

# Developing an Education Strategy for Barnet

## Briefing Paper

Education Strategy Board 7 November 2012

### 1 Background

1.1 The transition towards greater autonomy for schools and the evolving role of local authorities in education have been thrown into sharp focus by the speed with which schools and new education providers have embraced the Academies agenda. Whilst arguably the move towards a more autonomous school sector began over two decades ago with the delegation of funding, the current landscape with a rapidly growing mixed economy of providers is causing much national and local debate about the role of local authorities in education. Nationally, 46 per cent of secondary schools are now Academies and around 5% in the primary sector. An increasingly important feature of the Academy landscape is the growth of Academy 'chains' of which there are now 294 nationally, incorporating 908 of the current Academies. Chain arrangements take a variety of forms including collaborative partnerships, multi-academy trusts and umbrella trusts.

1.2 The Department for Education, London Councils and the Greater London Authority have all commissioned research or analysis to try to capture the debate, articulate the issues and opportunities of this new environment and share local authority experience and practice. All stress the emerging nature of this policy area and that the position is by no means settled. The impact of changes to the school funding regime, the new Ofsted inspection regime, the proposed reforms of special education needs provision, the new post 16 responsibilities and a plethora of other policy developments have yet to be played out. However, there are some areas where, with variations in language a consensus is emerging to help shape the conversation.

1.3 The quality of education is central to all local authorities' visions and ambitions for creating successful communities. Local democratic accountability to deliver community aspirations means that education will remain very much a local issue, whatever structure and future landscape emerges from this policy reform. In essence, this role in its very broadest sense is one of 'championing' the needs of children, families and young people. This role for local authorities was highlighted in Education White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* 2010.

1.4 SOLACE – the representative organisation for senior strategic managers in the public sector have proposed that the 'championing role' can be described as

- championing the vulnerable; by enabling the voice of the child and young person to be heard, and complementing this with Councils' own local brand of vigorous and proactive advocacy, speaking up for those who would otherwise not be heard
- championing parents and families; by empowering them to support and challenge their school to improve continuously
- championing educational excellence; by creating the environment for others to succeed

- championing of relationships; Nurturing strong, positive, trusting engagement between the Council, its communities and representatives of all schools, to secure success for all children and young people in the local area

1.5 Research sponsored by the DfE into the emerging role of local authorities echoed this through focussing three areas for local authorities to:

- ensure a sufficient supply of school places
- tackle underperformance in schools and ensuring high standards
- support vulnerable children

1.6 In this evolving policy environment, there is a tension between rushing to seek clarity about roles and relationships and taking time to develop a robust consensus that will stand the test of time. However, the sheer pace of change instils the need for us to provide a framework to discuss, debate and develop our local response in Barnet. We need to develop our approach on how both council and schools' resources and efforts will deliver locally on our vision for the borough. And of course, this debate needs to be framed within the demographic growth and the period of austerity facing public services.

## **2 The current position in Barnet**

2.1 Barnet schools have historically been keen to seize opportunities to develop their autonomy evidenced by Barnet's high delegation of funding to schools compared to other local authorities. Fifteen of our 22 secondary schools now have Academy status with only one non-VA secondary school (Friern Barnet) remaining a community school. As elsewhere in the country, primary schools have been more cautious with only two Barnet schools converted so far. However, there are signs nationally and locally that the primary sector is growing in confidence with the exploration of various structures to enable umbrella or multi Academy type structures to develop. To date, there are no Academy chains present in the borough although London Academy is creating a multi-Academy trust with Deansbrook Junior. The development of the new school at Mill Hill East and the requirement by the DfE for any school in a 'category' to become a sponsored Academy is likely to see Academy sponsors come into the borough.

2.2 Whilst standards overall are being maintained and in some cases, bucking the national trend, there are early signs that maintaining performance is proving challenging. Maintaining Barnet's reputation for academic excellence and achieving further improvement requires a relentless focus on attainment across the whole spectrum of school provision. While the government is relying heavily on the concept of parental choice, the new national Ofsted inspection regime and other developments to do this, we need to fulfil our role as local champions to ensure that schools deliver their part in maintaining Barnet as a successful suburb. The role of the council and elected members in championing and scrutinising standards and how this translates into service provision needs to be scoped and agreed.

2.3 Currently, Barnet has retained a limited resource to monitor and challenge schools, acting as the 'eyes and ears' but the majority of school improvement functions are now offered as a traded service through the establishment of the Barnet Partnership for School Improvement. The overwhelming majority of Barnet primary schools have bought into the service whilst all but one of Barnet's secondary schools are commissioning services from elsewhere. The strategy will explore the next steps and future model in supporting autonomy whilst achieving excellence for our residents.

### **3 Developing an education strategy**

3.1 To provide the framework to shape the local landscape, it is proposed to develop an education strategy for the borough. Following a review of all the current research it is proposed to develop three strands in full consultation with schools, members and other stakeholders:

#### *3.2 Strand A - A strategic vision*

3.2.1 To provide a high level policy position covering the elements listed below. The purpose is to articulate to residents, school and any school provider seeking to establish in the borough, the expectations of members and the community and the future direction regarding:.

- working in partnership
- championing pupils, parents and communities (including role of members/scrutiny)
- supporting success and challenging under performance
- championing the attainment of vulnerable pupils
- promoting curriculum choices for 14-19/Raising of the participation age, increasing employability
- promoting choice and diversity in provision
- early intervention and prevention
- schools at the heart of the community – supporting regeneration
- Health and Well being
- role of Governors
- services to schools (meeting our statutory duty)
- school funding
- involvement of pupils and parents

3.3 This vision will be supported by two 'commissioning strategies'.

#### *3.4 Strand B - Commissioning strategy for pupil and learner places age 4-19 (25 for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities) 2013-18*

3.4.1 To set out the need and the strategy for meeting pupil and learner demand for primary, secondary provision, special schools and resourced provision, alternative provision and post 16 provision.

#### *3.5 Strand C - Commissioning strategy for monitoring, challenge and support services 2013/14*

3.5.1 To set out how the council will meet its duties in relation to monitoring and challenge/intervention, educational psychology and behaviour support, educational welfare, admissions, non-statutory provision/curriculum support (collectively commissioned services by maintained schools) and traded services.

### **4 Consultation and engagement**

4.1 It is proposed that the Education Strategy Board will oversee the overall development of the strategy and in particular the strategic vision. Two existing consultative headteacher groups (the Capital and Place planning Group and the Education Task Force) will each steer the development of strands b) and c).

4.2 A conference on the 20 November for all headteachers will kick start the consultation process, followed by a series of workshop sessions around specific themes:

- Supporting success and challenging under performance
- Alternative provision
- Improving employability - 14-19 provision (up to 25 for LDD)
- Early intervention and prevention

4.3 We will look to utilise existing headteacher engagement forums in order to minimise the time away from school.

4.4 It is proposed to establish a Member Task and Finish Strategy Group to engage and consult with elected members to contribute to the development of the strategy.

## **5 Timing**

5.1 It is proposed to finalise strands a) and b) by the end of February and strand c) by the end of March.

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