Education Strategy for Barnet

Scrubity Panel Briefing Paper

Developing an Education Strategy for Barnet

1. National Context

1.1 Background

Recent changes in national education policy are presenting a number of important strategic challenges for local authorities. The emerging new national education landscape necessarily requires a change in education strategy in order to meet statutory requirements and Barnet’s corporate objectives.

1.2 The role for local authorities in this developing climate was clearly set out recently by the Department for Education 4th December 2012 when the Minister of State, David Laws MP, made a speech to the Local Government Association reaffirming the need for local authorities not to be simply the deliverers of change but leaders and innovators within their own school communities. He challenged local authorities to have a greater ambition for their own role in improving educational outcomes and for them to seek to achieve their potential. He emphasized the need for local authorities to have a key strategic oversight role in education.

1.3 Critically, he reminded local authorities that they can and must support schools, challenge schools, and – where necessary – intervene in schools, even in the new educational landscape where schools’ autonomy presents a new angle in terms of the relationship between local authority and school. He called on local authorities to be the champion of parents and pupils.

2. Issues emanating from national policy

The transition towards greater autonomy for schools and the evolving role of local authorities in education has 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.

2.1 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.
2.2 Number of academies open nationally at the end of each month from Aug 2010 to Oct 2012

![Bar chart showing the number of academies open each month from Aug 2010 to Oct 2012, with columns for sponsored and converter academies.]

2.3 What is happening nationally – growth of academy chains

![Pie chart showing the distribution of academy types as of Oct 2012: Collaborative partnerships (274), Multi-academy trusts (566), and Umbrella Trusts (65).]
2.4 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.

2.5 The impact of changes to the school funding regime from 2013, 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.

2.6 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 the Education White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (2010).

2.7 Local democratic accountability and the role of elected members in championing the needs of children, families and young people is a key plank of the accountability framework within the new education landscape. The context of this role is centred on five key principles:

- The democratic mandate held by Members
- Link to other areas of local responsibility and services
- Local collaboration and local expertise
- Collective responsibility for a community of pupils
- Statutory responsibilities

2.9 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 a 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.

### 3. Local Context

#### 3.1 Background

3.2 Barnet is witnessing a population growth requiring significant investment in schools at a time when the Council is moving towards becoming a commissioning authority and undergoing a Senior Management Review.

3.3 The census in March 2011 has revealed that the population of Barnet at that time was 356,400. This is the second largest population in Greater London, behind Croydon whose population is estimated to be 7,000 people more than Barnet at 363,400. This means that Barnet’s population has increased by 41,800 (+11.5%) since the 2001 census. London as a whole grew by 11.6%.

3.3 The census reveals that there are more children and young people in Barnet than the prevailing projection suggested, with an additional 1,650 0-19 year olds and 1,300 more 20 to 24 year olds compared to the prevailing hybrid data. While this represents an absolute

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1 This comparison is based on the 2001 mid-year estimate from ONS, not the 2001 census estimate which was broadly accepted to be too low.
increase in children and young people, the proportion of the 0-19 cohort within the wider population remains the same at 25.4%.

3.4 There are an estimated 3,000 short term migrants in Barnet in addition to the 356,400 population base – the eighth highest number and proportion in London. These are individuals who intend to stay in the country for between three and twelve months. There is no further detail on these individuals in this release, but across London the majority of short-term migrants are aged 15-44, with more females than males aged 15-24.

3.5 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.

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3.6 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.
What is happening in Barnet in terms of school performance?

Percentage of children achieving Level 4 in both English and maths

3.7 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.
4. Developing an Education Strategy for Barnet

4.1 In order to provide the framework to shape the local landscape, it is proposed to develop an education strategy for the borough. The strategy needs to provide a framework to debate the evolving relationship in Barnet among stakeholders:

- Moving towards a shared articulation of the role of the council and the role of Barnet schools in this evolving landscape;
- Moving towards a more clearly articulated commissioning relationship to reflect the council and national move in this direction;
- For parents and carers, setting out how the council will champion the interests of children in Barnet

4.2 Background research

4.2.1 In order to support the development of the strategy, research into the challenges facing Barnet in the development of a new education strategy was conducted by ISOS in November 2012. It’s purpose was to improve understanding of how other local authorities are exercising their key education responsibilities in light of the growth in numbers of academies and the more autonomous system. The authorities that took part in this research reflect differing proportions of established Academies: Bristol, Middlesbrough, Westminster, Gloucestershire, Thurrock, Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire, Bolton, Warwickshire and Royal Kingston.

4.2.2 In summary, these authorities adopted a strategic response to a more autonomous system by:

- Taking a pragmatic and positive approach to the change agenda and making a commitment to enabling schools to lead their own improvement. The increase in school autonomy is seen as part of a longer term change process.
- Being generally confident that they have established a coherent vision about how they could work with schools and key partners to support the quality of education over the next period

But also by recognising that:

- success in a more autonomous system depended on the ability of the authority to persuade, influence and develop common goals and areas of mutual interest.
- There were capacity constraints within local authorities to carry out their maintaining role, while developing new roles and skills in the context of a mixed economy of schools

4.2.3 The key recommendations emerging from the research were that, in order to keep in line with the changing landscape, local authorities needed to:

- Seize the agenda, rather than be apologetic and wait for instruction.
- Treat schools as partners and leaders in the education system and develop the governance with and between schools so that good relationships have a life beyond the particular individuals involved at any one time.
- Identify opportunities to delegate further powers, responsibilities and budgets to schools, within a framework of strong partnership working and robust quality assurance for outcomes.
- Develop what the local authority’s role as ‘a champion of pupils and parents’ really means, including the scrutiny role of members.
- Develop strong relationships with local academy sponsors and Free School promoters and maximise local intelligence to become a valued partner in the commissioning dialogue related to future school provision.
- Monitor the sufficiency of support available for vulnerable children and the effectiveness with which schools are able to commission that support to meet needs.
• Take much greater responsibility for collective, rather than individual, outcomes in relation to exclusions, admissions, Fair Access, post-16 planning and supporting better teaching and learning.
• Recognise that one school’s decisions will have a far-reaching impact across the community and beyond its own walls.
• Develop the confidence to challenge headteacher peers, on the basis of evidence.
• Grow the capacity to make the most of the new opportunities that come with a changing education landscape. In particular, become an expert commissioner, with confidence to define need, identify the right support, and quality assure the service delivered by an external provider.

4.2 Following a review of all the current research it is proposed to develop three strands in full consultation with schools, members and other stakeholders:

4.2.1 Strand A - A strategic vision

4.2.2 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

4.3 This vision will be supported by two ‘commissioning strategies’.

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

4.4.1 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.

4.5 Strand C - Commissioning strategy for monitoring, challenge and support services 2013/14

4.5.1 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.
5. Consultation and engagement

5.1 The Education Strategy Board is overseeing 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) are each steering the development of strands B) and C).

5.2 A conference on the 20th November for all headteachers kick started the consultation process, followed by a series of workshop sessions around specific themes. The two workshops below have already taken place:

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

The following two will be taking place in January/February 2013:

- Alternative provision
- Early intervention and prevention

5.3 The objective behind the establishment of this Strategy Group is to seek the contribution of elected members to the development of the strategy.