

Appendix B

A new approach to school improvement in Barnet

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In July 2013, the Council published its 'Education Strategy for Barnet', which was developed collaboratively by Council officers and headteachers and agreed after consultation with all schools. Barnet's Education Strategy provides a framework for partnership working between the Council and all state-funded schools in Barnet. The framework includes arrangements for:
- Striving for excellence and challenging under-performance
 - Championing the attainment of children and young people, especially those who are vulnerable or at risk of underachievement
 - Securing sufficient high quality school provision and widening local opportunities
 - Monitoring, challenge and support for schools.
- 1.2 The new approach to school improvement set out in this document focuses on those aspects of the Education Strategy that relate most directly to school improvement. It brings up to date the key challenges faced by the education service and schools in Barnet and proposes practical measures to develop the more autonomous and self-improving schools system to which the strategy aspires, building on the principles set out in the strategy about schools being responsible for their own improvement.
- 1.3 The proposed new approach is the result of a review of current arrangements and takes account of:
- the performance of schools and achievement and progress of pupils in 2013 and 2014
 - local and national developments in relation to school education and the respective roles of local authorities and schools.
- 1.4 The report is divided into the following sections:
- 2. Context - School Standards in Barnet: This summarises the key issues in relation to the performance of schools and achievement and progress of pupils in 2013 and 2014.
 - 3. Context – Local and National Developments in school Improvement. This describes current arrangements in Barnet and sets these in the context of national policy developments.
 - 4. Review of School Improvement. This sets out the proposed ambition and priorities for school improvement in Barnet.
 - 5. Towards a schools-led school improvement system. This sets out the vision behind the new approach, the main assumptions, the principles and the proposed approach.

- 6. Links with alternative delivery model – this explain how the proposed new approach links with proposals to consult on options for a new delivery model for the Education and Skill service.

1.5 It is proposed to consult with schools on the approach set out in this document and then review the Education Strategy in the light of both these proposals and the consultation outcomes in relation to an alternative delivery model for the Education and Skills service.

2. Context - School Standards in Barnet

2.1. For some years, Barnet has been one of the top performing local authority areas in the country in relation to the achievement of children and young people and the quality of our schools. However, Barnet's good performance cannot be taken for granted. Our aspiration is to be among the top 10% of local authorities in relation to the quality of provision in our schools, but on a number of measures Barnet is either below this level or at risk of falling below it. For example:

- Whilst Barnet remains in the top 10 per cent of local authorities for schools that have been judged by Ofsted as good or outstanding, Barnet ranks much lower (close to the national average) in relation to inspections carried out under the new inspection framework introduced in 2012.
- In relation to pupil achievement and progression, there are significant concerns with Primary school results, particularly in relation to Writing, though the provisional 2014 results indicate an improvement on 2013.
- At both Primary and Secondary level, the gap in attainment between pupils eligible for Free Schools Meals and their peers last year was well outside the top 10% of local authorities in England and well above the average gap for London. There has been an improvement in the Key Stage 2 figure in 2014 but it is not yet known whether this is also the case for Key Stage 4.
- In 2013 just 14% of looked after children in the Year 11 cohort achieved 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths and the percentage making the expected level of progress in English and Maths between Key Stages 2 and 4 was just 12%.
- Pupil attendance at primary schools in 2012/13 (the last available figures for a full school year) was below the national average and well below the London average.

2.2 Appendix A provides an analysis of school performance issues in Barnet based on the assessment and examination results in 2013, developments since then and the provisional results of the 2014 assessments and examinations.

- 2.3 Given this analysis and the issues highlighted in 2.1 above, there needs to be a continuing sharp focus on the quality of provision in all schools. The local authority (LA) needs to ensure there are adequate arrangements in place to monitor and challenge all maintained schools and to intervene where necessary when a school is a cause of concern. In the light of the local and national developments in school improvement described in section 3 below, it is necessary to consider a more flexible approach to how the LA's statutory functions are exercised and the extent to which these need to be exercised by LA staff rather than other education leaders and experts, such as good and outstanding headteachers from other schools.
- 2.4 Our approach to school improvement needs to take account of Academies as well as maintained schools and needs to recognise the different statutory frameworks that exist. Whilst the local authority has no powers of intervention in Academies, it is still responsible for performance in the area as a whole, under the 1996 Education Act. In addition, the Secretary of State has made clear the expectation for local authorities to act as strategic commissioners for all schools. To this end it is important that the authority maintains a positive working relationship with all schools. The authority is also expected to liaise with the recently-appointed Regional Commissioner who now has responsibility for taking action if an academy is underperforming. The approach proposed in this paper is intended to ensure that Academies have the same opportunities to benefit from a schools-led school improvement system as maintained schools.

