
Increase 2013-2020 ³	5,338	2,773	105	8,216
% increase 2013-2020	21.3%	19.0%	3.0%	19.0%

Ethnicity

The ethnic make-up of the borough's population has changed over the ten years from 2001, according to the 2011 national census. There has been a 9% reduction in the White ethnic group and a corresponding increase in the Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) population from 55% to 64%. This is the second highest BAME proportion (after Newham) in the country. The balance in the composition of the White ethnic group has included a reduction of White British and White Irish but a significant increase of White Europeans, particularly those of Romanian and Polish backgrounds.

The January 2013 school census shows that the main ethnicities of Brent school pupils are:

Asian Indian	14.1%
Black Somali	9.1%
Black Caribbean	8.7%
White British	7.7%
Asian Pakistani	6.2%

³ Primary increase compared with October 2013 figure, secondary and 6th form increases with January 2013 figures

Asian Other Asian	6.1%
White East European	5.8%

A complete list of the ethnic make-up of schools over the past five years is included in Appendix 1. The ethnic composition in Brent-maintained schools has not changed significantly over the last five years, if the usual categories are used. The only ethnic groups that increased their proportions by more than 1% were Somali and White East Europeans. The latter group rose by 2.3% over the period. The proportions of Black Caribbean and White British have fallen steadily in each of the last five years. However, these broad categories mask rapid change and local trends such as a 100-fold increase in the numbers of Romanian pupils and rapid increases in the numbers of pupils from Goa and Brazil who have Portuguese citizenship.

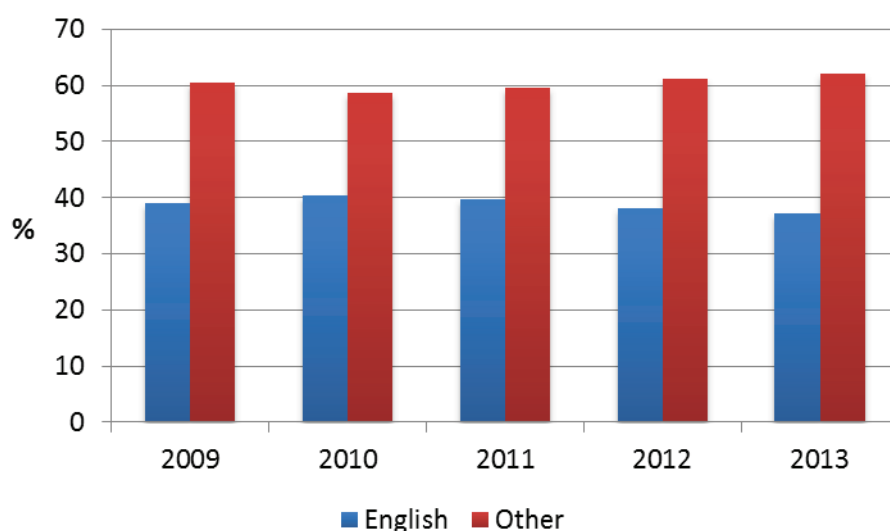
The proportion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) pupils is too small to be included in the table. However, there is in Brent (as elsewhere) significant under-reporting of GRT ethnicity owing to an unwillingness to self-ascribe by these groups. 2012 data suggest that GRT pupils represent about 0.3% of the school population whereas an estimate based on the intelligence of schools and Council officers suggests a figure double that.

Language

The proportion of children with English as an additional language is about four times the national average and higher than the average in Inner and Outer London. About three-fifths of the school population in Brent speak a home language other than English. Figure 1.3 shows that the proportion has been gradually rising over the past five years.

Figure 1.3 First language of pupils in Brent schools with English 2009 -2013

First Language	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
English	39.0%	40.5%	39.6%	38.2%	37.1%
Other	60.4%	58.7%	59.6%	61.1%	62.1%



Special Educational Needs

In 2013, 8,959 pupils in Brent schools had special educational needs (SEN), including 1,367 with a statement. Figure 1.4 shows that the proportion of pupils with statements and at School Action Plus has remained fairly constant over the past five years; there has been a decrease in the number and proportion at School Action.

Figure 1.4 Percentage of Pupils with SEN in Brent schools 2009 - 2013

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Statement	2.9%	3.0%	3.2%	3.0%	3.0%
School Action Plus	5.7%	6.2%	6.2%	6.5%	6.2%
School Action	14.4%	13.5%	12.8%	12.1%	10.4%
Total	23.0%	22.7%	22.1%	21.7%	19.6%

The figures in the table include pupils attending schools in the borough who are not Brent residents. In general, pupils in Brent schools but living outside the borough are less likely to be at School Action Plus and School Action than pupils who live in Brent; however, the proportion with a Statement of special educational needs is similar.

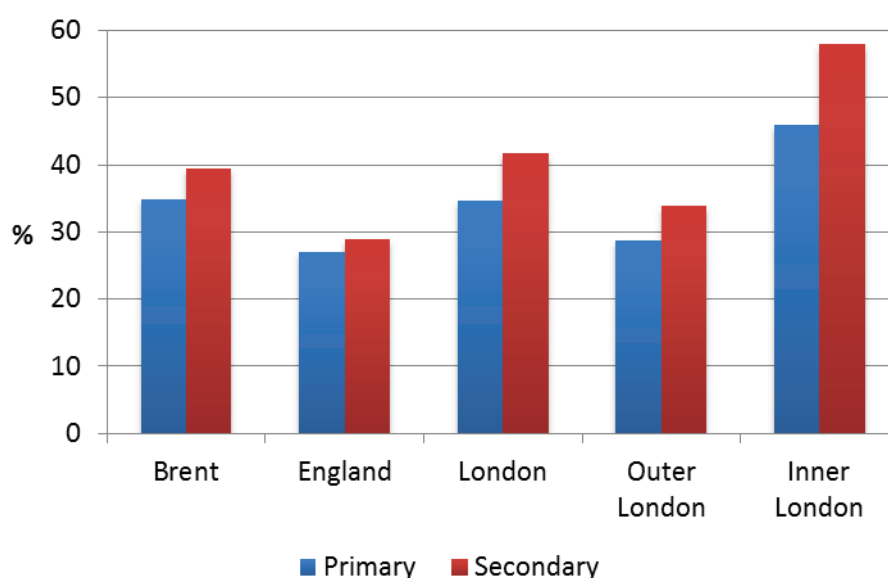
Disadvantage

One measure of disadvantage in schools is the pupil premium indicator, which attracts additional government funding for each school. Figure 1.5 shows that deprivation in Brent is

about average for London as a whole, above the Outer London but significantly less than the average for Inner London boroughs. However, some Brent head teachers also report significant levels of disadvantage among groups of pupils who are not eligible for the pupil premium as their parents/carers are not eligible for, or do not claim, benefits.

Figure 1.5 Percentages of primary and secondary school pupils eligible for Pupil Premium (2013-14)

	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)
Brent	34.9	39.4
England	27.0	29.0
London	34.7	41.7
Outer London	28.7	33.8
Inner London	45.9	58.0



Pupil mobility

Pupil mobility in Brent is above average. The local authority's data show that, in the summer term 2013, 6,554 pupils in Brent Primary and Infant schools had not joined their schools at the beginning of the Reception year. This represents 30% of the pupils on the rolls of those schools. This varies significantly between schools so that some schools experience extremely high mobility. At secondary level, 2,212 students (15.1% of the rolls) had not started at the beginning of Year 7. Analysis of the data over the past five years shows a similar picture but with a downward trend in the figures, suggesting a small increase in stability of the school population.

The data from the local authority also show changes in the cohort of students in secondary schools compared with those in local primary schools. In 2013, out of 3,132 pupils transferring at the end of year 6 to secondary schools from Brent primary schools, 2,173 (69%) went on to Brent schools with the remainder transferring to schools elsewhere. In year 7, there were 635 students in Brent secondary schools who had not attended year 6 in a primary school in the borough. In terms of attainment levels, 315 of the pupils leaving the borough's schools at the end of year 6 were high attaining; by contrast there were 202 high attaining students who joined year 7 in Brent secondary schools.

Section 2 Setting the school performance context

This chapter provides an overview of performance in Brent schools, compared with other London boroughs and national averages. It draws mainly on the outcomes of Ofsted inspections and performance data from the local authority. The analysis takes account of headline 2012-13 outcomes, including attainment data at each key stage, equity indicators (related to socio-economic, gender and ethnicity factors), value added indicators, and measures of progress.

Any such analysis is based on the most recent published data, which are to some extent historical and may not always give a complete picture of the current situation. Nevertheless, the Commission identified some clear messages, which are explored in more detail in this chapter:

- 1. There is considerable variation in educational performance across Brent schools, both at primary and secondary level.*
- 2. Whilst a relatively high proportion of schools have been judged as outstanding by Ofsted, only 12% have been judged outstanding for teaching and learning and too many other schools are 'inadequate' or 'require improvement'. Indeed, Brent has the highest proportion of 'inadequate' schools of any London borough.*
- 3. Brent's performance is above the national average. However, other London boroughs are performing better than Brent which risks falling behind.*
- 4. Children in Brent appear to make a good start in the Early Years but the high levels are not maintained at later key stages. Given the positive start, better attainment should be expected at key stages 1 and 2.*
- 5. The variation in the standards of performance in different primary schools cannot be attributed only to levels of deprivation. Some schools achieve very good results at key stage 2, despite facing high levels of deprivation.*
- 6. A comparatively low proportion of primary age pupils achieve higher levels of attainment, e.g. level 3 at key stage 1 and level 5 at key stage 2.*
- 7. The fall-off in overall attainment in the primary phase continues at key stage 3 after transfer to secondary school. This is followed by better progress during key stage 4 when Brent schools are compared with the rest of London. There continues, however, to be significant variation between the outcomes from different Brent secondary schools.*
- 8. In the middle of the last decade, Brent secondary schools were performing better at key stage 4 than the London averages, but this position has slipped back over recent years.*
- 9. Performance at key stage 5 is relatively strong.*
- 10. Compared with the performance of disadvantaged pupils elsewhere, Brent pupils from similar backgrounds achieve relatively good results, although recent results indicate a reversal in this pattern at key stage 4. The underachievement of boys when compared*

with girls' attainment becomes apparent at an early age and is not reversed until after key stage 4.

11. *There is a remarkably wide range in performance between different ethnic groups in the borough. Overall, Indian pupils perform well at all key stages but the good start made by many Black groups up to key stage 1 is not maintained by these groups by the end of key stage 4. Those pupils categorised as 'White Other' (who are mainly eastern European) also achieve below the borough averages. While Caribbean and Somali pupils have been targeted by the local authority in terms of closing the achievement gap, there needs to be finer analysis of attainment issues for new and emerging groups given the rapidly changing demography in Brent.*

Ofsted judgements

A summary of the overall judgements from the most recent Ofsted inspection of each Brent school is set out in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 Brent OFSTED Summary (January 2014)

Ofsted Grade By Proportion	Outstanding (1)		Good (2)		Requires improvement (3)		Inadequate (4)	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Nursery	1	25%	1	25%	2	50%	0	0%
Primary	11	19%	36	61%	10	17%	2	3%
Secondary	5	33%	7	47%	0	0%	3	20%
PRU	0	0%	2	67%	1	33%	0	0%
Special	1	25%	3	75%	0	0%	0	0%
ALL	18	21%	49	58%	13	15%	5	6%
London	6711	27%	1396	57%	333	14%	51	2%
Inner London	246	30%	487	59%	85	10%	14	2%
Outer London	317	24%	752	57%	220	17%	21	2%
National	3481	18%	11653	61%	3538	18%	538	3%

As the table shows, there are 67 Brent schools that are good or better, including 18 schools that were found to be 'outstanding'. These figures can be compared with the national

position, as presented in the most recent annual report from Ofsted.⁴ At secondary level, 33% of Brent schools are outstanding and 47% good; this compares with national figures of 23% outstanding and 48% good. A relatively high proportion of secondary schools in the borough have been judged to be outstanding. However, of the eighteen schools judged outstanding, only 10 schools (12%) were judged as outstanding for teaching and learning. This explains why Brent has relatively few teaching schools since to apply for designation a school must be outstanding for teaching and learning. Furthermore, the current Ofsted inspection framework no longer allows 'outstanding' overall if that grade has not been achieved for teaching and learning.

At primary level, 19% of Brent schools are outstanding and 61% good, which is similar to the national picture of 17% outstanding and 61% good. The position changes on a regular basis; for example between December 2013 and January 2014 two primary schools improved their Ofsted rating with a judgement of 'good'. Although beyond the timeframe of Figure 2.1, in January and February 2014, both a primary school and a secondary academy were judged inadequate by Ofsted inspectors.

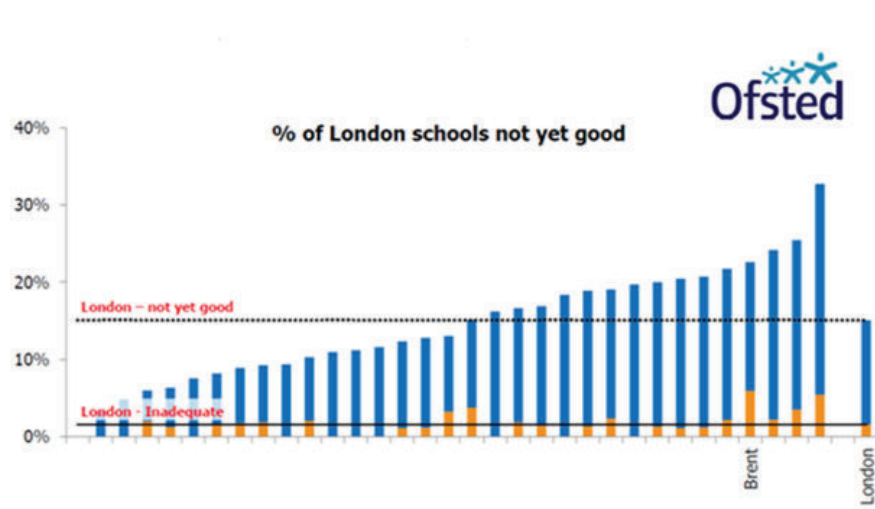
However, and especially worrying, Ofsted has also found that 13 schools in Brent 'require improvement' and five schools are providing an 'inadequate' standard of education. The five schools include three secondary and two primary schools; the three secondary schools were all judged as inadequate. Whilst the percentage of primary schools in these categories is similar to the rest of the country⁵, the three secondary schools that are inadequate represent a much higher percentage than found nationally.

The greatest concern for the Commission is the comparison between the proportion of Brent schools that are inadequate and Ofsted's judgements of schools in other London boroughs. Ofsted data show that fewer than 2% of London schools are inadequate. Out of all the London boroughs, Brent has the highest proportion judged to be inadequate (Figure 2.2). At the same time, the proportion of Brent primary and secondary pupils in either 'good' or 'outstanding' schools is marginally above the outer London average. When considered against the inner London average, the proportion of children in good or outstanding schools is significantly lower (8%).

⁴ Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, Annual Report 2012-2013

⁵ As reference 4.

Figure 2.2 Ofsted data showing proportion of schools in each London borough that are judged to be inadequate or 'not yet good'



Brent's School Improvement Service has a system of support in place to address these weaknesses, discussed later in this report. In the last term, following Ofsted inspections and HMI monitoring visits, three schools have moved up a grade though others have not yet made sufficient progress. The number of schools that are inadequate or require improvement is clearly of major concern and continues to require urgent, focussed action by the relevant schools and by the local authority.

