



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM held on Wednesday 12 June 2019 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT:

Governors

Mike Heiser (Chair)
Martin Beard
Geraldine Chadwick
Helga Gladbaum
Michael Maurice
Titilola McDowell
Raphael Moss
Narinder Nathan

Head Teachers

Gill Bal
Martine Clark (Vice-Chair)
Michelle Ginty
Melissa Loosemore
Andy Prindiville
Indira Warwick (substitute)

Lead Member

Councillor Agha

Guest

Farzana Aldridge (BSP)

Officers

Brian Grady
Andrew Ward
Dena Aly
Kunwar Khan

1. Apologies for Absence and Membership

Governors

Lesley Benson
Jo Jhally
Tim Jones

Head Teachers

Jayne Jardine
Gerard McKenna (Indira Warwick attended in Gerard's absence)

Special

Kay Charles

Early Years PVI

Sylvie Libson

Paul Russell

Trade Union

John Roche

The Forum noted that there were three vacancies on the Forum - a Nursery Governor; an Academy Primary Head Teacher; and a Maintained Secondary Head Teacher.

It was further noted that Sylvie Libson, Early Years PVI Representative, had emailed to put herself forward for the vacant position of the Academy Governor. The Governance Officer informed the Schools Forum that the Council would publicise the vacant posts and the process to be followed which would include details about the suitability and nomination criteria.

(Action: Kunwar Khan)

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Deputations (if Any)

None.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 16 January 2019, be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

5. Actions arising

The Forum examined the Action Log which had been included in the Agenda pack for the meeting.

In reviewing the action points, it was noted that:

- Updates on Actions 28 to 40 were now completed.
- Action 41 (Agenda Item 6 - DSG Support for Central Education Services 2019/20 from 12 December 2019 meeting - Provide additional information on the way other local authorities used their DSG central support budgets, including the rationale behind allocations and spending about categories outlined in Appendix 1) was in the process of being completed.

(Action: Andrew Ward)

- Action 45 (Agenda Item 7 - DSG Schools Budget Setting from 16 January 2018 meeting - Draft a letter on behalf of the Chair to the DfE addressing the issues outlined in resolution (vii) of Minute Item 7) was outstanding.

(Action: Andrew Ward)

6. Update report on projects commissioned from Brent Schools Partnership

6.1 Raising the Achievement of Boys of Black Caribbean Heritage in Brent Schools

Gail Tolley, Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council, introduced the report which provided an update from the Brent Schools Partnership (BSP) on the actions taken and progress made since September 2018, following the launch of the *Raising the Achievement of boys of Black Caribbean heritage in Brent Schools* project.

It was noted that BSP were commissioned to implement this project with funding agreed by the Schools Forum. The report was in line with the recommendation in the Schools Forum report of the 20 June 2018, that Schools Forum receives six-monthly reports on the use and deployment of the allocated spend and the resulting impact on securing improvement for this group of pupils. After a brief introduction, Gail Tolley, handed over to Farzana Aldridge (BSP Strategic Director) to present the report.

In summarising, Farzana Aldridge highlighted the following key points:

- On 20th June 2018, Schools Forum agreed to allocate a total budget of £564,750 over two years to the BSP to deliver the proposals set out in the report. The funding allocated for the two years was broken down as £359,500 (2018-19) and £205,250 (2019-20).
- Section 3.7, featured what the funding was approved to deliver:
 - a) A supported rigorous and robust analysis of the performance of pupils of Black Caribbean heritage, and the effectiveness of key aspects of schools' practice to ensure pupils of Black Caribbean heritage achieve well.
 - b) The designation of a Black Caribbean Achievement (BCA) Champion in every school in Brent for two years.
 - c) A programme of half-termly training for the BCA Champion to ensure a high level of skills and competencies to deliver the role effectively leading to a real impact on outcomes in schools.
 - d) A programme of subsidised training for groups of staff and school governors.
 - e) The development of online resources for parents on strengthening their role and contribution to improving their children's learning and progress and reducing the likelihood of their children being excluded from schools. This would provide links to opportunities for accreditation, face-to-face advice and workshops.
 - f) Leadership and management of the overall BCA strategy, including regular collation and analysis of the attainment and progress of pupils of Black Caribbean heritage.
- A separate monitoring and tracking Board, in addition to regular reporting to the Schools Forum, was in place and details were also shared with the Board Members for enhanced transparency and accountability.