3. Context – Local and National Developments

3.1 School Improvement support in Barnet

- 3.1.1 School improvement support is available to Barnet schools from a variety of sources, including:
- Learning Network Inspectors (LNIs), employed by the local authority to support networks of schools across the Borough and to carry out the local authority's statutory role of monitoring, support and challenge to schools and, for maintained schools, intervention where appropriate. The service maintains a list of schools causing concern (SCC). This includes any schools that have been judged as 'Inadequate' or 'Requiring Improvement' at their last Ofsted inspection along with any other schools that the local authority believes are at risk of falling into one of these categories. SCCs receive more regular and intensive support from an LNI than other schools, including a termly or twice-termly monitoring review meeting with the Education and Skills Director.
 - Barnet School Improvement Partnership (BPSI): This is the LA's traded school improvement service. Nearly all Primary, Special and Nursery schools commission support from the Barnet Partnership for School Improvement service, which offers support outside the strategic school improvement framework of the local authority. The BPSI model of support at present is less utilised by secondary schools, which tend to commission the support they need from elsewhere.

- Teaching Schools: These are outstanding schools accredited directly by the DfE to work with other schools to provide high-quality training and development to new and experienced school staff. In Barnet there are two Teaching Schools, The Compton and Northgate. The Compton provides a broad range of support to several schools across phases and Northgate provides specialist support in relation to mental health needs. Teaching Schools operate autonomously of the local authority although, in practice, most Teaching Schools work in partnership within their local school improvement services.
- National Leaders of Education (NLEs) and Local Leaders of Education (LLEs). These are headteachers of outstanding schools, who have a strong track record and are able to provide significant support to underperforming schools. In Barnet there are 10 NLEs and 2 LLEs.
- Other support from a variety of sources, including other good or outstanding headteachers, external providers of support (e.g. Challenge Partners) and some existing partnerships between schools.

3.1.2 A School Standards Partnership Board, chaired by the Council's Strategic Director for People, with representative headteachers and senior officers as members, meets half-termly to keep under review school standards and pupil attainment, attendance and progress, with a particular focus on narrowing gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. It has played a key role in reviewing current arrangements and developing the proposed approach set out in this document.

3.1.3 Whilst there are several examples of valuable partnership working between schools in Barnet, system leadership and school to school support are not yet sufficiently systematised or central to an agreed borough-wide school improvement strategy. Outstanding headteachers, NLEs, LLEs and Teaching Schools do provide support to other schools, but there is more that can be done to make the most of these resources and the expertise they are able to offer. There is a growing consensus among headteachers that the strategy for school improvement now needs to make a significant shift towards systematic school-to-school support, drawing on the system leadership capability of many of the best headteachers and schools, including Academies. This is what we are proposing in section 5 below.

3.2 National policy context

3.2.1 The School Standards Partnership Board has reviewed the national policy context, by considering the views expressed by a number of organisations and individuals, including:

- Government policy, as set out in statements by Ministers and comments by the Schools Commissioner, policy papers from the DfE and consultation documents such as 'Savings to the Education Services Grant for 2015-16' (DfE).

- The Labour Party policy review – *Review of Education Structures, functions and the raising of standards for all: ‘Putting students and parents first’* by David Blunkett, MP.
- Ofsted, including ‘The framework for the inspection of local authority arrangements for supporting school improvement’.
- Independent views:
 - Local authority role in education – final report from the ISOS Partnership
 - The Academies Commission (Christine Gilbert).

3.2.2 This review shows there is a certain amount of consensus between political parties and other commentators. The common elements are around the need for:

- School-led system leadership and school to school support.
- Schools, especially primary schools, to work together in some forms of partnership groupings, such as federations or partnership trusts.

In some cases the emphasis is on academisation of primary schools – through multi-academy trusts – with other primary schools and/or with secondary/special schools. In other cases the emphasis is on federation without an immediate emphasis on academy status.

3.2.3 More recently, in July 2014 the DfE published a research report, which it had commissioned the ISOS Partnership to produce, entitled *The evolving education system in England: a “temperature check”*. The report reports on the ways in which ten local education systems have evolved in response to extensions of school autonomy. Among their conclusions are:

- There has been a decisive shift towards schools-led partnerships leading local school improvement.
- School leaders are confident that they can access the high-quality support they need.
- School leaders see both the attractions and necessity of being connected to at least one formal network.