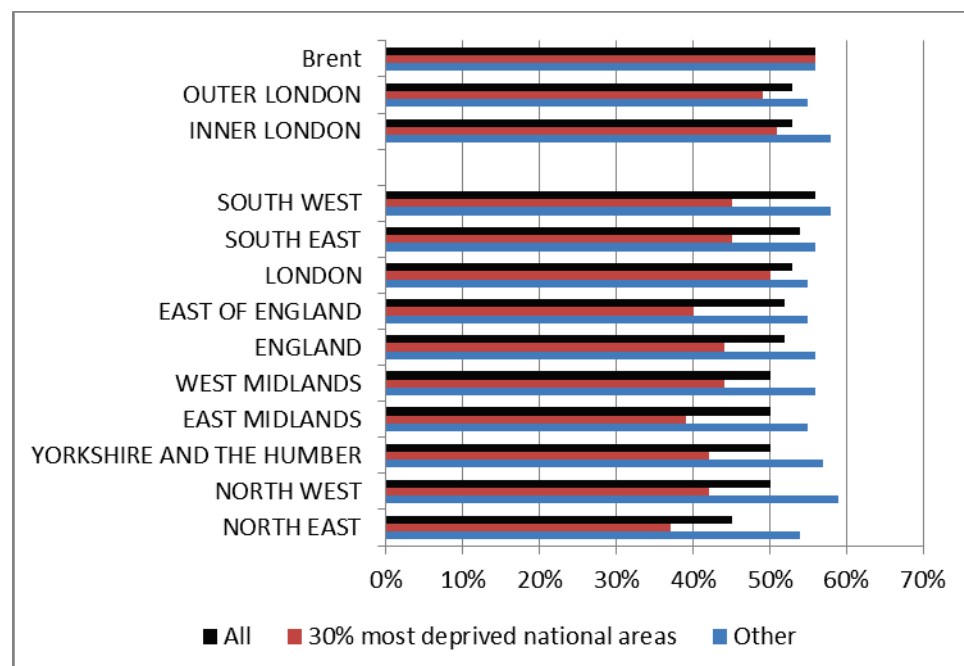
School performance data

The second main source of performance data considered by the Commission consists of the attainment data of Brent schools, starting at the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and following progress through each of the education key stages. Comparisons are made with the results nationally and in other London boroughs. After this, some of the main messages from an analysis of the data in terms of disadvantage, gender and ethnicity are presented.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

A new EYFS assessment was piloted in 2012 and used in 2013. This rates children in relation to each of the 17 early learning goals. Outcomes for children in Brent at the end of the EYFS are high relative both to Inner and Outer London and all other regions of England apart from the South West (Figure 2.3). This chart also compares attainment when levels of deprivation are taken into account. Children in the most deprived areas of Brent do as well as other children in the borough. This is discussed later in the chapter.

Figure 2.3: Percentage of children achieving at least the expected level in the areas of learning by national deprivation status of child residency⁶ for each local authority



More detailed scrutiny of the percentages of children attaining the expected levels in each of the seven EYFS areas of learning shows that Brent also surpasses the averages for Inner London, Outer London, London as a whole, and England in each of these seven areas of learning.⁷

Another way of comparing results is through the average points score (APS) of children. In terms of APS in the Early Years, Brent again performs well by comparison with other London authorities. The Brent score (33.9) is higher than all Inner London boroughs⁸ and is only surpassed by five Outer London boroughs.

In summary, children in Brent make a very good start, according to their teacher-assessed performance at the end of the EYFS. In the new assessment system, Brent outperforms Inner and Outer London and England as a whole.

⁶The percentage of children in each local authority who reside in the 30% most disadvantaged Super Output areas in England based on the 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation. The number of children in the deprived areas varies considerably between local authorities.

⁷ A note of caution is needed in comparing Brent with national, regional and sub-regional data, because a like-for-like comparison would be with other individual authorities rather than with regional groups of authorities.

⁸ City of London has been discounted because of its very small school population

Key stage 1

The phonics screening test for six year olds, applied nationally for the first time in 2013, also shows Brent to be performing well above national and London averages. In Brent, 73% of children reached the required level compared with 72% in London and 69% nationally.

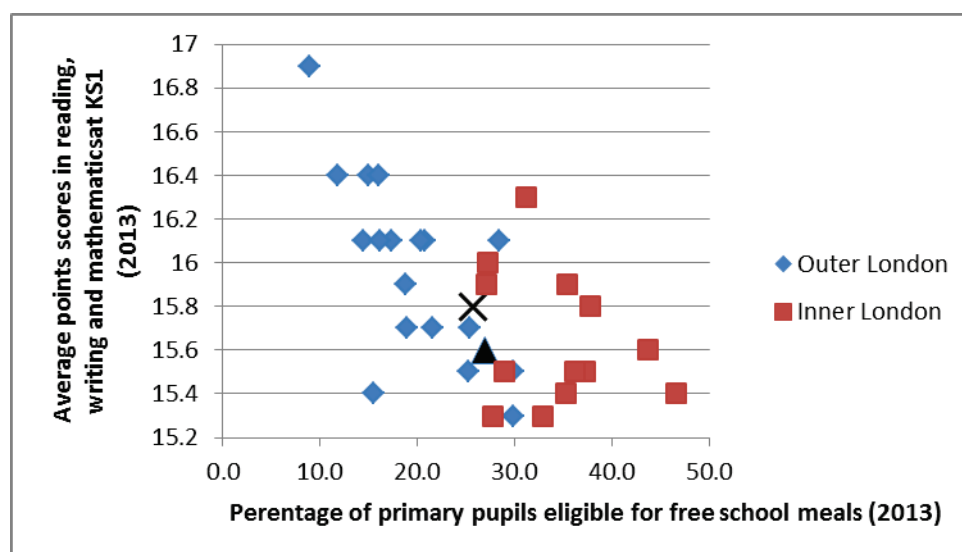
The performance of seven year-old children in Brent schools at the end of key stage 1 improved in 2013 on the results from previous years. Overall 89% of pupils attained at least level 2 in reading, 86% in writing and 91% in mathematics. Figure 2.4 shows the upward trend.

Figure 2.4 Percentage of Brent pupils attaining at least level 2 at key stage 1

	2011	2012	2013
Reading	85%	85%	89%
Writing	81%	83%	86%
Mathematics	89%	89%	91%

Despite this progress, Brent's performance at key stage 1 in 2013 is just below the average APS for the combined reading, writing and mathematics teacher assessments when compared with other London boroughs (Figure 2.5). The chart also compares the level of disadvantage in each borough and its relationship to key stage 1 outcomes. Eight boroughs with similar or greater proportions of free school meals score less well than Brent and five score more highly.

Figure 2.5 APS in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 against levels of disadvantage (free school meals) in the Inner and Outer London boroughs. Δ represents Brent and X is the overall average for London



Although the above figures suggest reasonable progress, the percentage of children who achieve the higher level 3 at key stage 1 is lower in Brent than in London as a whole or nationally (Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6 Percentage of Brent pupils attaining level 3 or above at key stage 1 in 2013

	Reading	Writing	Speaking and listening	Mathematics	Science
England	29	15	23	23	22
London	28	15	24	23	22
Brent	24	14	21	21	18

Overall, standards in key stage 1 are not entirely consistent with the strong start in the Early Years, though the results may be influenced by the number of children who enter Brent schools during key stage 1 (see mobility data in the previous chapter).

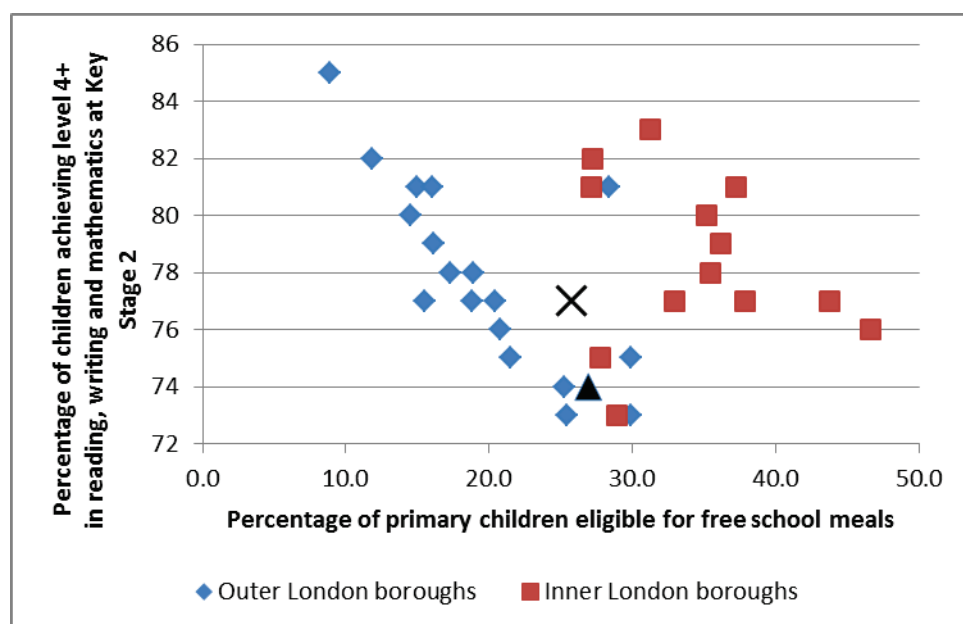
Key stage 2

The percentage of Brent children attaining level 4 or better in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2013 was 77%. This performance is better than in the rest of the country (75%) but just below the London average of 78.9%. Given the good start in the Early Years, higher results would have been expected.

There was no change in Brent from the borough's 2012 results, whereas the London average improved from 77.5% in 2012. In terms of raw results, when compared with the 31 other London boroughs, Brent slipped from 15th equal in 2012 to 22nd equal in 2013 due to the relative improvement of other boroughs.

Figure 2.7 shows how key stage 2 achievement in Brent compares with other boroughs having similar or higher levels of economic deprivation.

Figure 2.7 Primary school attainment in London boroughs in relation to social disadvantage, 2013.
 [London average shown as ×; Brent average as Δ.]



There is considerable variation between schools at key stage 2: four schools performed below the Government's floor target but in eight schools over 90% of pupils achieved level 4 or above.

The 2013 results also show that disadvantage does not need to be an insuperable barrier to school success. In three Brent schools with more than 40% of pupils eligible for free school meals, over 80% of pupils achieved level 4, well above both the national and the London averages. These are:

- The Kilburn Park School Foundation
- John Keble CofE Primary School
- Harlesden Primary School

As a further example, even though both Wykeham Primary and St Mary's CofE Schools had 38% or more of its pupils eligible for free school meals, over 90% of pupils achieved level 4.

A positive finding is that the proportion of children who started from below level 2 (in reading, for example) but nevertheless attained level 4 is significantly higher than the national average. Key stage 2 value added is positive in the majority of schools.

The percentage of pupils who reached the higher level 5 was also considered. In Brent, 22% of pupils achieved the combined level 5, which is a lower proportion than the London average of 24.5% but above the national average of 21%. Nearly two thirds of boroughs, 20 out of 32, achieved a higher proportion of combined level 5 than Brent. This is consistent with the finding at the end of key stage 1 that the proportion of pupils reaching higher levels is comparatively low.

Schools that managed to significantly improve on the borough average include:

Northwest London Jewish Day School at 47%

St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School at 43%

Wykeham Primary School at 40%

Key stage 3

Key stage 3 teacher assessments cover English, mathematics and science. In 2013 the proportion of students achieving level 5 in Brent schools was lower than the national, Inner and London averages (Figure 2.8). After three years in secondary education, level 5 was not reached by 18% of students in English, by 20% in mathematics and by 21% in science.

Figure 2.8 Teacher assessments at key stage 3 – students attaining level 5

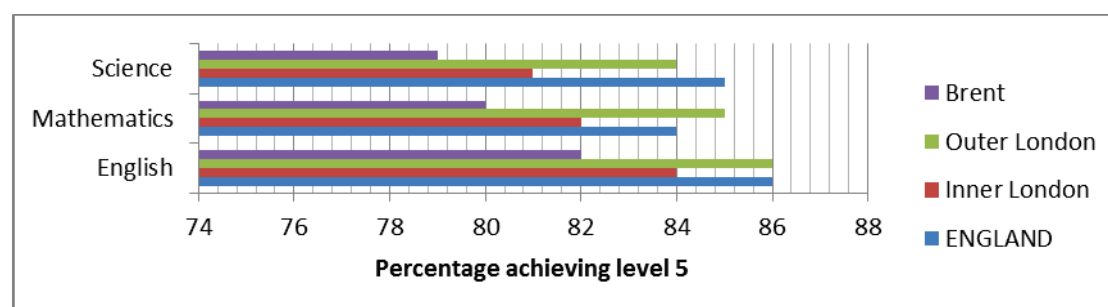
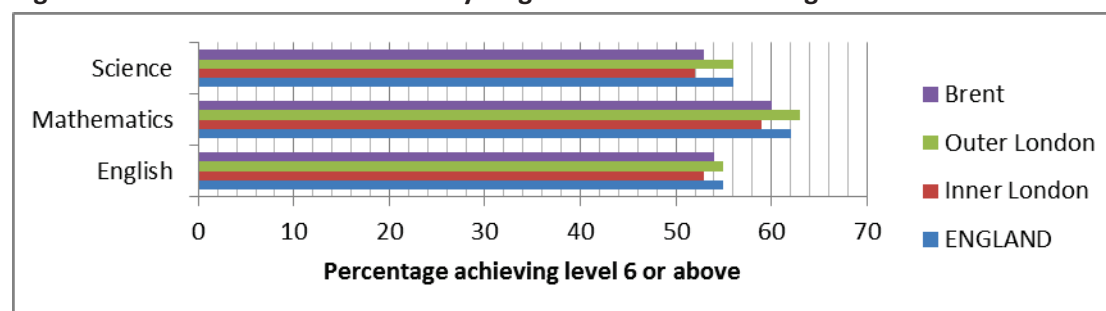


Figure 2.9 shows that Brent is also a little below national and London averages for students reaching level 6 at key stage 3, though slightly higher than the Inner London averages.

Figure 2.9 Teacher assessments at key stage 3 – students attaining level 6



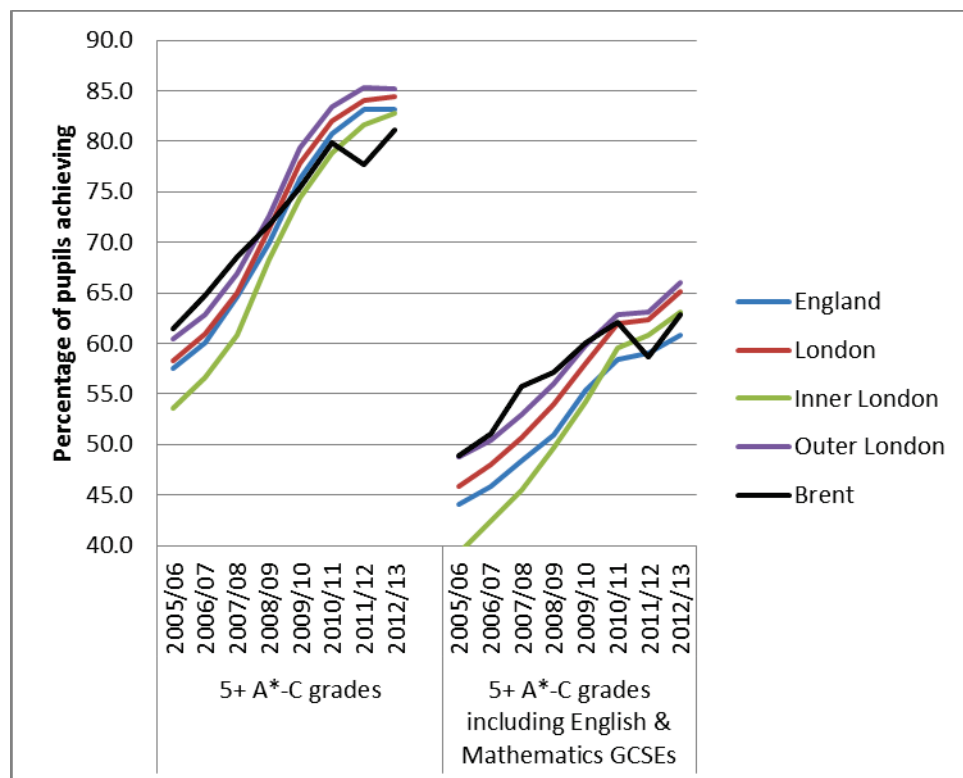
Key stage 4

In the middle of the last decade, Brent secondary maintained schools were performing significantly better at key stage 4 than the averages for London and England. As illustrated in Figure 2.10, Brent schools were overtaken by Inner and Outer London schools in 2011, suffered a substantial dip in 2012, and recovered some ground in 2013⁹. Subject data suggest that Brent schools were affected more than schools in the majority of local authorities by lower than expected English results in 2012, but they recovered well in 2013.