In considering the report, the Forum posed the following questions and made a number of comments:

- The initiative was welcomed. It was queried whether there was any in-depth analysis in relation to good quality Early Years (EY) support and opportunities for children of Black Caribbean heritage. A Forum member commented that it was important that EY provision be properly funded and monitored to avoid other cohorts of children performing below their potential.
- Gail Tolley informed the Forum that almost all Early Years provision in Brent had been judged Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. She added that this programme was one part of a wider series of activities aimed at improving take-up of Early Years places across all groups and supporting the achievement of boys of Black Caribbean heritage.
- In response to a question about how often the BSP met with Black Caribbean parents, it was noted that although BSP did not work directly with the parents it engaged parents to understand the system's potential gaps. Two meetings had been held by BSP with parents of Black Caribbean heritage, which were attended by 60-80 parents with strong and diverse views. Schools were being engaged with an offer of support and constructive challenge. However, the BSP had no statutory mandate to make people engage.
- A concern was raised that some schools had been asked to provide data of children from other ethnic groups rather than boys of Black Caribbean heritage. Farzana Aldridge said she would review communications but reiterated the focus of the project and data provided should refer to the school's pupils of Black Caribbean heritage. In relation to section 3.4 of the report which highlighted the significant 'variability' of relevant monitoring data by schools, some clarity was requested. In response, it was noted that recording and categorisation of ethnicity were set out by the Department for Education (DfE). Identification of ethnicity was a complex and nuanced area with consideration needing to be given to dual/multiple heritages and the principle of self-identification as the basis for all ethnicity recording.
- BSP had to rely on the data provided by the schools as they did not have the capacity to check and scrutinise the data.
- Another issue was the persistent absence of pupils from schools and it was noted that the Local Authority and the DfE would be drilling into this.
- The Audit Framework could be applied to any group but the current project was specifically focussed on boys of Black and Caribbean heritage.

As no further issues were raised the Forum thanked officers for the report.

RESOLVED that the Schools Forum note the report, and as appropriate, would seek further information from the BSP Strategic Director.

(Action: Brian Grady and Farzana Aldridge)

6.2 **Strengthening Leadership Development and Succession Planning in Brent Schools**

Gail Tolley, Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council, briefly introduced the report. She handed over to Farzana Aldridge (BSP Strategic Director) to respond to any questions.

Farzana Aldridge (BSP Strategic Director) underlined the following key points during her update:

- The report provided an update from the Brent Schools Partnership (BSP) on the actions taken and progress made since September 2018 following the launch of the Schools Forum funded '*Leadership Development and Succession Planning in Brent Schools*' and the relevant sections in the report provided the details.
- Several schools put forward multiple applications for places on the programmes. Applications were considered based on the quality of applications rather than coverage of schools in Brent. However, all schools with applicants for a place in one of the programmes were successful in securing at least one place.
- In addition to Brent headteachers developing and delivering the targeted leadership programmes, two external organisations had been contracted to secure the necessary capacity and wider expertise to deliver programmes of the highest quality and to cover each of the agreed strands of the programmes. The strands consisted of leadership development sessions, personalised coaching, shadowing/placements and a residential experience - the feedback had been positive.
- The Leadership Charter was a work in progress.
- A breakdown of expenditure was provided and there was some movement within some headings.
- Appendix 1 - Professional commitment agreement between successful candidates with a place on one of the LD programmes and their school - highlighted the commitment to remain in Brent, it was important that Brent (schools and parent/residents) benefited from the work.

In considering the report, the following comments and queries were noted:

- Forum members were pleased to see Brent investing in leadership.
- Members commented that a robust way to evaluate the project would need to be put in place.
- In response to a query about what percentage of schools were from outside the Brent Schools Partnership (BSP) and fair distribution of funds, it was noted that all state-funded headteachers were invited - many non BSP schools were present - at least 4 non-BSP members were benefitting from

the project including audit and CPD opportunities and the programme was completely open.