3.2.4 The report goes on to characterise three types of transition from a traditional LA-centric model of school improvement to a school-led model:

- Slow movers – systems with historically higher levels of intervention in schools, in which local authority services are seen by schools as weak or variable in quality, that are mostly lower-performing systems, and that have been slower in adapting to change or where the leadership of change has been ineffective.
- Sudden reactors – systems with different starting points, but the same end goal in mind: namely that local authority services should diminish, regardless of quality, and that school partnerships should lead, regardless of their maturity. Change has been dictated and driven quickly, with pace outweighing precision in planning and engagement with school leaders,

and without creating the conditions for schools to lead a successful transition.

- Timely adapters – systems in which local authority services are highly regarded by schools, with a history of encouraging partnership-working, that are mostly high-performing systems, and in which change to a schools-led system was already underway and/or has been led pro-actively, with local authorities and schools working together to create the space and conditions for schools to lead the transition.

3.2.5 Barnet schools and the Education and Skills service are in a strong position to make a successful, timely transition to school-led improvement, building on the existing strengths of schools and central services. Section 5 below proposes practical steps for achieving this through consultation and engagement with and between schools, in the context of the parallel discussions taking place about the development of a new delivery model for the Education and Skill service.

4. Review of School Improvement

4.1 After considering the local and national context, the School Standards Partnership Board agreed that the school improvement system within Barnet needed to be further developed and re-modelled in recognition of:

- the increasing responsibility for schools to support and challenge each other, given the concentration of school improvement resources now sitting within schools.
- the need to ensure a comprehensive coverage, particularly in the context of a diverse range of types of school and the range of new education providers entering the education market.
- the potential to make better use of the resources available locally, including the Teaching Schools and National and Local Leaders of Education.

Ambition

4.2 As it is important to set school improvement arrangements in the clear context of an agreed vision and aims, the School Standards Partnership Board developed the following statements of ambition for education in Barnet:

'We want Barnet to be the most successful place for high quality education where excellent school standards result in all children achieving their best, being safe and happy and able to progress to become successful adults.'

In order to achieve that our aims are:

- Every child attends a good or outstanding school, as judged by Ofsted
- The attainment and progress of children in Barnet schools is within the top 10% nationally
- Accelerating the progress of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils in order to close the gap between them and their peers

Priorities

4.3 Given this vision and these aims and the analysis of performance described in section 2 above and the national and local developments in school improvement, it is proposed that the main priorities for school improvement for 2014 to 2106 should be:

- Increasing the number of good and outstanding schools and reducing the number of schools 'Requiring Improvement' or that are 'inadequate'.
- Improving attainment and progression at the end of primary so it is in line with the top ten per cent in the country.
- Improving Primary Writing.
- Raising the achievement of FSM pupils and closing the FSM gap (especially at Primary).
- Improving progression of Looked After Children (especially at Secondary)
- Improving pupil attendance in Primary Schools.

4.4 These priorities will be supported by a schedule of activities that are set out in the annual Business Plan for the school improvement service and include:

- The planned activities of the LNIs through the year, supplemented by much greater use of headteachers (NLEs etc.) to support and challenge other schools, including schools causing concern.
- The development and offer of traded services that reflect these priorities – by BPSI.
- The effective use of and sharing of school performance data with schools, under the leadership of the new Head of School Improvement, supported by the new School Performance Data Manager.
- The development of new support and challenge arrangements for all schools from April 2015, based on the principle that schools should be driving their own improvement and supporting each other to improve.

5. Towards a schools-led school improvement system

Vision

5.1 Here is a proposed vision for what we are trying to achieve through the proposed new approach to school improvement in Barnet:

Every Barnet school should be part of a formal school partnership with a number of other schools. Within these partnerships schools will work together and share best practice and the best schools and best headteachers will play a key role in enabling other schools in the partnership to improve towards outstanding. A self-managing, self-improving school system will become established where co-operation and structured and planned improvement are driven by school leaders, every school benefits and standards are continuously raised.

5.2 Based on this vision, the short-term objective is to establish a series of school improvement partnerships by April 2015 in Barnet so that every school is a member of a partnership and able to benefit from or contribute to system leadership and a self-improving school system.

Assumptions

5.3 This framework is based on the following assumptions:

- Schools should be responsible for their own improvement and so we need a self-improving school system
- System leaders in schools should be driving improvement across the school system
- Nearly all schools need to have regular external challenge in order to identify key areas for development and to improve continuously.
- The local authority is no longer able to offer such challenge to all schools or to pay for it for most schools (from April 2015).
- With the removal of the scaffolding provided by the LA – some time ago for secondary schools and now for primaries – schools that work in isolation are likely to be putting their own school improvement at risk. This is especially the case with primary schools, which are generally too small to maintain a sufficiently robust internal challenge function.
- The way forward is for schools to join together in school improvement partnerships.