⁹

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/250149/SFR40_2013_AT.xls

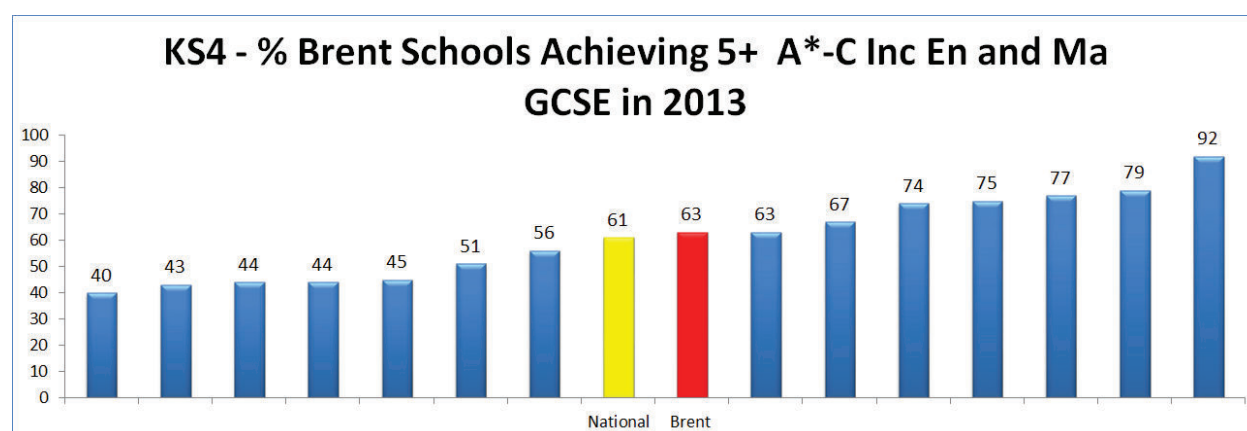
Figure 2.10 Percentage of pupils achieving five A*- C grades in GCSE or equivalents at key stage 4 (2013 revised data)



Results for 2013 show that 62.9% of Brent pupils achieved five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics. This is better than the national average and close to the London average.

There is a wide range of outcomes between Brent schools: at Wembley Technology College, for example, 92% of students achieved 5+A-C including English and mathematics whereas at Crest Boys' Academy the figure was 40%. This variation can be seen in Figure 2.11, in which the results of each Brent school are shown separately. Two of the lowest five performing schools were academies before 2010. These schools have had longstanding problems and even though two of them were supported by a large academy chain, this has not yet brought about the necessary improvement.

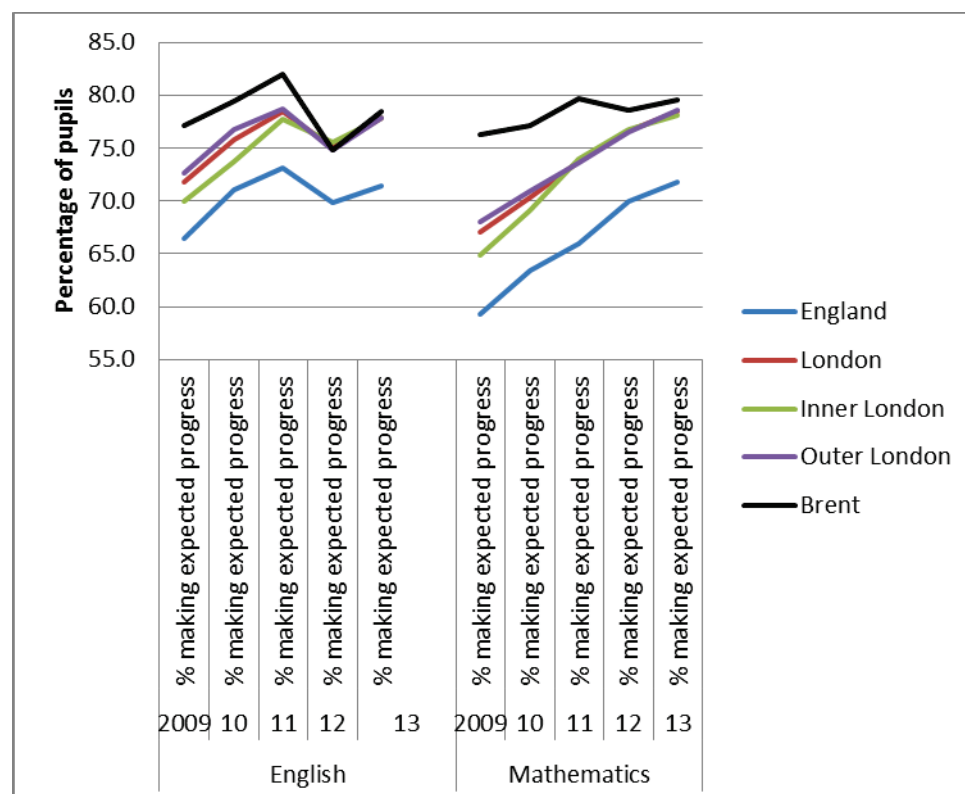
Figure 2.11 Brent schools achieving 5+ A*-C including English and mathematics at key stage 4 in 2013 (each bar shows the results of one Brent school)



Progress in English and mathematics from key stage 2 to key stage 4 is good in Brent secondary schools, exceeding the averages for Inner and Outer London schools, as shown in Figure 2.12. Given the above results at key stage 3, the data suggest that the main gains, particularly in English, are made at key stage 4.

Most Brent schools perform better than the national averages in terms of progress between key stage 2 and key stage 4 in English and mathematics. 64% of schools are above the average for three levels of progress in English and 71% in mathematics. There is, however, wide variation between schools in terms of the amount of progress made; the gap between the school making the greatest progress and the one making the least progress is 37 percentage points in English and 36 percentage points in mathematics.

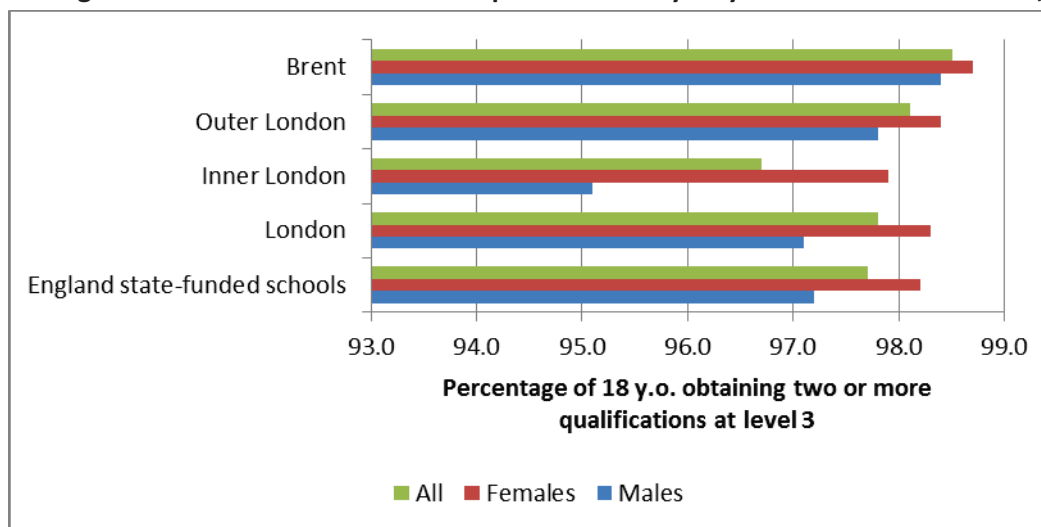
Figure 2.12 Percentage of pupils making expected progress in English and mathematics between key stage 2 and key stage 4 (2008/09 to 2012/13) (2013 revised data)



Key stage 5

Results for key stage 5 show that achievement of Level 3 qualifications in schools in Brent is higher than the averages for London (Figure 2.13). On this measure, the earlier gap in the achievement of girls and boys, discussed below, has almost closed by key stage 5 in Brent. This contrasts positively with the averages for London and England, especially Inner London.

Figure 2.13 Achievement of level 3 qualifications by 18 year olds in Brent schools, 2013



In terms of the average points scores of students achieving level 3 qualifications, Brent ranks 13th of the 32 London boroughs and 11th of the 19 Outer London boroughs. On this measure, female students outperform males, similar to the average for London.

A substantial advanced level academic or vocational qualification is defined as a qualification that is at least the size of an A level (150 guided learning hours per year), such as a BTEC Subsidiary Diploma (Level 3). A comparative indicator of attainment at this level is the proportion of students achieving two such qualifications. On this measure Brent, is slightly better than the Outer London average and outperforms the average for England.

The proportion of Brent young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) was 2.4% at the end of 2012. This is lower than the London average of 4.7% and below all of Brent's statistical neighbours, with the exception of Harrow.

A report by London Councils shows that in 2011-12 the number of 18-20 year olds studying in Higher Education was 6,777. The participation rate of Brent residents in the relevant age range was 61%, which was the ninth highest rate of the 32 London boroughs.¹⁰

In terms of access to top ('Russell Group') universities, two As and a B at GCE A-level are a normal minimum requirement on the most sought after degree courses. The achievement of students in Brent provision compares well with the London averages, particularly at the highest levels of performance. A significant proportion of these students may not live within the borough but attend high-achieving faith schools in Brent. Male students achieve better than females at the higher achievement levels, the gender differentials being greater than in London as a whole (Figure 2.14).

¹⁰ The Higher Education Journey of Young London Residents, London Councils, Autumn 2013

Figure 2.14 Higher levels of student achievement in Brent providers*

	Percentage of students achieving grades AAB or better at A level, of which at least two are in facilitating subjects			Percentage of students achieving grades AAB or better at A level, all of which are in facilitating subjects		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
London	14.5	11.8	13.0	10.0	6.8	8.2
Inner London	10.1	8.8	9.3	6.5	4.8	5.5
Outer London	16.0	13.1	14.5	11.2	7.7	9.3
Brent*	16.8	11.4	14.0	13.0	6.1	9.4

* Numbers of students aged 18 in Brent (2013): 723 males; 717 females; 1,440 total.

Equality indicators

Brent's key stage performance data were analysed to identify messages in relation to deprivation, gender, ethnicity and home language. Additional charts illustrating these findings are included in the appendices to this report.

Deprivation In the Early Years, children in the most deprived areas of Brent do as well as other children in the borough (Figure 2.3 above-). This makes Brent the only local authority in London where there is no overall deprivation¹¹ attainment gap by the end of the EYFS. On the phonics screening test at age 6, children eligible for free school meals did considerably better in Brent schools than nationally and in most other London boroughs¹², only surpassed by two other boroughs.

At key stage 1, a higher proportion of Brent children eligible for free school meals achieved at least level 2 in reading than in any other borough. The gap between these readers and other children, not eligible for free school meals, achieving level 2 is also the smallest¹³. However, whereas this finding is encouraging, the difference for those reaching level 3 or higher is much greater than for level 2, as in many other authorities.

The relatively positive outcomes for children eligible for free school meals continue at key stage 2. In 2013, the gap between the attainment of these pupils and the others in Brent was the fifth smallest in London. There was a 10% difference in those

¹¹ Note: Official data relate in different tables to deprivation, disadvantage, free school meals, pupil premium and children in care (or looked after children).

¹² Appendix 2

¹³ Appendix 2

attaining level 4 or above in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 2, compared with the London average of 14.4%. However, children not classed as disadvantaged achieved relatively less well in Brent than in most other London boroughs. For these children, results are in the bottom quartile of authorities. In Brent 81% of them attained combined level 4 or better results, compared with the London average of 84.5%.

As outlined earlier, disadvantage does not need to be an insuperable barrier to school success. Some primary schools with a high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals manage to achieve results at key stage 2 that are above the Brent, London and national averages.

At key stage 4, in terms of 5+ A*- C passes at the end of key stage 4, Brent performs as well as or better than other outer London boroughs with similar levels of disadvantage, based on free school meals entitlement. There are, nevertheless, three Inner London boroughs (Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster) with higher levels of disadvantage that achieve better results at the end of key stage 4¹⁴ and Brent's relatively positive position has slipped back over recent years.

Gender At the end of the Early Years, Brent has one of the lowest EYFS gender gaps in the country. On the average points score, the difference in attainment between girls and boys is 1.8 points, compared with 2.3 for London and 2.5 for England.

At key stage 1, the outcomes for boys and girls in Brent follow the national pattern in which girls outperform boys in literacy skills, particularly in writing.¹⁵ The differential between girls and boys is 9% in writing, 5% in reading and 3% in mathematics. The performance in Brent is similar to London and national averages. The lower attainment of boys at this early stage is of concern because of the resulting disadvantage that they face when they enter key stage 2.

By the end of key stage 2, equal proportions of girls and boys in Brent attain level 4 or better in mathematics, but there is a gap in reading where 5% more girls than boys attain level 4+ and in writing where there is an 8% advantage by girls.¹⁶ Only 18% of boys reach or surpass level 5 compared with 26% of girls, the same as the national averages for boys and girls.

¹⁴ Appendix 2

¹⁵ Appendix 3

¹⁶ Appendix 3

By key stage 3, the gap between boys and girls appears to have become entrenched¹⁷. The attainment gap between girls and boys in English is about 15% in Brent, perpetuating the differential found at key stage 1. There is also a large difference of 10.3% between the achievement of boys and girls at GCSE. This gap is greater than in Inner or Outer London, although boys in Brent achieve better than the average for England (57.3% compared with 55.4%)¹⁸. The overall picture is that boys' underachievement at key stage 1 onward is not redressed by the end of key stage 4.

However, a more positive message emerges at key stage 5. As mentioned earlier, the gender gap has almost closed in terms of level 3 qualifications at key stage 5, unlike the national and London averages, especially the Inner London results (Figure 2.13).

Ethnicity and language The good performance of Brent 6 year olds on the phonics screening test relates both to children whose first language is English and to those for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL)¹⁹. There is relatively little difference between the results for different ethnic groups, though Asian pupils do particularly well²⁰.

At key stage 1 Asian, Black and Mixed groups all achieve above the national average for level 2 or above. White groups achieve significantly below other groups at key stage 1 in Brent and below such groups elsewhere. Children from low-income White British families are an under-achieving group nationally, but the profile of Brent White children includes a majority of children who speak English as an additional language (EAL).²¹

The data from key stage 2 show only a very weak link between outcomes and English as an additional language²². The attainment of these pupils is a little lower than expected when compared with other London boroughs. However, the headline findings may disguise factors such as the type of home language, length of time since joining the school, and home or cultural influences on school performance related to different heritages.