- A follow-up event was hosted for Jewish headteachers as the first one clashed with a Jewish religious day.
- All the hard work being done behind the scenes, including by volunteers was appreciated.

The Chair thanked the Schools Forum, Gail Tolley and Farzana Aldridge (BSP Strategic Director) for their comments and contributions.

RESOLVED that Schools Forum note the report, and would receive the next report in six-months' time.

(Action: Brian Grady and Farzana Aldridge)

7. 2018/19 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Schools Budget Outturn and Schools Balances

Andrew Ward - Head of Finance, Children & Young People, Brent Council - introduced the report which set out the final DSG outturn against the agreed budget for 2018/19, together with, providing detail on the overall £1.4 million overspend.

Dena Aly, Senior Finance Analyst, Brent Council, informed the Forum that the maintained school balances had increased by £0.9 million from £15.8 million during 2017/18 to £16.7 million during 2018/19 (Appendix B). It was noted that maintained schools received £1.2m of the £2.5m reserve funding added to the funding formula for 2018/19.

In considering the report, the following key points and comments were noted:

- The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budgets overspent by a total of £1.4 million in 2018/19. This was primarily due to a £3.1m overspend on the High Needs block which was partially offset by underspends in the Schools block, Early Years block and Central Services block. The High Needs block experienced demand-led overspends on top-up funding to mainstream settings, residential and independent settings, and post-16 providers.
- The underspend in the Early Years block was due to an underspend on nursery provision for 2, 3 and 4-year-olds, and a planned underspend on central budgets. The Schools block underspend was due to an underspend on the growth budgets. In addition to the £1.4m overspend, there was planned use of DSG reserves totalling £4.1m in 2018/19. Therefore, in 2018/19, the DSG reserves balance reduced from £7.8m to £2.4m as highlighted in section 10.3 and table 3 in the report.
- The schools funding formula for 2018/19 was set in December 2017 ahead of the final DSG budget being confirmed in February 2018. The DfE recoup formula and high needs place funding for academies and fee schools, and pay these directly to them. The total gross 2018/19 DSG allocation for Brent

was £312m, of which £118m was recouped/deducted by the DfE (Department for Education).

- The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) expenditure budget totalled £315m which was supported by £312m of grant income and £3m of DSG reserves released in consultation with Schools Forum as one-off funding.
- The £315m represented the total cost of funding education to Early Years and school age pupils in the borough before recoupment of funds by the Department for Education to fund the borough's Academies. In addition, £3.5m of sixth form funding was received and passed onto maintained schools with sixth form provision - Appendix A provided the detailed budget.
- Overall, the DSG was overspent by £1.4m but within this, there were large variations on the High Needs block and the Pupil Growth Fund. The overspend could be met from DSG reserves in 2018/19, but the growing cost of High Needs provision was a serious concern for future years and might deplete reserves by the end of 2019/20.
- Concerning Schools Expenditure, sections 5, 6 and 7 of the report provided further details to the Forum.
- With regard to pupil growth, there was an underspend against the growth contingency budgets. These budgets were prudently set aside for localised primary growth, for the demographic bulge in secondary phase pupil numbers, and included £0.8m spent on supporting the projects supporting newly arrived pupils from overseas. The budget underspent by £1.3m in 2018/19, had been rebased for 2019/20. The underspend on growth budgets partially compensated for the overspend on high needs, with DSG reserves meeting the balance of the High Needs pressures.
- A main cost driver for the High Needs block was the increasing number of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). These plans specify the amount and type of support a pupil with SEND required and therefore largely dictate the cost. The number of EHCPs increased by 200 in 2018/19 from 2,000 to 2,200, which represented a 10% increase, despite the overall pupil population remaining broadly the same. The average cost of funding the services required by an EHCP was £20k, in a range from £11k to £63k with an average cost of different EHCP placements illustrated in table 2 of the report.