5.4 The idea of school improvement partnerships is not new. Many attempts have been made to build school improvement through school collaboratives, partnerships and federations (soft or hard) but often they are not sustainable because of an absence of, or the withdrawal of, specific funding or because of the looseness of the arrangements and thus often a lack of rigour and accountability. This framework is intended to be different. Whilst recognising there cannot be a one size fits all solution, it does aim to systematise and formalise such partnerships in a way that ensures robust and sustainable school improvement across all schools.

5.5 In developing the framework, we have taken into account the following contextual factors:

Phase issues

- There are different starting points for primary and secondary schools, with secondary schools far more likely to be capable of operating completely independently in relation to school improvement, because of their size.
- Many Primary schools are likely to feel uncomfortable about being in a formal partnership with a Secondary school if they feel that the Secondary school would be “in control”.

Academies

- Whilst 17 out of 24 Secondary schools are Academies (including two Free Schools), only 9 Primary schools out of 90 are Academies (including three Free Schools).
- Four of the Primary Academies operate in partnerships with a chain or Trust:
 - Deansbrook Juniors with the London Academy
 - The Hyde and Parkfield – sponsored by the Elliot Foundation

- Millbrook Park, which is part of the London Diocesan Board for Schools (LDBS) Academy Trust.
- Grasvenor and Broadfields Primary Academies are stand-alone academies, but now each has a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) currently consisting of just one school. Three Roman Catholic primary schools are currently considering forming a MAT.
- Three community primary schools have consulted on Academy status and may still be interested in forming a MAT with the right partner schools.

Existing partnerships

- There are various existing partnerships operating across Barnet schools.

Faith schools

- The Diocesan Boards are key stakeholders in relation to partnership and governance arrangements for Church of England and Roman Catholic voluntary-aided schools.
- Some other faith schools may object to joint governance arrangements with other schools that do not share the same faith perspective.

Principles

5.6 In developing a framework for school improvement partnerships, it is necessary to agree some key principles. It is suggested that the following principles should apply:

- In order to ensure the new framework is supported by strong system leadership, every school improvement partnership should include at least one 'good' or 'outstanding school' with outstanding leadership (to be defined - not necessarily based on categorisation by Ofsted at the last inspection).
- In order to mitigate against the risk of schools causing concern pulling down standards in a school improvement partnership, schools causing concern should never make up more than a third of the schools in a partnership (unless it is a partnership of just two schools).

School Improvement Partnerships

5.7 ***Types of School Improvement Partnership***

5.7.1 A School Improvement Partnership may be:

- A **hard partnership** with a strong internal structure and clear lines of accountability to an executive leader and a partnership governance board – this could include, for example, school federations, multi-academy trusts or academy chains.
- A **structured partnership**, which involves a slightly looser internal structure but where there are still very clear agreements on roles and accountabilities for challenge, support, intervention, etcetera. This may involve an executive board of headteachers, with roles allocated to different heads according to their strengths, experience etc.

- A **loose partnership** – less structured than either of the above, where two or more schools agree to work together to challenge and support each other. This is the likely model for partnerships of two or three secondary schools. It is a less desirable model for primary schools, which would generally derive more benefit from a more formal arrangement. However, it remains an option for schools that do not want to commit to a more formal partnership.
- 5.7.2 In some cases it may be possible for a hybrid model to develop, with a hard or structured partnership also having ‘associate’ members, who may not be part of the formal partnership but may engage with the rest of the partnership in some specified school improvement activities.
- 5.7.3 Partnerships may vary in size. Hard partnerships may include 2 or 3 schools or as many 5 or 6 schools. Structured partnerships could be larger – from 3 or 4 schools to up to 10 schools.
- 5.7.4 It is proposed to commission school improvement partnerships to deliver some services currently provided by the local authority. This would be on a differentiated basis depending on the strength of the partnership in question and the ability of the partnership to sustain a robust challenge, support and improvement role for all schools involved.
- 5.7.5 It is proposed that **hard partnerships** should have a similar role to Academy chains – i.e. where the chain is responsible for school improvement functions. In effect the LA’s school improvement services would be provided by the ‘hard federation’ with the executive head and board accountable for these services. So that would include:
- Ensuring regular robust challenge for all schools in the federation
 - Early intervention where weaknesses emerge and formal intervention activities on behalf of the local authority if a school falls below good in an Ofsted inspection or is judged to be below good either by the federation itself or by the LA.
- 5.7.6 For **structured partnerships**, it is proposed to commission the partnership to provide support and challenge services but the LA would take a more direct and active role in intervention activities in schools causing concern, albeit that it may commission the partnership to provide some of the challenge and support that such schools need in order to improve.
- 5.7.7 Schools that do not join in either sort of partnership (including those in loose partnerships) would continue to be monitored or challenged by the LA, but the LA may commission one of the partnerships to provide related services on its behalf.
- 5.7.8 The LA would retain a strategic and brokering role through a reduced school improvement team, which would be responsible for ensuring the quality assurance of each partnership’s devolved school improvement functions (for maintained schools) . That may involve commissioning of an external expert to check the arrangements within each partnership to ensure consistent