By the end of key stage 4, the GCSE results in 2013 indicate that the groups achieving well above the borough average are those categorised as Indian, Other Asian, and

¹⁷ Appendix 3

¹⁸ Appendix 3

¹⁹ Appendix 4

²⁰ Appendix 4

²¹ Appendix 4

²² Appendix 4

‘Any Other Mixed’ groups²³. Those achieving below the borough average include Black Caribbean, ‘Any Other White’, and Black African groups. The spread of attainment of 5+ A*-C including English and mathematics, is from 72.1% of Indian students to 48.3% of Black Caribbean students, compared with the borough average of 62%.

There is also a group of 304 students where no ethnic background was provided, who obtained 78.6% 5+A*-C including English and mathematics. This is worthy of further investigation. It is also of interest to note that although there were only 27 Bangladeshi students, they obtained 77.8%.

Summary of performance data

Educationally, Brent outperforms local authorities nationally but not those in London, where it is close to the average. Many other London boroughs are performing better, including some with higher levels of deprivation. Moreover, its ordinariness masks significant challenges: the inability to improve on the apparently excellent results at EYFS and key stage 1, for instance, the relatively low percentages of children attaining higher grades, the disproportionate number of schools rated ‘inadequate’ and the wide variation in the quality of educational provision. The average for Brent masks unacceptable disparities between the best and worst performing schools.

Some schools, notwithstanding the social disadvantages of many of their pupils, do excellent work. They show how well pupils can achieve, even overcoming disadvantages such as late arrival in the education system or poor living conditions. But the practices of the best must be adopted by the rest if Brent is not to fall further behind its London neighbours. Indeed, if the worst performing schools were at or close to the London average, Brent could be one of the highest performing boroughs in London.

²³ The groups included for comparison purposes are only those where there were at least 50 students

Section 3 Developing education strategy and leadership

The last chapter identified that Brent has a number of strengths, and is certainly not in crisis, but there is a sense that it is losing momentum and at risk of becoming more fragmented as the school system become more autonomous and school-led. Many school leaders and staff are working hard in challenging circumstances, but the gaps between different schools and between different groups of pupils could be addressed more effectively if there was a more coherent and focussed approach.

Underlying much of the evidence presented to the Commission is a strong feeling from all stakeholders that there is a need for shared clarity about the future role of the local authority in a changing education environment. This in turn should lead to agreement by all the principal education partners about an ambitious vision and a strategy for education in the borough.

The development of education strategy and leadership is the subject of this chapter. It is then followed in the next chapter by consideration of some of the issues that have been repeatedly raised during the Commission's work and which should be key elements of the implementation of the borough's strategy.

The main messages in this chapter are that:

- 1. Key local stakeholders agree on the need for a new approach that responds to the changing education landscape. The local authority itself, in setting up the Commission, has recognised the need for change if progress in Brent schools is to be accelerated.*
- 2. The local authority should state unequivocally that its main role should be strategic: becoming the guardian or champion of the needs and interests of Brent children and their parents. This means it has a strong role in providing assurance that all schools, including academies and free schools, are performing well and improving and that effective action is being taken where this is not the case. This quality assurance role should support school improvement.*
- 3. The local authority has a role in facilitating and supporting school-to-school improvement and ensuring that no school is left behind but, beyond that, the local authority should, over time, be stepping back from the delivery of improvement services.*
- 4. There needs to be a clearer and stronger shared overall strategy shaping the direction of education in Brent, endorsed by all key education partners. Such a strategy needs to be challenging and ambitious to drive forward performance across all schools in Brent.*

The role of the local authority

Like all Councils throughout the country, the context for education in Brent is one of a changing role for local authorities and a debate about how they can best contribute to education in their areas. This was one of the factors behind the establishment of the Commission.

Education remains of fundamental importance to local people and therefore to councillors. The Leader of the Council recognises the importance of education, not only to parents but also to regeneration and the life of the local community. He sees its economic importance and its key role in creating a more just and fair society. Both the Leader and the Lead Member for Education see the council as having a vital role in guarding and championing the interests of Brent children, and their parents. They believe their democratic base gives them this potential leverage. They are looking to the Commission to give guidance on the changing responsibilities of the local authority and how it should continue to have a role in raising aspiration and expectations. Some elected members may feel that the prevalence of so many academies in Brent secondary schools has reduced the role of the local authority. Academisation, along with a more general shift to locating school improvement with schools, does indeed change the Council's role: but it is, nevertheless, an important one. Pupils educated in academies and free schools in Brent are still, as the Leader of the Council put it, 'our children'.

Although there is universal consensus that the traditional role of the local authority has changed, there continues to be a lack of clarity about its new role. Local authorities continue to have many important functions in relation to education services. In total, there are still nearly 200 statutory education duties.²⁴ They include, for example:

- making sure that there are enough school places (considered in greater detail in the next chapter)
- ensuring high standards
- supporting vulnerable children. This includes safeguarding and the welfare of children in the area, promoting the education of looked after children, and identifying and assessing children with special educational needs
- coordinating admissions to schools
- providing alternative provision for pupils permanently excluded from school
- arranging school transport and school meals

²⁴ A full list can be found at www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/strategy/a00198443/statutory-duties-of-local-authorities

- nominating governors for community schools.

This list looks much as it would have done 20 years ago but the emphasis is different with local authorities increasingly described as the guardian and champion of the needs and interests of local children and young people. Guarding the needs of children and young people entails ensuring that there are sufficient good school places and quality provision locally. All those we spoke to in the course of the Commission's work saw the local authority as needing to plan school places, to oversee the assessment of pupils with SEN and even to provide additional services for minority needs. Few saw the local authority as their provider of choice for school improvement services.

The Commission believes that Brent schools and the local authority need to build a new relationship that ensures educational sufficiency and quality in Brent.

The other major shift of emphasis is in schools themselves increasingly taking responsibility for whole system improvement. In this school-led system, schools individually and collectively take responsibility for improving outcomes for the children and young people in their schools.

The Commission believes the local authority has an important role to play as the guardian of the needs and interests of children and young people locally. It should build and champion a vision for education and schools that helps to raise aspirations and to develop a more skilled community. As champion, the local authority needs to be able to provide assurance to the local community that all schools are serving their pupils well, that is, they are providing at least a good level of education and are continuing to improve. Where schools are not yet providing well for their pupils, the local authority needs to explain what action is being taken to improve and in what timescale. This quality assurance function is central to the changing role of the local authority and indeed to the development of a school-led system of school improvement.

More recently, Ofsted has introduced an inspection regime based on the duties set out in the Education Act 2006, to promote high standards for all pupils. At the core of these duties is responsibility for the quality assurance of all schools in the area. This should not be confused, as it often is, with responsibility for school improvement activities. This responsibility rests with schools themselves.

Local authorities that know their schools well have a strong quality assurance role that supports school improvement. They know how their schools are progressing, challenging them and, if necessary, intervening in some way to prevent them failing local pupils and parents. If Brent is to scrutinise schools in this way, it is essential that a good quality assurance framework is established.

A strong quality assurance framework should:

- be underpinned by a borough vision setting out aspirations and expectations for the education of all
- be co-produced between schools, including school governors, and the local authority
- use a range of agreed and accessible evidence based on both quantitative and qualitative data
- rest on a relationship between the local authority and schools in Brent of professional respect, confidence and trust
- support school improvement within schools and across the borough.

As part of this quality assurance role, local authorities have a responsibility to ensure that every school – in particular every maintained school – is at least a good school. There has, as mentioned above, been a change of emphasis. In a self-improving system the onus is more than ever on schools themselves to achieve higher standards of education for their pupils. The authority's role is to create a culture of aspiration and ambition and to build a strong partnership with schools in the area so that the needs of children and young people are served well. As part of this process, they should help schools establish robust models for school-to-school challenge and support, and use data and other evidence to check that improvements are happening quickly enough.

The local authority's enabling role was emphasised in a recent Select Committee:

*Local authorities still have a critical role to play in a school-led improvement system, in particular through creating an “enabling environment” within which collaboration can flourish.*²⁵

The local authority is expected to intervene more directly in community schools placed in an Ofsted category or those that have failed to comply with a local authority warning. It is also responsible for working with schools that are below government floor standards. For maintained schools, the local authority continues to have a number of statutory intervention powers. For academies and free schools, intervention is the responsibility of the academy trust and ultimately, the Secretary of State. Nevertheless, as local authorities retain a moral responsibility to all children in their area, regardless of where they are educated, Brent should keep a weather eye on all its schools and should reserve the right to challenge them if progress is poor.

²⁵ House of Commons Education Committee, School Partnerships and Cooperation, HC269 published 6 November 2013

The Education Commission has evaluated how well Brent, as a local authority, has been adapting to this changing landscape. The main finding is that, although key local stakeholders recognise that there is a need for change, the local authority now needs to lead and engage the school community in responding to it quickly and positively. There is increasing recognition that a new framework for school improvement needs to be designed with schools themselves in the forefront of system leadership. The education community in Brent needs to adapt to the new role, build a different set of relationships and establish innovative systems that enable Brent schools to provide the highest standards of education that serve all pupils.

As the local authority role changes, the work of governors becomes ever more important. The governing body has a strong leadership role, enshrined in legislation, to give strategic direction, to act as a critical friend and to ensure accountability. In all schools, but never more so than academies, governors have a very important role to play in ensuring that their schools are well led and that senior leaders are held to account for creating a strong professional community that serves all pupils well. The evidence received during the Commission suggests this key role of the governing body and its linked accountabilities to pupils, parents and communities is not yet widely understood in Brent and needs to be given more attention.

Education has not been a sufficiently high priority for the Council for many years; progress in educational outcomes has been too slow compared with other London boroughs; and there has been a lack of shared responsibility by key education stakeholders for all children in every Brent school. Above all, the local authority should state unequivocally that its main role should be more strategic and focused on that of guardian and champion for the needs and interests of children and young people in the borough. Over time it should step back from the delivery of services, particularly improvement services. Schools, individually and as part of a variety of partnership arrangements, should increasingly be taking over responsibility for providing and brokering services for schools.

The rest of this report considers key areas where change is now a priority.

Overall vision and strategy

The Commission's first consideration was the extent to which the local authority has developed an overall vision and strategy for education in the borough.

The establishment of the Commission in itself reflects a strategic commitment to shaping a more effective approach to education. Although there is an overall Council plan and the Operational Director ensured Brent Children's Partnership has included educational priorities in the Plan for Children and Families in Brent 2012 – 2015, there needs to be an

agreed overall strategy shaping the direction of education in Brent. Such a strategy needs to be challenging and ambitious, and to be widely owned, including by schools themselves. Whilst it is important not to devote vast amounts of time and energy to the production of a glossy document, there is an imperative to produce a clear statement that includes a small number of short- and medium-term priorities towards which everyone connected with Brent schools can work.

The Commission found that there is currently not enough corporate ownership of the existing plans. Consequently there is little buy-in from schools. The priorities do not reflect the rapid pace of change in the landscape of increasingly autonomous schools. Above all, the priorities are not seen as part of an overall vision, shared by all the key stakeholders, setting out where education in Brent should be aiming over the coming years. This affects the lack of shared ownership for pupils in all Brent schools.

Leading members of Brent Council have a clear view of the economic future for the borough and the importance of education to develop a skilled local workforce, but this understanding has not yet been translated into the development of a robust education strategy so that everyone involved understands the borough's priorities and their own roles in achieving them. There has been a focus on the importance of the Early Years as the foundation for learning, but this priority has not been translated into an emphasis on education throughout the school system. Although early years were not a focus of the Commission's work, we were concerned that the local authority's structural arrangements, which split responsibility across two teams, might be complicating the focus on quality and standards. We recommend that this structure is reviewed.

Currently, there is no forum for effective strategic dialogue between elected members, senior council officers and head teachers. The Commission was surprised to learn that, whereas there are monthly meetings between the Leader of the Council, the lead member and trade union representatives, there are no regular meetings with head teachers. This is a significant gap because the necessary relationships depend upon proper forums for dialogue and for listening to the views of all parties. Meetings between elected members, senior council officers and head teachers have always been important but, as more schools have become academies, the absence of any such forum is even more significant because of the reduced opportunities for the authority to influence the work of the academies and to ensure that they are part of the council's broader vision for the borough. For example, while the acting Director has ensured there are clear educational priorities set out in the updated Borough Plan, these outcomes and the actions to deliver them are not sufficiently owned by schools.

The most meaningful dialogue is currently through the Schools Forum. There is no effective dialogue between schools and officers about educational developments at national level,

nor where there is best practice within the borough or elsewhere from which they might learn, or indeed where support might be necessary and available. The efforts of the acting Director both at individual levels and collectively to address this have been appreciated by schools but it is difficult to do this from an interim position. In the past, meetings between senior officers and head teachers focused too much on administrative matters and not enough on educational strategy and improvement.

Although the acting Director and key managers have managed to engage schools and engender confidence in the challenging changes to special educational needs and alternative provision that are being implemented, the pace of change more generally and rapid turnover of staff have left schools unclear about what can be expected from the local authority. Feedback to the Commission indicated that the Council's approach towards many issues is not sufficiently strategic or ambitious. It is described as often being too reactive and too late. The Commission was given the example of the abolition of assessment levels, as announced by the Secretary of State. There seems little preparation for this and, consequently, a risk that each school will act separately, resulting in a lack of common language about assessment and learning across the borough. Another example is the lack of forward planning for free schools meals capacity. Head teachers believe that, to some extent, significant reductions in education staffing, particularly at managerial levels, have made this inevitable. Another factor is the lack of continuity of staff within the Council. Lots of interim posts add to the challenges of long-term strategic planning and reduce the drive to implement agreed priorities. Establishing a staffing structure, which has resilience and continuity, should be a priority for the new Director, Children and Young People.

A common theme, pursued in the next section, is the need for intelligent and timely data systems that provide useful information to support both school leaders and governing bodies and also officers and members to do their jobs. Ideally, the Council and schools will agree on a standard format for submitting and presenting key data sets.

In order to make a sustained difference, the borough's strategy needs to set robust excellence targets, with shared support for delivering them coming from all the principal education stakeholders. Easily accessible data systems will assist everyone involved to set appropriate and ambitious targets and track progress in meeting them. Good data are a prerequisite for a meaningful and effective strategy.

The performance data presented in the previous section of this report highlighted some of the priorities that need to be core elements of the borough's future strategy. There should be a relatively small number of challenging medium-term targets, such as:

- every Brent school becomes at least a good or outstanding school within three years
- the number of outstanding schools is within the top quartile for London in all phases

- attainment at each key stage in Brent schools exceeds the London average
- the variation in attainment between schools is significantly reduced at all key stages by raising the performance of the lowest performing schools towards that of the best
- differences in attainment related to deprivation, gender and ethnicity are minimised throughout the school system.

Evidence to the Commission revealed developments that are needed in terms of the local authority's role in: planning school places; knowing its schools; promoting and supporting school-to-school networks; providing challenge to address weaknesses; improving school governance. Each of these priorities is considered in more detail in the next section of this report.

Recommendations

1. The local authority should set out a clear statement about its own role, within the changing education landscape, for discussion with the education community. This should be rooted in ambitious aspirations for, and expectations of Brent Children and Brent Schools. The statement should underline the moral imperative for all schools in the borough to have shared ownership for the education of all children in every Brent school.
2. The role of the governing body as an important force for support, challenge and improvement should be recognised and the local authority should invest in the development of governors.
3. A strategic group involving the principal education partners should be established, chaired by the new Director of Children and Young People, to drive forward the education strategy in conjunction with key education partners.
4. This new strategic group should develop and agree the vision for education in the borough. This must not be a protracted process. The resulting vision should lead to a strategy which contains a few key goals that are owned by all key participants and result in well-defined, agreed actions.
5. The local authority, in collaboration with schools themselves, should set out challenging but achievable excellence targets demonstrating high expectations for children in the borough. The Commission believes that these excellence targets should include an expectation that all schools in the authority will be good or better within three years and that outcomes at key stages 2 and 4 will be at least 2% above the London average within three years.
6. The Leader of the Council and the Lead Member for Education should establish a forum for meeting on a termly basis with a group of representative head teachers to ensure the education strategy is being taken forward and to reinforce the importance of education as part of the political agenda of the council.