In response to a comment that Local Authority Schools could face serious financial difficulty as a result of the current funding situation, together with, an enquiry whether DfE were truly listening to concerns, Gail Tolley informed Schools Forum that the DfE was beginning to recognise the evidence-based lobbying. She asked the Schools Forum members to use their own professional and community networks to push the message that this issue required urgent attention by central Government.

In response to a query that there appeared to be significant difficulties ahead in 2020 and whether this had been picked up earlier in the three-year budget

forecast, it was noted that the full budget details were recently received and the financial uncertainty was recognised. In addition, it was clarified that there were no known plans for financial claw-back and the average school balance was 12% of annual income.

Based on the information and budget numbers available, Forum members observed that there appeared to be significant financial concerns in 2020 - a number of Forum members commented on the serious financial situation and enquired as to what measures could be/were being taken. In response, Gail Tolley, provided the Forum with a London-wide context where 24 local authorities overspent on their High Needs block in 2018/19, 13 of those had a deficit budget and were obliged to submit a recovery plan to the DfE. It was reiterated that this was a national issue Brent was comparatively in a better situation than most authorities but it was not a sustainable situation. Gail Tolley added that strong lobbying was being undertaken by both officers and politicians, and Brent Council had also contributed to a London Councils paper on this issue since reserves would be inadequate to cover this shortfall. A paper was also to be presented to the Council's Corporate Management Team on this topic.

RESOLVED that the Schools Forum note the report, and further updates to be provided at future Schools Forum meetings.

(Action: Andrew Ward)

8. 2019/20 Dedicated Schools Grant Schools Budget Outlook

Andrew Ward - Head of Finance, Children & Young People, Brent Council - introduced the report setting out the budgetary issues that Schools Forum would need to consider when planning the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budgets for future years.

In considering the report, the following key points and comments were noted:

- A check on the funding formula showed that there was an error in adjusting pupil numbers for pupil growth from September to March. For example, where an additional class was expected in a school, 30 pupils were added to the Number on Roll, however, as the growth would only be for the 7 months from September to March, the 30 pupils needed to be scaled back by 7/12ths. This only applied to specific schools where the Council was aware of planned growth. It had a minor knock-on effect for other schools, as the adjustments meant that the per pupil funding could be increased slightly therefore the total allocated via the funding formula remained at £226.88m.
- The Forum noted that the Table 1 on page 50 of the report illustrated the details of the funding formula whereas sections 4.3 and 4.4 dealt with the funding for the two innovative Schools Forum approved projects for raising attainment for boys of Black Caribbean heritage and strengthening school leadership and succession planning, into the prescribed national funding framework.
- In response to a query about the risk of non-payment of the contribution to the Schools Forum approved projects by Academies, Andrew Ward stated

that this was less of a risk although it was possible. There was no indication that this risk would materialise and the Council was working constructively with schools. An arbiter process was also in place but such a scenario was not envisaged based on the information available.

- In relation to unfunded cost pressures, such as pay rises and increased pension contributions for support staff, it was noted that the government was funding the teachers' pay rise using a separate grant for 2019/20. In addition, funding for the increase in the employer's contribution to the Teacher's Pension scheme was expected to be a separate grant to the DSG. For 2020/21 it may be the case that these grants would be mainstreamed into the DSG, and if so an equitable way of adding these sums to the local funding formula would need to be agreed.
- It was highlighted that it might be useful to look at the Government's Schools Resource Management links that provided very useful information and resources at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-resource-management-checklist>
- In response to queries about the previously agreed split site funding information, it was noted that this could be looked at in budget management papers and/or by the Task and Finish Group.

(Action: Andrew Ward)

RESOLVED that Schools Forum approve the funding arrangements for the projects commissioned from the Brent Schools Partnership (BSP) in 2019/20 and 2020/21.

9. Update on take-up of the extended 30-hours entitlement and wider Early Years entitlements in Brent

Brian Grady, Operational Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy Children and Young People, Brent Council, introduced the report setting out the statutory entitlement to 30-hours of free childcare and early education for all 3 and 4-year-olds from working families that took effect on 1 September 2017. The report also highlighted 30-hour places that had been delivered in the borough alongside the existing free early education entitlements for eligible 2-year-olds and all 3 and 4-year-olds.