quality, robust challenge and timely intervention across all partnerships. It is also envisaged that a School Improvement/Standards Board, with representation from individual partnerships, would monitor the overall effectiveness of the partnerships.

5.8 *Proposed approach to the development of local school improvement partnerships*

- 5.8.1 The approach we propose is an iterative process of consultation with schools, with a differentiated approach between primary and secondary schools.
- 5.8.2 For secondary schools, the proposal is simply to encourage and invite all secondaries to consider or re-consider the value of entering into some form of school improvement partnership with one or more other secondary schools. The LA can help with brokering such arrangements if requested but otherwise it is proposed to let schools take the initiative themselves.
- 5.8.3 It is recognised that some secondary schools may also wish to develop a formal partnership with one or more primary schools. We will return to this below.
- 5.8.4 It is proposed to develop the approach with Primary schools initially. If this grows organically, with Secondary schools subsequently joining a local partnership, then that might address primary school fears about Primary/Secondary partnerships.
- 5.8.5 It is proposed to consult with Special Schools about the most appropriate partnerships for them and the schools they might wish to partner with.
- 5.8.6 For Primary schools, it is proposed to take a proactive approach to developing school improvement partnerships. The DfE assumes that schools will wish to engage with the 'schools supporting schools' agenda and that this approach will evolve naturally without guidance, support or pump-priming. Local experience and national research, however, suggest that, if schools decide to develop a collective approach, the approach is more effective when it is a supported process, with a collective commitment and a shared desire to ensure that the school system's capacity for improvement is not compromised. The development of BPSI is an example of this and it is proposed that a similar approach be taken to school improvement partnerships.
- 5.8.7 It is then proposed to consult all headteachers and chairs of governors on the development of partnerships, and particularly, to ask them to indicate the schools they already have informal partnerships with, schools they would like to partner with and the type of partnership they are interested in. We would follow that up with individual discussions and attempts at 'match-making' before producing proposals for a set of partnerships that seems to represent the 'best fit', whilst ensuring all primary schools are offered membership of a school improvement partnership.

- 5.8.8 Once there appears to be some agreement on the partnerships, we would invite individual schools to agree on the proposed partnerships. Where this is a hard or structured partnership, it would require a decision by the Governing Body and for hard federations there may also be a statutory process to follow, depending on the specific model adopted.
- 5.8.9 Schools that form a structured partnership will of course be able to consider whether they want to move towards a hard partnership at a later date. Those that opt for a hard partnership will need to consider if that should be through federation (a federated Governing Body) or a Multi-Academy Trust or involvement in an Academy chain.
- 5.8.10 The aim is to get as many schools as possible into operational school improvement partnerships by April 2015, so the partnerships can plan their activities and resources in advance of the new school year.

6. Links between the proposed approach to school improvement and the consideration of an alternative delivery model for the Education and Skill service

- 6.1 Barnet's Education Strategy (approved by Cabinet in June 2013) sets out the changing educational landscape within which local authorities and schools are now operating, including:
- The increasing autonomy of schools
 - The increasing diversity of educational providers entering the educational arena, including academy trusts/sponsors and free school proposers
 - Increasing delegation of school funding.
- 6.2 This changing landscape sets the framework for both the proposals in this strategy to move towards a school-led system of improvement and the proposals in the Draft Outline Business Case (OBC) for an alternative delivery model for the Education and Skills service. It points towards a need for schools to take centre-stage in the oversight and strategic direction and commissioning of all school-related services.
- 6.3 The Draft OBC emphasises the need for a delivery model for education services that is 'owned' by schools in one sense or another (shares or a strong commissioning role). As the local authority role dwindles, it is essential that there is a strong framework of school governance that underpins this new organisational structure just as there needs to be a stronger governance framework of school partnerships to underpin effective schools-led school improvement.