Section 4 Moving forward: key areas of development

This chapter focuses on the five recurring issues that emerged from the evidence presented to the Commission, listed at the end of the previous chapter: planning school places; knowing Brent schools; promoting and supporting school-to-school networks; providing challenge to address weaknesses; improving school governance. The significance of each of these priorities is explained in this chapter with a series of recommendations for improvements.

The current arrangements do not have sufficient focus on the key roles of governing bodies, in particular on governors' accountability for the performance of pupils in their school. The issues reflect key aspects of the local authority's role within the changing education landscape and illustrate both the current position and change that is necessary to establish a strong, ambitious educational community in Brent able to accelerate progress and performance so that children and young people in Brent are served better.

Key messages emerging from the Commission's evidence are that

- 1. Providing sufficient school places of good quality is a responsibility of the entire educational community. The quality of education must become the main priority for determining decisions about school expansion.*
- 2. The local authority does not know all schools sufficiently well to be able to pinpoint the main weaknesses or the areas of best practice. There is an urgent need to establish better data systems so that clear information is provided to schools, the community and the secretary of state.*
- 3. The local authority should work together with all education partners to build the capacity and effectiveness of the Brent Schools Partnership.*
- 4. All schools in Brent should be encouraged to be part of school-to-school partnerships that are focused on developing and sharing effective practice in teaching and learning and providing focused mutual support for improvement and raising standards.*
- 5. The current arrangements for developing the roles of governing bodies do not have sufficient focus on their key roles, in particular their accountability for the performance of pupils in their school and their roles in supporting and challenging the school's leadership.*

Planning school places

As indicated in the previous chapter, local authorities continue to be responsible for ensuring sufficient good school places in their area for primary and secondary education, for

securing diversity of provision of schools and increasing parental choice. In Brent, as for many London boroughs, this is a challenging task because of the rapid population growth outlined earlier in this report. It is particularly hard to provide all the places in the precise areas where they are needed.

Other factors in Brent have also made the task more difficult. These include the constraints of school sites, not all of which are large enough to enable expansion to take place; the responses of individual governing bodies; parental pressure to resist expansion; a lack of capital expenditure; and the opening of free schools.

In August 2012, the Council's Executive approved a strategy for primary school expansion to meet the need for a further 21 forms of entry by 2020-21. A requirement for an extra 192 Special Educational Needs places was identified. A strategy for meeting a projected shortfall of 19 forms of entry in secondary schools was also approved in January 2013. The borough has received funding for planning additional school places but it is not yet clear that this will be sufficient.

In June 2013, Brent's Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report that reviewed the School Expansion Programme, 2012-16. The report gave details of schools that had already expanded over the previous four years and listed the names of seven primary schools, which had agreed to commence statutory consultation or were in the process of considering expansion to meet the future requirements. The schemes would provide 11.5 forms of entry by September 2014. A further list of possible schemes for September 2015 was also included.

The Scrutiny Report also set out how the Council planned to provide just over half of the special educational needs requirement. At secondary level, other than one school expansion, the report explained that the plan is to keep other possible schemes on hold pending the opening of a new secondary free school.

Apart from the medium term pressures on school places, the Commission was also concerned about the immediate difficulty of finding places for children who are out of school. Although the borough's statistics show that the available vacancies are sufficient to meet the demand in all year groups, the geographical location of the places may be far from ideal for individual families and for their children's education.

Based on evidence received by the Commission, the following are some of the biggest concerns about place planning by the local authority:

- Although there has been a plan and a programme for place planning, there has been no real strategy although one is now (March 2014) being developed. Decisions have

mainly been tactical. Finding extra places has often been hand to mouth, just in time to meet the needs rather than properly planned.

- As a result, some of the extra places being created are in schools that have been judged by Ofsted as still requiring improvement.
- There is not yet an authoritative grip on the numbers and therefore the projections of extra places needed have not been consistently owned and understood. There is a need to ensure in particular that the housing data being fed into the GLA projections are as accurate as possible and that the assumptions and projections are tested at regular points during the year.
- Schools do not feel ownership of the challenge faced by the borough or the approach taken by the local authority. As a consequence, there has been a mixed response in terms of how supportive individual schools have been to proposals for expansion. This is of particular concern because of the considerable additional workload for the head teachers and schools that take additional forms of entry. The logistics of planning for the changes can be exacerbated if there are delays or problems with the buildings, as there have been in some cases.
- The borough is running out of possible sites for primary expansion.
- Where there is consideration of increasingly large primary schools, there should be debate and sharing of best practice about the leadership and day-to-day management of such schools to ensure all pupils benefit.
- There is insufficient evidence that the locations of planned expansions are firmly based on data about the geographical areas where there is likely to be the greatest future demand for additional places.
- The requirement for secondary expansion will soon become a priority. This may be more feasible on existing secondary school sites because of their size but since most of these schools are academies, a strategic approach will be needed. Although the extra secondary places will not be required for several years, planning should be starting now.
- So far, there has been insufficient consideration of the opportunity to invite in new providers or reshape existing schools that are struggling. Other boroughs have introduced innovative approaches to address similar issues, such as the competitive invitation issued in a neighbouring borough to set up new or free schools.
- The planning for the provision of extra places is currently split between two separate council directorates. Children and Families, soon to be known as Children and Young People, assess the demand; Regeneration and Growth deals with the property and building aspects. There is no overall, coordinated responsibility. The Commission believes this should sit with the Children and Families Department who have the most direct link with schools. This would also give schools greater confidence.

The most significant and worrying finding from the evidence to the Commission was the strong view that school expansion is being addressed in Brent separately from school

improvement. The Commission concluded that this is the wrong approach and that the quality of education must be the most important factor in deciding where new places are created. The performance of pupils, the outcomes of inspections and the local knowledge of the School Improvement Service about the recent and likely quality of education in each Brent school should form the cornerstone of a strategy that views place planning as an opportunity for raising Brent's educational standards further.

Recommendations

7. The local authority should produce an agreed strategy for place planning. The quality of education and the potential for school improvement in any expansions should be the foremost priority when determining the programme of expansion.
8. The Council should appoint one head of service to be responsible for drawing up and implementing all aspects of the place planning strategy across the two departments that currently have responsibilities for place planning.
9. The new Director of Children and Young People should urgently review the authority's arrangements for projecting the future school population and the geographical spread across the Borough to ensure they are rigorous and fit for purpose.
10. The local authority should be proactive in encouraging the best schools in Brent and free school providers to set up new schools in areas where extra places are needed. The Council should encourage open competition in order to establish new schools.
11. The place planning strategy, and future updates about its progress, should be kept under review and progress should be discussed with school leaders, chairs of governors, academies, and faith and community groups, on a regular basis.

Knowing Brent schools

As indicated in the previous chapter the local authority, as champion for the needs and interests of children in Brent, has to undertake some form of school quality assurance. It should capture knowledge and intelligence by scrutinising education provision in such a way that it knows the strengths and weaknesses of its schools. It should be able to provide assurance that all schools are performing at a good or outstanding level and, where they are not, that appropriate support and development are taking place to bring about improvement. The knowledge of the local authority should be based on a range of evidence including both performance and other quantitative data and also on more qualitative data, based, for example, on the interaction of officers, advisers and head teachers themselves with schools. This aspect of the local authority's role applies to all Brent schools, not only to those that are underperforming and may require intervention. The latter are considered separately in the next section. This focus of the local authority needs to be developed in collaboration with all schools and with consent, confidence and trust.

The first key element of an effective school improvement system is the collection of accurate, up to date and comparative data. This needs to include within-year progress in addition to end-of-year data. The best local authorities and academy chains provide this information. It is of great value to all schools but particularly for those that are less than good. During the course of the Commission's work, the absence of such a system was identified as an area of major concern. However, the new School Improvement Service has now established a 'risk matrix' that uses a range of metrics and measures and this is updated frequently and kept under regular review; this an encouraging development.

Commissioners found shortcomings in Brent's capacity for data analysis, which is weak and requires urgent investment and development. For example, data handlers were struggling to pick up and make adjustments to data tables both for provision and 'satellite schools' set up during the course of the school year. Although the authority is able to respond to specific requests for information, the Commission could not identify a joined-up and comprehensive overview of local education data. There appears to be a lack of co-ordination between key data sources. This made it hard for members of the Commission to gain a clear understanding of how each school was performing or to see where the risks lay.

It is equally difficult for schools themselves or elected members to obtain an 'at a glance' overview of where each school stands. There is a pressing need to produce some form of 'dashboard' showing the performance of every school in the borough against a range of criteria. This information should be shared with governing bodies. Other local authorities and some academy trusts have developed effective systems.

There is a wide range of data about schools in the public domain. Ofsted's Data Dashboard provides information about a range of metrics, in most cases showing the quintile in which the school is located, as compared with schools with similar free school meals, and over time. Governors are increasingly familiar with this and the metrics provide a helpful base for consideration and comparison. Inspection reports are also very useful but they have a fairly limited shelf life. Local metrics have the advantage of raising questions about issues early enough for emerging problems to be identified and solutions found. The following box identifies some of the examples used in other local authorities.

Examples of local metrics and factors that might be taken into account about individual schools

Children and Families

Attainment data

Fischer Family Trust (and other similar) school-based data

Ofsted inspection grades

Numbers of permanent exclusions

Numbers of fixed-term exclusions

Number of children admitted against planned admissions number and net capacity

Number of in-year admissions

Attendance and absence rates

The proportion of children on roll at the end of the year who started the year on roll – 'churn'

Number of children with English as a second language at home

Number of looked-after children on roll, and their outcomes

Teenage pregnancy rates

Number of children with additional needs at school level (higher levels of need are reported in the Data Dashboard)

Number of children on roll known to the local Youth Offending Team

Number of children on roll known to be at risk of neglect or abuse

Other factors will include special circumstances such as, for example, 'churn' among the children of service families, and local housing issues

Destination data

School and Staff

Head teacher change

Staff turnover

Staff vacancies

Finance issues

Complaints about the school

In Haringey, the school improvement team has established an in-year risks dashboard and produces regular risk reports. This takes into account the Ofsted rating for the school, and attainment data but also assesses risks against:

- Admissions (e.g. % first choice)
- Attendance
- Learner well-being (e.g. exclusions)
- Finance (e.g. budget spend; audit reports)
- Governance (e.g. vacancies; progress and reports to governing body; support & challenge)
- Health & safety (e.g. H&S policy up to date and in place; risk assessments used)
- Human resources (e.g. staff vacancies; disciplinary or capability issues)
- Property (e.g. statutory responsibilities; condition & suitability of accommodation)
- SEN (in-school provision; assessment & tracking)

Brent needs to follow the lead of other authorities, learn what works effectively and provide school leadership teams and governing bodies with data to help make their work more effective. An additional benefit of such data systems is the increased ability it offers the authority to publish regular information for not only parents and the general public but also Ofsted and the government about the performance and progress of local schools.

The Commission recommends that discussions are held with schools, particularly governing bodies, about what they find most helpful to be better informed and better equipped to ask

questions and take action. They might want a simple performance card to supplement the Ofsted dashboard or a fuller report produced in collaboration between the leadership of the school and the local authority.

It also recommends that the local authority should produce an annual report on the quality of local education provision. This should be shared with the local community, in particular parents, and copies sent to the trusts of all academies in Brent and to the Ofsted Regional Director for London. A copy should also be sent to the secretary of state for education so he receives early warning of any emerging issues and takes action as appropriate with academy trusts.

An important way in which the authority knows about its schools is through the School Improvement Service's interactions with schools. The School Improvement Service provides a current core offer for all Brent schools, as set out in the box below, and an extended traded offer that is largely provided through a team of external associates and consultants.

The Brent School Improvement Core Offer

*It is the LA's responsibility to maintain a full overview of the effectiveness of all schools including academies and free schools. Where **academies and free schools** fail to provide the standards required, it is appropriate for the LA to hold these establishments to account. This will be through discussion with the head teacher and sponsor representative.*

*For **maintained schools**, we will deliver a differentiated core offer which departs from the more universal offer previously in place. The purpose of this new Core Offer is to provide an appropriately differentiated offer for the most effective and efficient use of public funding. It will ensure that the best schools are able to define and develop their improvement journey as they see fit, purchasing support from the LA or elsewhere as required. For those schools not yet good or outstanding, intensive, skilled and purposeful support and monitoring will challenge and encourage the school to improve at speed, and result in intervention if this is not successful.*

For good and outstanding schools, the local authority's involvement is light touch with a visit once a year by the school's link adviser to address a range of issues depending upon the context of the school. The visit aims to ensure that the local authority can validate the school's own assessment of its strengths and weaknesses for development. It also allows for an assessment of the school's capacity to sustain its position and bring about further improvement. The School Improvement Service supports and challenges good and outstanding schools where specific improvement is required. They celebrate good practice and disseminate it across all schools. The visit leads to a short report providing an annual 'health check' for the school with any recommendations that result from the meeting.

Those Brent schools that are judged to be good or better are encompassed within the light touch arrangements above and are responsible for their own improvement. This core offer is valued by many schools and helps them to assess where they need to make improvements. Several recent Ofsted monitoring reports produced on individual schools by HMI have commented positively on the local authority support and challenge provided through the core offer. However, the Commission found a lack of confidence from some schools that the local authority team has a sufficiently clear picture of what a good school looks like in practice or is able to challenge schools to improve from being satisfactory to providing a good standard of education.

The Commission has particular concerns about the local authority's capacity to know how well the academies in Brent are doing. Relationships between the local authority and academies are mixed, and sometimes poor, so the local authority's knowledge tends to be patchy and reliant on examination and test data, admissions data and local anecdote.

In summary, the local authority does not know its schools sufficiently well to be able to pinpoint the main weaknesses or the areas of best practice. Schools themselves also do not know enough about each other. These concerns need to be addressed urgently.

Once the local authority has a stronger understanding of its schools, it would be able to give far greater recognition of what is being achieved by individuals, organisations and initiatives. This might be at the level of individual pupils or schools achieving well against the odds. It could also serve to highlight interesting or emerging practice within or across schools. Such recognition would not only serve to raise the profile and improve the image of education in Brent but would also provide a base for celebration of achievements, such as an annual awards ceremony to showcase the best of Brent. The Commission recommends that Brent produces a range of case studies, capturing some of the interesting and effective practice in its schools, before the end of the 2013/14 school year. To develop this recommendation further, it is suggested that the local authority develops with head teachers, governors and the professional associations and unions, a programme of activities that would recognise and celebrate education in Brent.