The Forum reviewed the update on take-up of the free entitlement to 30-hours places in Brent as well as take-up of the 2-year entitlement and the universal entitlement to 15-hours free early education for all 3 and 4-year-olds.

In considering the report, the following comments and points were noted:

- In relation to challenges about the take-up, it was noted that the paper was discussed by the Early Years Task and Finish Group on 27 March 2019 where the experience of offering 30-hours places was discussed, with some members of the group reporting that delivery of these places was a struggle. It was acknowledged however that there were also other providers in the borough who had advised that delivering 30-hour places had been a success and helped their sustainability significantly. It was also noted that while take-

up of the two-year entitlement and the universal 3 and 4-year entitlement were still below London and national averages, take-up of the 30-hour entitlement had been consistently high in Brent since the roll-out in September 2017. Appendix 4 provided the breakdown of take-up by ward for the 2017-2018 academic year.

- A School Forum member enquired about Information and data on 2-year-olds which they felt should also be considered if available.
- In relation to comments about more marketing and awareness being helpful to increase the take-up, it was noted that the take-up for the 30-hour entitlements had been consistently strong in the borough with take-up in all terms, except one, exceeding the outer London average. Early difficulties with access to the HRMC online application system had largely been addressed and the Local Authority had received no recent feedback from families indicating that they had experienced problems with using this system. Promotion for the 30-hour free entitlements was ongoing and progress against take-up targets for this entitlement was positive. Notwithstanding this, anecdotal feedback from parents indicated that some were choosing not to take-up their full entitlement. Parents reported that this was for a variety of reasons including a desire to spend time at home with children and a feeling that children were of an age when long hours at a nursery might not be appropriate. The Borough had also received a congratulatory letter from the relevant Minister about the local take-up rate.
- Innovative work was taking place to engage employers in the childcare agenda and this had resulted in a number of Brent employers making changes to their recruitment practices and provision of information to their employees to enable them to access childcare to meet their needs. Alongside this, the Early Years, Quality Improvement and Early Years Inclusion Support teams were involved in targeted work in wards/areas to raise the profile of early learning (both in the home learning and formal childcare setting). These initiatives were however subject to the Forum approving ongoing funding.
- The Chair requested a further update report from the Early Years group at the next meeting.

RESOLVED that:

- i. The Schools Forum note the contents of the paper as an update from that presented in a paper to Schools Forum in June 2017; and
- ii. An update from the Early Years group be presented at the next Schools Forum meeting.

(Action: Andrew Ward)

10. **Scheme for Financing Schools and Financial Regulations**

Dena Aly, Senior Finance Analyst, Brent Council, presented the report detailing the changes to be implemented to the Scheme for Financing Schools and the Schools Financial Regulations, which would become effective from 1 April 2019.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- All changes applied in the revision were in line with the February 2019 Department for Education Scheme for Financing Schools (Statutory Guidance) issued to local authorities, changes to the Local Authority's regulations, the EU Public Procurement Regulations and all relevant regulations.
- The 2019-20 Scheme for Financing Schools was attached as Appendix A to the report, with the summary of changes detailed in Appendix B. The 2019-20 Schools Financial Regulation was attached as Appendix C, with the summary of changes being detailed in Appendix D.
- The Forum noted that the changes would become effective immediately after consultation with Schools Forum.
- The attention of the Forum was drawn to Appendix B, section 3.6 on page 125 of the report about the changes to the use of credit cards by schools which stated 'if the schools opt to use credit cards or charge cards, no interest should be incurred by the school, with balances fully cleared on a monthly basis'.
- In addition, a reference was made to the High Value Contract classified between £2m to £5m. In relation to contractual value, the Chair requested that the upper limit to the value be clearly stipulated.

(Action: Andrew Ward)

RESOLVED that, subject to the comments highlighted above, the Schools Forum approve the amendments to the Scheme for Financing Schools 2019-20.

11. **Any Other Urgent Business**

None.

12. **Next Meeting**

6 November 2019.

The meeting was declared closed at 7:41 pm.

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