Recommendations

- 12 To support school improvement, the local authority should put in place a system to provide each school with a picture of how they perform against both local and national indicators. These would be a range of quantitative and qualitative indicators. The process for designing this system, in particular the evidence used, should be co-produced with schools, both head teachers and governors.
- 13 To support their role as champions and guardians of the needs and interest of children, the local authority should produce an annual report that should be easily accessible to parents and the local community. This should set out achievements and progress in education in Brent, as well as highlighting challenges and areas for development. It should be sent to the governing bodies of all schools in Brent as well as academy trusts, Ofsted and the Secretary of State.
- 14 The local authority should urgently investigate with schools the introduction of a data tracking system that can be used to risk assess the progress and performance of schools within the school year as well as at the end of the year. This system should be co-produced with head teachers and school governors.
- 15 Through the new strategic group, an agreed programme of peer reviews should be established between schools, drawing on best practice in models elsewhere. The peer review model should influence Brent's current Rapid Improvement Groups (RIG) process. Regular development opportunities should be provided for teachers to observe good practice in other schools.
- 16 The local authority and schools should devise a programme of activities to showcase excellence and interesting practice in education in Brent
- 17 The local authority, in conjunction with the Brent Schools Partnership and teaching schools, should publish case studies of good practice in local schools, before the end of 2014. This should give a clear picture of what good and outstanding schools look like in practice.
- 18 An annual schools awards scheme should be established in 2014/15 to recognise and celebrate practice in Brent schools.

Promoting and supporting school-to-school networks

Brent has a diverse range of schools and notions of autonomy and independence are strong in all sectors. Most head teachers we spoke to were clear that it was schools themselves that were responsible for their own improvement. However, the Commission is clear that autonomy should not mean isolation as that carries many risks. Schools in Brent need to learn from other schools so that practice gets stronger and improvement is accelerated.

There is endorsement from many sources of the importance of school-to-school support. A recent House of Commons Select Committee report²⁶ concluded:

Properly handled, school collaboration offers benefits to all schools involved. The Government should continue to promote this message so as to reassure reluctant governing bodies and promote equality of esteem among all participants.....

We believe that, in common with the Government's view of the education system, schools are best placed to identify the most effective ways to work with other schools, based on their particular history, ethos and challenges. Schools should be able to adopt models of partnership and co-operation that suit their needs within a legislative and policy framework that is as non-prescriptive as possible.

The Select Committee also underlined the role of local authorities in making this happen in their area and ensuring that all local schools are included:

Local authorities still have a critical role to play in a school-led improvement system, in particular through creating an "enabling environment" within which collaboration can flourish. We welcome Ofsted inspection of local authorities' school improvement services, which has acted to highlight the importance of this role. We also support the new system which is emerging with recognition that the expertise lies within schools but with local authorities as part of the picture. The role of local authorities is still evolving and some clarification of what is expected of them is needed. We recommend that the Government set out clearly the role of local authorities in helping to broker school-to-school partnerships and acting as champions of all parents and children, with particular reference to academies in their region.²⁷

Brent has used successful heads to help schools in need for many years with one head having now supported six schools. The Commission found some encouraging signs that partnership working between schools in Brent is growing more widely. There are hard federations in place between infant and junior schools, for example at Lyon Park Infant and

²⁶ House of Commons Education Committee, School Partnerships and Cooperation, HC269 published 6 November 2013

²⁷ House of Commons Education Committee, School Partnerships and Cooperation, published 6 November 2013

Junior Schools and between Oakington Manor Primary and Furness Primary Schools; there is a soft federation between Byron Court Primary and Oliver Goldsmith Primary Schools. Some schools are also collaborating closely to improve teaching and learning. For example, Lyon Park Junior and Infant Schools have brokered their own partnership with another primary school and established relationships with two Brent secondary schools and an independent school. Harlesden Inter-School Support (HSS), led by Stonebridge Primary School, is another example of schools working together to drive improvement.

Some schools have joined networks outside the Borough. For example, Claremont High School Academy and Wembley High Technology College have joined Challenge Partners. This is a school-led partnership that was set up originally by a number of outstanding schools in London but has now extended to other parts of the country and to a range of schools. It is a collective of schools that not only challenge each other to do better but also support weaker schools to improve. The schools involved pay a fee to be part of the Challenge Partner collective for which they get a number of things in return, including an annual peer review. Challenge Partners use peer review, based on Ofsted's inspection framework but customised to the needs of the school, as a way of raising aspirations and of improving professional practice. Those involved in these peer reviews are hugely positive about the experience and describe it as a really valuable development experience. The Commission recommends that the local authority commissions the Brent Schools Partnership to introduce peer review as a support for systematic improvement, using Ofsted trained inspectors to train staff and to undertake the writing of each review on behalf of the inspection team.

Some of the academies in Brent, such as Ark, operate within a larger organisation that provides its own network for development. We heard from some of these head teachers that they would be prepared to engage and to work beyond their own particular 'family', if it was clear this would improve education for all children in Brent. At the same time, there was some scepticism that the local authority could really establish this sort of framework to support improvement.

Teaching schools are a positive force for collaborative work across schools. Woodfield School has been designated as Brent's first teaching school. Each teaching school has an alliance of partners to support and develop the planned programme of activities for nurturing new teachers, leaders and other colleagues. Four Brent schools – Alperton Community School, Oakington Manor Primary School, the Convent of Jesus and Mary Language School and the Village School – are involved in Woodfield's teaching school alliance, alongside Middlesex University, the Institute of Education, the College of North West London, Brent Schools Partnership (see below) and Brent local authority. A second Brent school, Byron Court Primary School, is currently making an application for teaching school designation with an alliance consisting of a range of local schools and education

partners and the signs are that the school will secure designation. Several Brent schools are also involved with the Gateway Teaching School, which is based in Enfield. Teaching schools have huge potential for supporting school improvement so the local authority and the BSP need to use them intensively over the next few years. They must ensure too that efforts and programmes are not duplicated and resources are used to best effect. Research is an aspect of the work of all teaching schools and the Commission recommends that this is used as much as possible to inform and influence the processes for better teaching and learning in Brent schools.

Commissioners are aware of the numbers of system leaders in Brent giving focused school-to-school support in the roles of National or Local Leaders of Education (NLEs and LLEs). These are school leaders who see system leadership as an essential part of their role and professionalism. More recently, they have been joined by Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs) and National Leaders of Governance (NLGs). These outstanding head teachers and practitioners should be deployed well and used to support strong improvement work in Brent. Certainly, NLEs and LLEs report reciprocal benefits for the work of their own schools in supporting others.

Most significant of all, schools have come together to form the Brent Schools Partnership (BSP). Although in its infancy, this indicates that there is considerable appetite for working across schools to build individual and collective capacity. The partnership's own description of its role is presented below.

Brent Schools Partnership

The Brent Schools Partnership (BSP) is a 'not for profit' organisation, led by schools for schools.

Backed-up by national research and the findings of the National College for Teaching and Learning, we have a strong belief that collaborative approaches lead to more effective support and sustainable improvement.

Brent School Partnership is structured to work alongside complementary services, including those provided by Brent, external agencies and consultants in order to broaden the range of high-quality services available to schools.

We are overseen by a management board made up of elected representatives from primary, secondary and special schools and other stakeholders, including the local authority and Governors.

Because we are school-led, we are best placed to identify the support and services needed and how they can be best delivered.

The aim of BSP is not to replace the services provided by the local authority, but to

work together to ensure that all services provided to our schools are of high quality and have impact

We will work closely with the local authority to support schools causing concern, or those at risk. We will also support the wider statutory and non-statutory duties provided by the local authority, to ensure that provision is sufficiently broad and flexible to respond to and meet individual school needs.

Because we operate as a 'not for profit' organisation, our own charges are kept to a minimum for members.

The BSP will deliver high quality, locally available school improvement support that:

- is cost effective*
- is quality assured*
- has measurable impact.*

Brent School Partnership, 2013

The BSP has recognised the need to develop its capacity and capability to shape and provide a full range of school improvement services to schools. The appointment of a full-time coordinator should support their ability to do this. Nevertheless, during its first year the BSP has led, or collaborated, on a range of activities and initiatives, including:

- organising termly head teacher conferences on key educational issues
- providing the induction programme for new head teachers, commissioned by the local authority
- supporting the assistant and deputy head teachers group
- developing the structure and programme for roll out of the National Professional Qualification for Senior Leadership (NPQSL) and for the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership (NPQML)
- leading the SEN local offer development project, commissioned by the local authority
- developing a Brent continuing professional development (CPD) programme, with the School Improvement Service
- developing a BEST Brent on-line portal for school support, with the School Improvement Service.

The Commission welcomed these developments and is strongly of the view that all Brent schools should be part of a school-to-school partnership that would enable them to develop better practice in teaching and learning and to provide mutual support to raise standards. These alliances could be brokered through the Brent Schools Partnership, the other arrangements outlined above or through joint working with schools in other boroughs.

The Commission was concerned to find that, despite these opportunities, many schools in Brent are not aware of what other schools are doing, their strengths and weaknesses. Not all schools are part of the BSP or of other school-to-school collaboration with a focus on improving teaching and learning. The Commission concluded that a powerful way both of building up and supporting primary schools and of reducing isolation or fragmentation among secondary academies would be for all Brent schools to be encouraged to join a school-to-school network.

The BSP is still at a relatively early stage in its development, though achieving good work that is appreciated by head teachers. Working with Woodfield Teaching School and the Gateway Teaching School, it has put in place a range of development opportunities for teachers and school leaders including the Improving Teacher Programme (ITP) and Outstanding Teacher Programme (OTP). It has also introduced the Outstanding Teaching Assistant Programme.

There is, however, a sense amongst schools, particularly amongst secondary schools, that the BSP is 'on probation'. There appears to be only limited attendance at BSP meetings by secondary head teachers. Overall, the message to the Commission is that the head teachers want the BSP to work but they are not yet seeing enough of the kind of support that they want.

The School Improvement Service recognises and welcomes the opportunity for the local authority, Teaching School Alliances and the BSP to work collaboratively to address the core school improvement issues facing the borough. The service wants to develop a cooperative process to track the progress of all schools in Brent, using available data, inspection results and qualitative data.

From the evidence to the Commission, there has been reluctance on the part of some in the local authority to let go of its role of providing school improvement and continuing professional development (CPD). This may be because the BSP is still in its early stages. However, the leadership team within the School Improvement Service fully supports this direction of travel. An encouraging sign is the establishment of a CPD Partnership between the local authority, the BSP and the schools in the Teaching School Alliance. Based on an analysis of Ofsted findings and through liaison between head teachers and School Improvement Link advisers, this new partnership has begun to draw up a professional development programme with *Teaching and Learning* and *Leadership and Management* as priority areas for 2014/15. Although these broad areas do not suggest a sufficiently forensic approach to identifying development needs, the collaboration is to be welcomed.

The Commission recommends that the BSP, with the local authority's support, should prioritise collaboration across schools so that schools learn from each other and from local research focused on teaching and its impact on learning. If change is to take place as quickly as it is needed, schools themselves must establish, drive and be responsible for a self-improving system in Brent. This means ensuring not only that schools have all the support they need but that schools collaborate professionally to improve practice. In a diverse and increasingly autonomous system, collaborative activities build individual and collective capacity to sustain this sort of system of improvement.

Every school in Brent should be part of a cluster or network that is focused on the improvement of teaching and learning, even if that cluster operates outside the borough. As this becomes more established, the BSP should seek to capture the learning from these collaborations and share them more widely. The clusters could take many formats: academy chains, Challenge Partners, geographical or other local clusters brokered by the local authority, or the teaching school alliance. Partner arrangements between schools can take place at many levels: being part of a cluster is consistent with also being part of the BSP or working with other schools on specific tasks such as secondary transfer or specific curriculum developments.

A key part of each cluster's role would be to develop opportunities for a detailed focus on improving teaching and learning. This is the strength of CPD activities such as ITP and OTP. David Hargreaves sets out a strong model of schools working in partnership to improve teaching and learning from them all. The emphasis in this model is on mutual observation, coaching and learning-by-doing, which not only shares good practice across school but also creates it:

Joint practice development (JPD) is a term that captures the essential features of this form of professional development:

- *It is a **joint** activity, in which two or more people interact and influence one another, in contrast to the non-interactive, unilateral character of much conventional "sharing of good practice".*
- *It is an activity that focuses on teachers' professional **practice**, i.e. what they do, not merely what they know.*

*It is a form of **development** of the practice, not simply a transfer of it from one person or place to another, and so a form of school improvement.²⁸*

²⁸ 'A self-improving school system: towards maturity', D. Hargreaves, Nottingham: National College for School Leadership, 2012, in 'Unleashing Greatness: Getting the best from an academised system', Academies Commission, Pearson, January 2013, p36

This is a peer-to-peer approach to developing professional practice that is shaped and modelled by school leaders and, most important, by teachers. Joint practice development

moves away from one-off training courses and INSET days run in isolation towards one that is linked with whole-school improvement, is continuous not occasional, and where everyone is an active participant, fusing learning and development with practice.²⁹

It is this sort of approach within clusters that will generate real change.

The Commission also concluded that, in developing the next phase of the BSP, those involved should consider the experiences of other authorities that have established similar school partnerships. These include Wigan, Manchester's 'By Schools for Schools', the Bradford Partnership and the neighbouring borough of Harrow

They might also want to consider the sort of focused partnerships for system development set up by the authorities included in recent NFER research (2013), for example:

- Milton Keynes Strategic Schools Effectiveness Partnership Board
- Slough Learning Partnership
- Brighton Learning Partnership
- Southend Education Trust.

The Commission believes that an immediate priority is to build the vision, capacity and effectiveness of the BSP. It is for schools in Brent to shape and own the BSP so that it meets their needs. The LA should support that process financially, specifying clearly its own expectations of the BSP and the purpose of the funding. The local authority has made a laudable commitment to support the establishment of the BSP by payment of the coordinator's salary for two years. It therefore needs to set out clearly what its expectations are for year one and year two, though the latter would, of course, be subject to review. For example, the local authority might expect the BSP to:

- offer all Brent schools access to a local professional learning network providing practical opportunities for working laterally across schools to improve teaching and learning
- build knowledge, capacity and practice across Brent, particularly in those areas identified by Ofsted inspection that are weak in Brent
- work with them to agree a process and training for peer reviewing the performance and progress of all schools in the BSP

²⁹ Replacing CPD with JPD, Maggie Farrar, SecEd, January 2013

- work with them to establish a programme of activities which celebrates practice, progress and performance in Brent schools.

The local authority would, in discussion with the BSP, need to translate these very broad expectations into specific outcomes.

Over time the local authority should move to a position where it commissions more and more services from the BSP, in particular all school improvement services. The Commission is explicitly separating school improvement services from the resource the local authority needs to undertake its scrutiny or school quality assurance role although, of course, the two are linked. All schools in Brent, including academies, should begin to see the BSP as an important coordinator and commissioner of professional development and improvement support, based on a model in which the schools contribute (financially and by sharing staff capacity and expertise on a paid for basis) and also benefit. A core part of the BSP's role should be the brokering of support on behalf of its members, not only for those that have been identified by Ofsted as requiring improvement.

In order to stimulate the growth of collaborative activity across schools and the establishment of clusters and networks, the Commission recommends that the local authority should provide additional funding for schools to introduce innovative partnership initiatives, focused on teaching and learning, through the BSP. Groups of schools would be invited to put forward their proposals and the best would receive extra funding to introduce the initiatives and monitor implementation. The BSP would be expected to evaluate their impact and to disseminate the outcomes to all other Brent schools.

This focus on the role of the BSP does not preclude individual schools from accessing wider networks and support, but the Commission believes that it is essential that there is a core model for identifying the borough-wide improvement priorities and leading school-led action to address them.

Recommendations

- | | |
|----|---|
| 19 | As part of its changing role, the local authority should work together with all education partners to build the capacity and effectiveness of the Brent School Partnership. This should include its ability to commission teaching schools and other excellent providers in Brent. |
| 20 | The Brent School Partnership and the local authority should be encouraged to learn lessons for school partnerships from other authorities and from families of schools, such as chains, federations and trusts. |
| 21 | Mechanisms should be put in place across all schools in the borough for school-to-school challenge and support in order to improve practice and build shared ownership for the education of all children in Brent schools. The local authority should play a key role, encouraging schools to consider the benefits of cluster and other partnership arrangements and to break down any barriers that may prevent such collaboration. |

- 22 The local authority should provide funding to the Brent School Partnership to appoint a full time Director, or coordinator, for two years with a formal review built into the end of year 1.
- 23 The new strategic group (see recommendation 2) should work with the Brent School Partnership steering group to agree a set of priorities and a costed programme for action in the school year, 2014-2015, for all schools. The local education authority should provide financial support to incentivise collaboration and work in clusters or networks. It should also agree a process for how the Brent School Partnership and teaching schools might be commissioned to provide and broker support for schools causing concern, including use of the Rapid Improvement Group process.

Providing challenge to address weaknesses

For schools that are failing to provide all children and young people with a good standard of education, the local authority has a statutory duty to ensure challenge and support. Brent has a system in place for assessing and taking action in schools that require improvement or are in an Ofsted category. This system is set out below. It is based on a one-year cycle to ensure rapid improvement or ultimately to trigger intervention.

Schools that require improvement, are satisfactory or require special measures

The principal elements of Brent's process are:

Rapid Improvement Groups (RIG) involving the head teacher, chair of governors or their representative, relevant school improvement officers and staff from any partner school. The RIG monitors and evaluates progress and whether support is making a difference.

A Leadership Review, undertaken with urgency, to identify leadership capacity at all levels and to outline specific improvements required. The Leadership Review is reported to the RIG.

An Action Plan by the school working with the school adviser leading to the implementation of a support programme with help from the BSP or Teaching School Alliance as appropriate.

Improvement for schools in these circumstances must be swift and embedded in good sustained practice, recognised by Ofsted monitoring visits or local authority reviews. If improvement is not demonstrated, the local authority will use its powers of intervention to ensure improvement at speed.

School Improvement Service, October 2013

Some of the feedback to the Commission indicates that Brent officers know when there is a problem or when schools are underperforming. This is a result of focused work by the current team. Whilst recognising some of the strengths of this system, the Commission felt

that the initial assessment within the RIG process should also include observations of classroom practice, rather than relying mainly on data. There was also some feedback that, when selecting staff from other schools to provide advice and support to schools with weaknesses, the local authority should ensure they choose from a wide variety of high performing schools rather than relying on a small number of schools.

In the recent past, the Council has not been shy about using Interim Executive Boards and seeking academy sponsors where schools have serious performance issues. However, the Council needs to work with the BSP and teaching school alliances and chains, both within and beyond the borough, to build up a range of support interventions that can be deployed as soon as underperformance is identified. In particular, we know that when schools are deemed inadequate they often have serious leadership and governance issues. We also know that pairing them with strong schools – whether through executive head teachers, National or Local Leaders of Education, federations or academy sponsors – is very often the best way to address the problems and sustain improvement. These options are not mutually exclusive: the immediate insertion of an executive head or NLE may lead to schools federating or the stronger school sponsoring the weaker one. The key, however, is to ensure that an inadequate school or one requiring improvement has the necessary leadership capacity to address its shortcomings in order to ensure that the quality of education and prospects of the children and young people in that school are not put at risk.

Brent's School Improvement Service has also carried out an analysis of 13 inspections where the school was judged either to require improvement or to be inadequate. The aspects of school improvement most frequently identified as areas for improvement are:

- Differentiation/challenge (92% of the schools analysed)
- Marking and Feedback (85%)
- Monitoring of teaching/quality (69%)
- Development of middle leadership (62%)
- Planning (62%)
- KS2 Reading (54%)
- KS1 Maths, KS1&2 Writing, Questioning (38%)
- Questioning (30%).

In addition, the School Improvement Service carried out an analysis of the aspects of school improvement identified during the Ofsted inspection of each primary school in the borough, together with a summary of the main areas requiring improvement. They are listed below with the percentage of primary schools found to have the identified weakness:

- Marking and Feedback (58%)
- Differentiation/challenge (54%)
- Development of middle leadership (32%)

- Monitoring of teaching/quality (29%)
- Planning (25%).

The Commission welcomes this analysis as a positive development. Responsibility for addressing the concerns rests with the schools and there should not be an expectation that support and professional development will all be provided by the authority. Over time the main responsibility for this should rest with the Brent Schools Partnership. Effective support should be from other schools and a range of the best providers.

Recommendations

24. There should be more forensic examination of the schools that are assessed as being at risk or requiring improvement through investigation of teaching and its impact on learning in the classroom.
25. There is a need for more effective support for schools that are struggling, drawing on the wider capacity and expertise of other Brent schools.
26. The local authority should be bolder in deploying executive heads, NLEs, LLEs, federations and academy sponsors to ensure that schools judged inadequate or requiring improvement have the necessary leadership and governance expertise to drive improvement.
27. The local authority needs to identify underperformance at an early stage and to be prepared to be more robust in how it addresses concerns, including issues relating to underperformance in leadership.

Improving school governance

The final theme raised with the Commission was the effectiveness of school governing bodies in Brent.

The Governors' Handbook³⁰, recently issued by the DfE, states that governing bodies should have a strong focus on three core strategic functions:

- a. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- b. Holding the head teacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils; and
- c. Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent.

³⁰ Governors' Handbook, Department for Education, January 2014

The governing body is the key mechanism not only for ensuring school improvement is as good as it should be but also as the pivotal link between the school and the wider community. The Commission recommends investment in the development of governors in Brent as a crucial support for improvement. Working closely with governors, the local authority should devise a very practical action plan for the development of governors as key agents of support for improvement. This plan would need to encompass the needs of different groups of governors such as new governors, chairs of governors or whole governing bodies. It might even include prospective governors.

The governing body must have the right information if it is to do its job properly. It needs to be able to benchmark its school locally and against London as well as the national context. Such information helps governors to know their school well. In addition, they need to have established effective systems and processes for monitoring and self-evaluation. These should engage all the key stakeholders in the school community - certainly pupils, parents and staff - and the findings should feed into development planning and action.

Ofsted's evidence suggests a strong correlation between effective schools and effective governing bodies. Good governance entails a grip on not only data but also issues relating to the performance of the school, which is the base for constructive challenge by governors. This is an important support for more rigorous self-evaluation and for asking questions about progress and performance. Head teachers themselves have said:

'Good governance supports honest, perceptive self-evaluation by the school, recognising the problems and supporting the steps needed to address them.'

Good Governance, Proposals from the 2012 Fellowship Commission, National College, 2012

All governors need to have training on analysing data, including RAISE-on-line, that gives them the confidence and skills they need to do their jobs well. It would also increase their ability to provide constructive challenge.

In Brent, support for school governing bodies is provided by the Council's Governor Support Service's (GSS). Their core offer includes telephone and written advice to governors, arranging Instruments of Government, and keeping governors up to date with national legislation and guidance. There are termly briefings chaired by the Operational Director to which all governors are invited. Governors welcome the role played by the Operational Director and the changes brought by her 'obvious high regard for governors'. The service offers a training and development programme through a service level agreement (SLA) with schools. For the 2013-14 academic year, 51 schools have bought into the SLA, the majority being primary schools. The service also offers training and development on a sessional basis for schools not choosing to purchase the full SLA.

The Commission found that the Governors' termly newsletter is welcomed. There is also a termly meeting between officers, the Lead Member and chairs of governing bodies, which has reasonable attendance as well as an annual conference. This current framework does not however give sufficient opportunities to enable governors, elected members and senior council officers to debate local educational issues and to offer an opportunity for governors to influence the borough's strategic and policy developments.

The governor support programme is broad and varied. Feedback to the Commission indicated that the programme is valued by those governors who go on the courses but it does not have enough of a focus on the strategic role of the governing body and how that might be translated into practical activities. Data from GSS shows that eleven courses for governors in the first few months of the academic year were attended by thirty nine different schools. Attendance varied from four governors for a session on safer recruitment to thirty one governors for training on head teachers' performance management.

Overall, the Commission concluded that the current arrangements do not have sufficient focus on the key roles of governing bodies, in particular to challenge the school constructively and positively on the performance of pupils. Training for governors should have a greater emphasis on the understanding and use of school performance data and on the role of governors in school improvement. This requires a good understanding of the available data, the ability to ask the right questions, and the right balance between challenge and support for the leadership of the school. Governors also need regular information about best practice in other governing bodies and opportunities to learn about initiatives elsewhere that enable governors to play an effective role in contributing to school improvement. Generally, governors are more comfortable providing support than they are challenge. They are also less used to working across schools than head teachers are. The Commission recommends that to increase governor confidence and expertise, the local authority pilots and brokers opportunities for one governing body to work with another to scrutinise each other's performance data.

One of the main concerns about governance raised with the Commission is the difficulty of recruiting governors with the right skills. The regulations allow governing bodies to review how they are constituted, including reducing the number of governors. As part of reviewing their role, some schools should investigate whether to have fewer local authority governors and to feel more confident in referring back decisions about appointments when they have concerns about them.

The current arrangements for nominating local authority governors are cumbersome and lead to long delays. The Commission heard of examples where there were delays of up to nine months in filling vacancies. GSS is aware of the concern over these delays and is in the process of re-writing the procedure, but this is taking too long. When a local authority vacancy arises, governing bodies will be encouraged to carry out a skills audit and advise the

service of where there are gaps. GSS will then endeavour to find a suitable match from a pool of potential governors.

There is also a need to continue to develop the skills of existing governors. One way is through increased opportunities to observe best practice in other governing bodies and the Commission recommends that this is arranged more widely within the borough through GSS and the School Improvement Service. In developing such opportunities, GSS should investigate contacts with other London boroughs where there might be examples of good practice.

Another way of increasing governors' skills is through participation on national training programmes. GSS reports that eleven chairs of governors have commenced the Chairs Leadership and Development Programme run by the National College for School Leadership. The intention is both to increase governance effectiveness and to improve future succession planning. The Commission supports this development.

There are also opportunities for the best governors to share their skills with other governing bodies by becoming National Leaders of Governance (NLG). Through this initiative, highly effective chairs of governors help other chairs of governors to increase their leadership capacity. The Commission felt that Brent chairs should be considering this opportunity to expand the number of well-led, effective governing bodies.

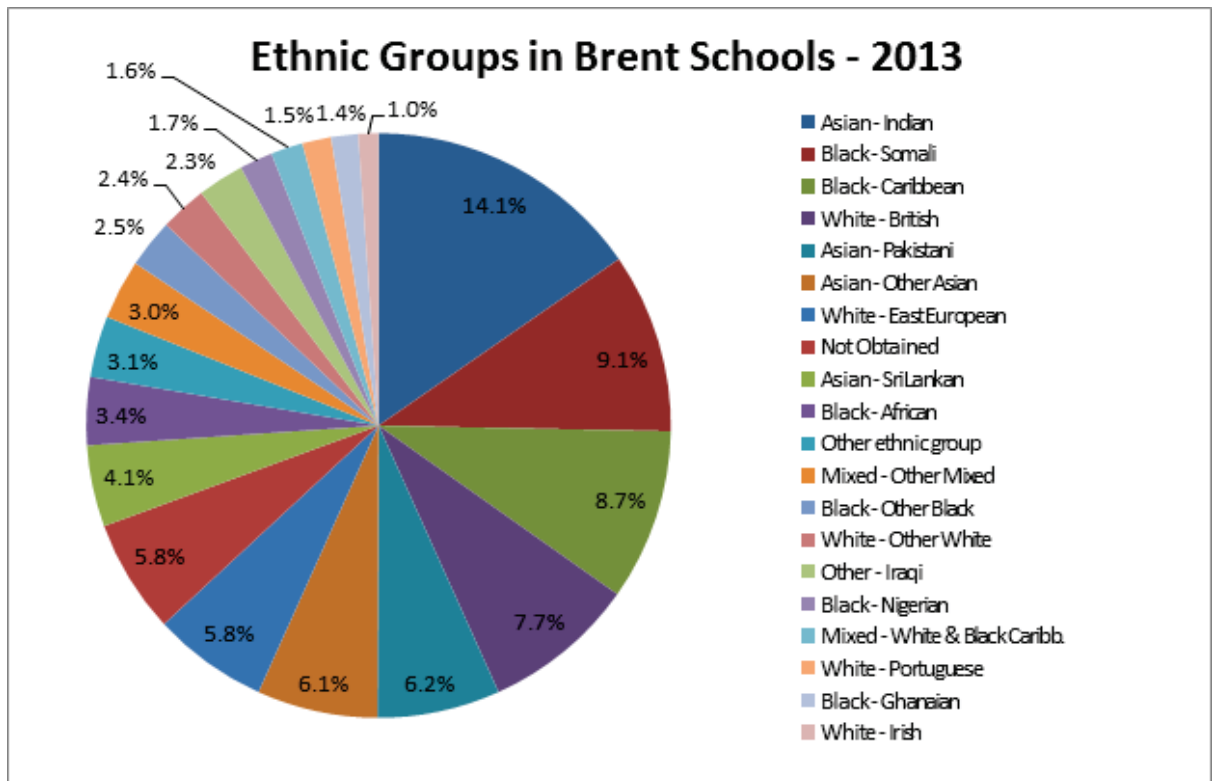
Recommendations

28. All schools in Brent should review their governance arrangements and consider reconstituting their governing body in line with the new regulations.
29. The local authority should complete and implement its review for nominating local authority governors with a view to speeding up the process, drawing in a wider pool of talent and making the skills and capacity of nominees the primary criteria for nomination.
30. The local authority should produce guidance for schools on conducting audits of governor skills.
31. The local authority should give greater priority within the governor development programme to understanding and using data and to supporting the role of governors in school improvement.
32. The local authority should broker collaborations between pairs of governing bodies to scrutinise each other's performance data and to engender confidence and skill in providing constructive challenge.
33. The local authority, should look at opportunities for governors to observe how each other works, perhaps on a cluster or network basis, and through developing contacts in other boroughs to observe and learn about good practice.
34. The best chairs of governors should be encouraged to seek accreditation as National Leaders of Governance and be deployed to support other chairs.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Ethnic make-up of Brent school pupils

2013 RANK	ETHNIC GROUP	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	% CHANGE
1	Asian - Indian	15.1%	14.4%	14.0%	13.8%	14.1%	-1.1%
2	Black - Somali	8.1%	8.1%	9.0%	9.3%	9.1%	1.0%
3	Black - Caribbean	10.2%	9.8%	9.4%	8.9%	8.7%	-1.5%
4	White - British	9.2%	8.8%	8.3%	8.0%	7.7%	-1.4%
5	Asian - Pakistani	6.4%	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	6.2%	-0.2%
6	Asian - Other Asian	5.5%	5.7%	6.0%	6.2%	6.1%	0.6%
7	White - East European	3.5%	3.7%	4.4%	5.2%	5.8%	2.3%
8	Not Obtained	5.6%	5.9%	6.0%	5.9%	5.8%	0.2%
9	Asian - Sri Lankan	3.9%	3.9%	3.8%	3.9%	4.1%	0.2%
10	Black - African	3.6%	3.9%	3.4%	3.4%	3.4%	-0.2%
11	Other ethnic group	3.4%	3.4%	3.4%	3.3%	3.1%	-0.3%
12	Mixed - Other Mixed	2.9%	3.0%	3.1%	3.1%	3.0%	0.1%
13	Black - Other Black	2.9%	2.9%	2.8%	2.6%	2.5%	-0.5%
14	White - Other White	1.7%	1.8%	1.8%	2.0%	2.4%	0.7%
15	Other - Iraqi	1.9%	2.1%	2.3%	2.4%	2.3%	0.4%
16	Black - Nigerian	1.9%	1.8%	1.8%	1.7%	1.7%	-0.2%
17	Mixed - White & Black Caribbean.	1.7%	1.7%	1.7%	1.7%	1.6%	-0.1%
18	White - Portuguese	1.3%	1.4%	1.4%	1.5%	1.5%	0.1%
19	Black - Ghanaian	1.6%	1.5%	1.5%	1.4%	1.4%	-0.2%
20	White - Irish	1.3%	1.2%	1.1%	1.1%	1.0%	-0.3%



Appendix 2 Performance data - Deprivation

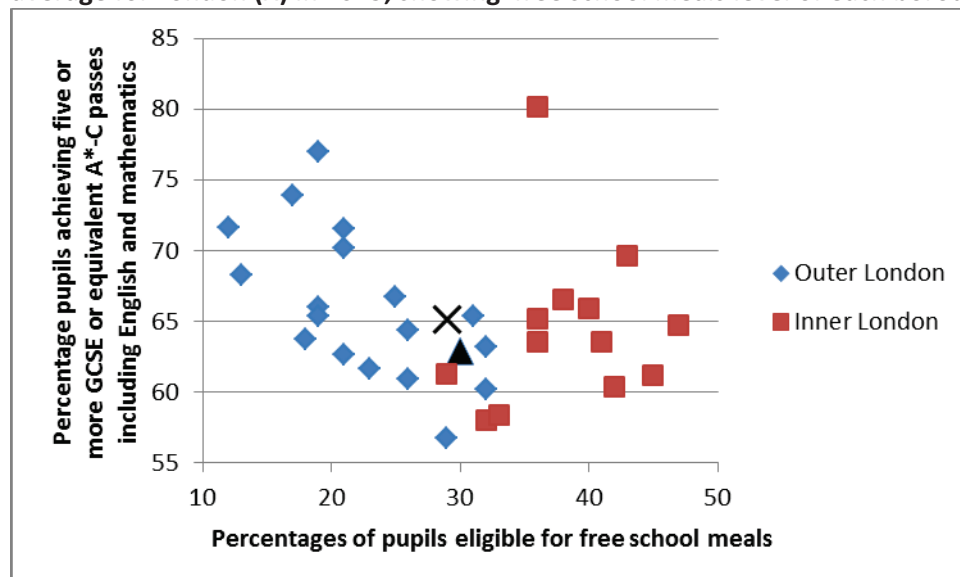
Performance in phonics screening of children eligible for free school meals and others

	Children eligible for free school meals	Other children	All
London	63%	75%	72%
Inner London	65%	76%	73%
Outer London	61%	75%	72%
Brent	69%	76%	75%

Key stage 1 attainment in reading, writing and mathematics in Brent compared with London as a whole, showing the relative achievements of children eligible for free school meals and others

	Level 2+ reading(%)			Level 2+ writing (%)			Level 2+ mathematics (%)		
Pupils:	FSM	Other	All	FSM	Other	All	FSM	Other	All
London	84	91	89	79	88	86	87	93	92
Inner	85	90	89	81	88	85	88	93	91
Outer	83	91	90	77	88	86	87	93	92
Brent	88	90	89	84	87	86	87	93	92

Key stage 4 performance of Brent (Δ) compared with Inner and Outer London boroughs and the average for London (X) in 2013, showing free school meals level of each borough³¹



³¹ Statistical first release

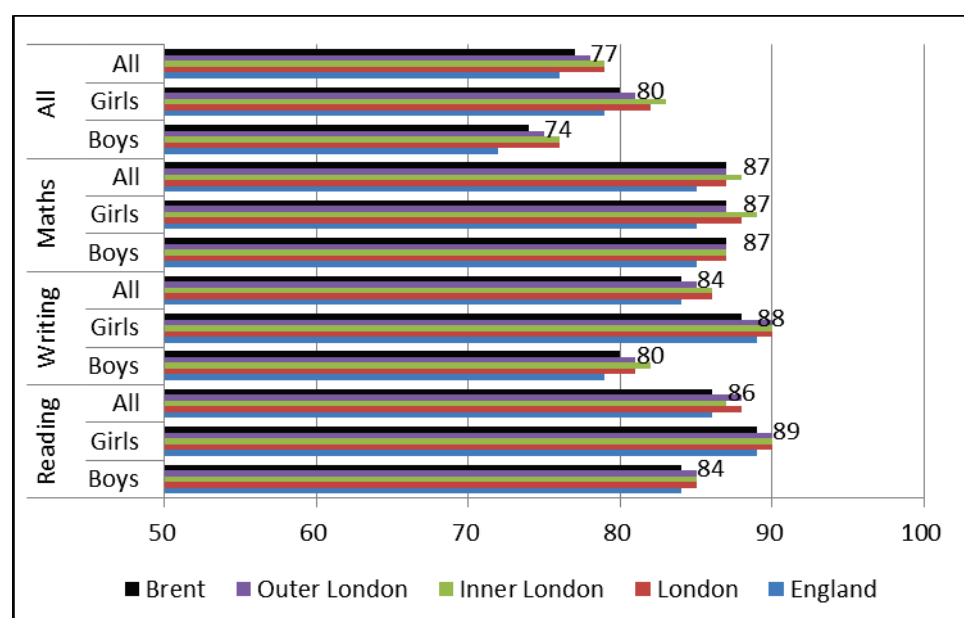
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2012-to-2013-revised>

Appendix 3 Performance data - Gender

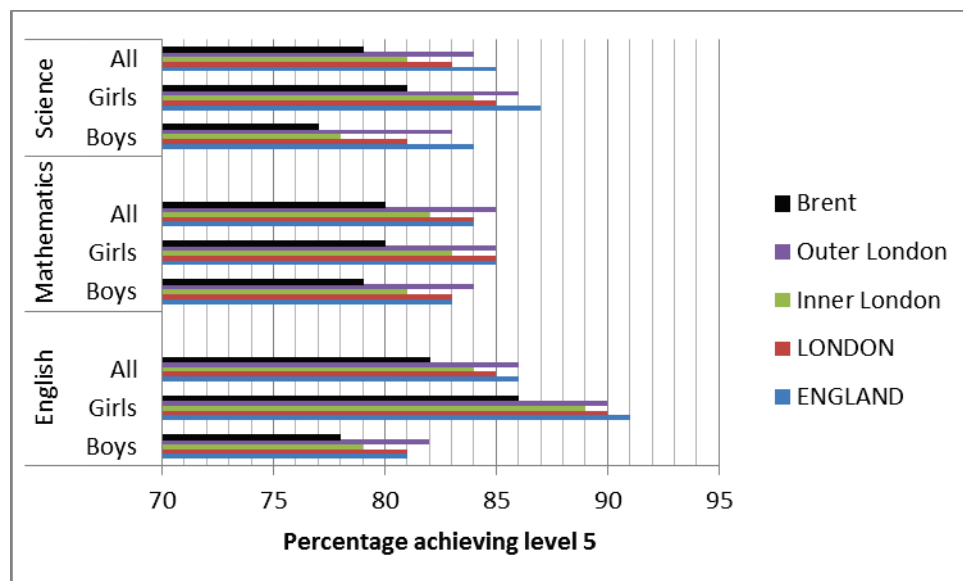
Key stage 1 comparison of achievement of boys and girls

	Level 2+ reading (%)			Level 2+ writing (%)			Level 2+ mathematics (%)		
	Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
England	86	92	89	80	90	85	90	93	91
London	86	92	89	81	90	86	90	93	92
Inner	86	92	89	81	90	85	89	93	91
Outer	87	92	90	82	91	86	91	93	92
Brent	87	92	89	82	91	86	90	93	91

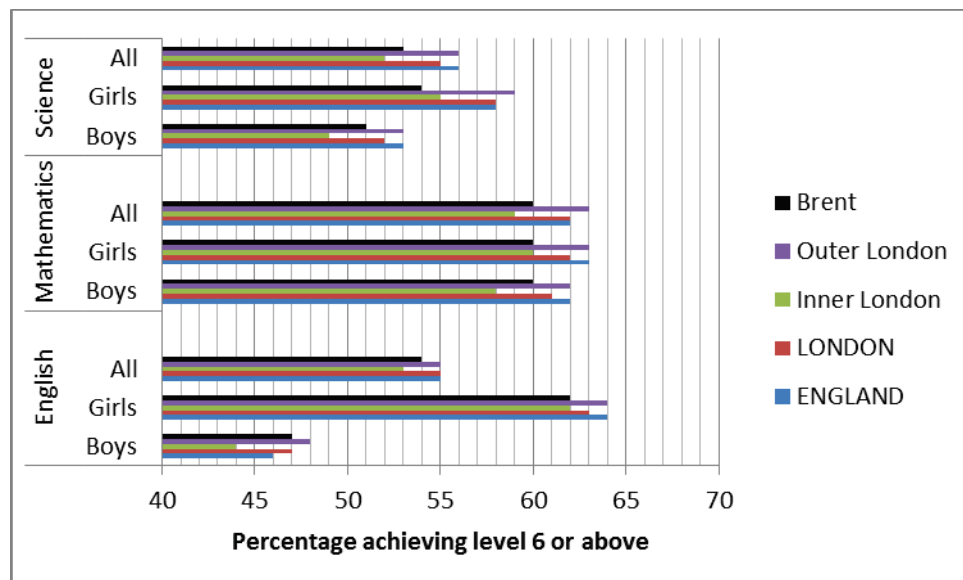
Percentages of boys, girls and all pupils attaining level 4 or above in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2013 (Brent percentages labelled)



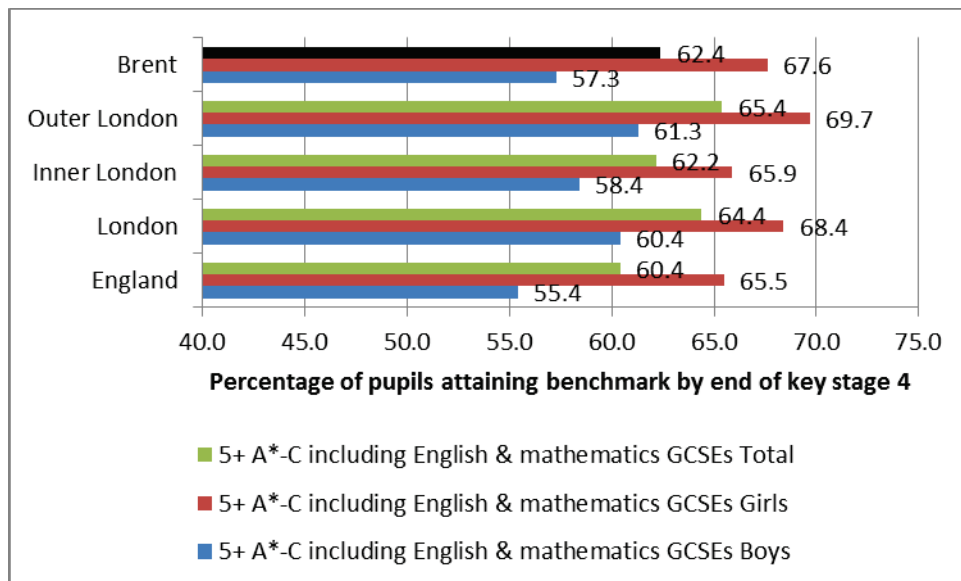
Teacher assessments at key stage 3 – students attaining level 5 by gender



Teacher assessments at key stage 3 – students attaining level 6



GCSE results of Brent schools by gender



Appendix 4 Performance data – Ethnicity and Language

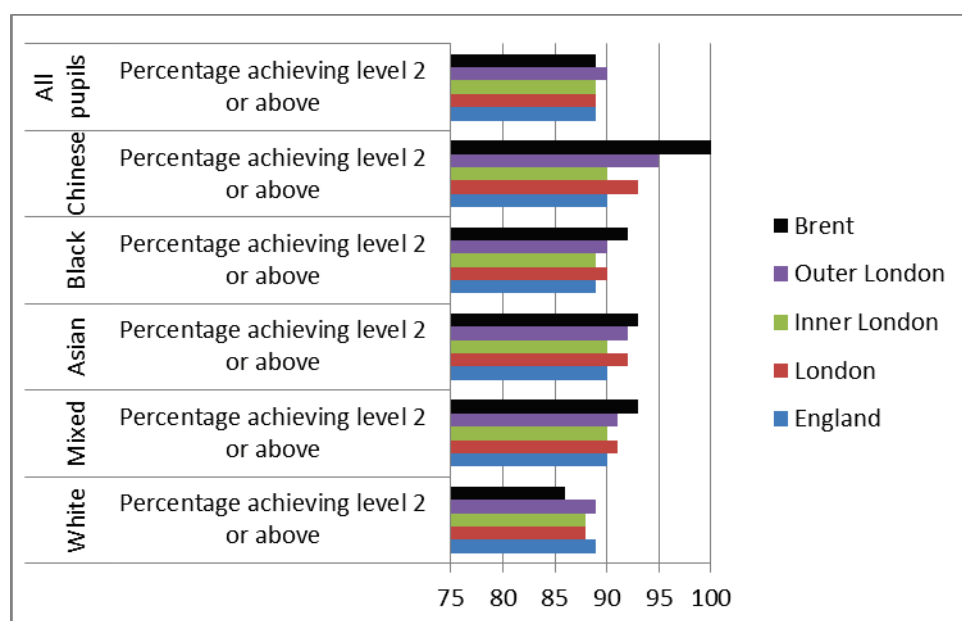
Phonics screening test: Percentages of EAL and other children reaching the required standards

	First language English	Other	All
England	69	63	69
London	72	73	72
Inner London	73	73	73
Outer London	72	72	72
Brent	76	76	75

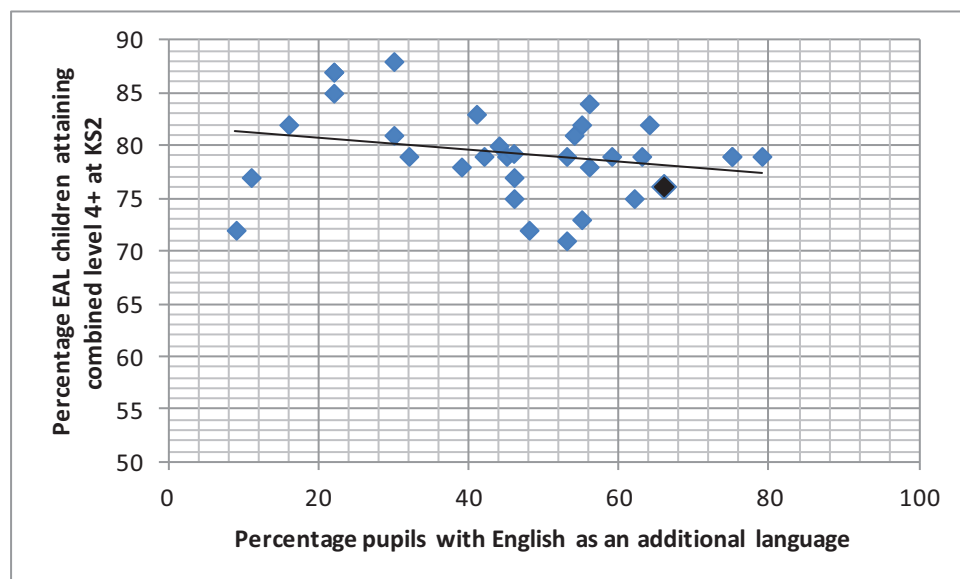
Relationship between ethnicity and achieving the required standard in the phonics screening in Brent

Ethnicity	White	Mixed	Asian	Black	Chinese	All
Percentage meeting the required phonics standard (2013)	76%	74%	79%	75%	-	75%

Key stage 1 reading attainment by ethnicity



Key stage 2 attainment of children with EAL in London boroughs (Brent highlighted)



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