

London Borough of Islington  
**Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 29 April 2024**

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Monday, 29 April 2024 at 7.00 pm.

**Present:**           **Councillors:**           Chapman (Chair), Bossman-Quarshie (Vice-Chair), Craig, Jegorovas-Armstrong, North, Ogunro and Zammit

**Co-opted**                   Mary Clement, Roman Catholic Diocese  
**Member**                   Sophie McNeill, Primary Parent Governor  
  Representative  
  Nick Turpin, Church of England Diocese

**Councillor Sheila Chapman in the Chair**

**189       APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. 1)**

Apologies were received from Susie Graves, Councillor Pandor and Councillor Safi-Ngongo.

**190       DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. 2)**

Councillor Convery substituted for Councillor Pandor.

**191       DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. 3)**

There were no declarations of interest.

**192       MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (ITEM NO. 4)**

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2024 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

**193       CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. 5)**

The Chair informed members and officers that this meeting, subject to ratification at the subsequent Annual Council on May 16<sup>th</sup> 2024, would not just be last of the municipal year, but also the last as the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee, as following the Council's review into the structure of scrutiny, this committee was proposed to become the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair advised that as the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee would take on the statutory education scrutiny responsibility and therefore the remit of the committee would broadly remain the same as that of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee but with some additional areas of focus, including children's health and wellbeing.

The Chair also outlined that the majority of the business at this meeting was made up of items that had been adjourned from the previous meeting of 26<sup>th</sup> February 2024. Therefore, the items that had originally been on the work programme for this evening, the SACRE Annual Report and the Quarter 3 performance report had been moved to

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the first meeting of the new Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

The Chair welcomed Sophie McNeill and Nick Turpin to the committee, for which this was their first meeting as sitting members. Susie Graves was unable to attend but was also welcomed. Each of the appointed co-opted members had been elected to serve four-year terms and would serve the remainder of their terms on the new committee.

### 194 **EXTERNAL ATTENDEES (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. 6)**

None.

### 195 **ITEMS FOR CALL IN (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. 7)**

None.

### 196 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. 8)**

None.

### 197 **SCHOOL RESULTS 2023 (ITEM NO. B1)**

The Director for Learning & Achievement and the Assistant Director for School Improvement and Pupil Progression was invited to present the item on School Results 2023. In the discussion, the following points were raised:

- Officers informed the committee, national context Islington had second highest population density in UK, high numbers of SEN needs, highest eligible FSM in mainstream schools in country. Backdrop of what we are in, a lot to be positive in these outcomes. Broadly when compared to national, compare favourably across most key stage. Challenge is how we can improve to be above inner London.
- Educational attainment in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) has improved on 2022 outcomes but remains just below National and Inner London figures.
- There were performance indicators where Islington did outperform inner London.
- Key Stage 2 outcomes exceeded National across most indicators with only the expected standard for writing just below. When compared with Inner London, reading, writing, maths and combined outcomes were broadly in-line whilst Greater Depth across all measures were below Inner London.
- Rates of absence and persistent absence have increased across the Primary sector despite a decrease in both measures, nationally when compared with 2022.
- Pupils achieving a standard pass (Grade 4 – 9) was in-line with National figures and above National for those pupils attaining a strong pass (Grade 5 – 9) in English and Maths. Both indicators were lower when compared with Inner London figures.
- The number of Electively Home Educated (EHE) pupils has increased to over 300 for the first time in 2023.
- At KS5, students across Islington performed better across vocational qualifications when compared with National and Inner London figures. The % of students achieving 3 A\*-A grades at A-level was below Inner London and National.
- The % of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) fell to 4.5% from 4.7% in 2022 and 4.8% in 2021. This was lower than the National figure but higher than Inner London.

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- 96% of all school settings in Islington are rated as either Good or Outstanding. This compares with a national figure of 88% and is an improvement on pre-pandemic outcomes.
- Primary school permanent exclusions and suspensions decreased slightly from 2022, although both indicators are higher than National and Inner London.
- Secondary school absence and persistent absence have increased on 2022 and are above Inner London and National.
- Permanent exclusions across Islington secondary schools have increased slightly on 2022 but remain below provisional National figures. The suspension rate has reduced from 2022 and for the first time since 2015, is lower than the provisional National figure for 2023.
- The Islington Key Stage 4 Attainment 8 score was above National but below Inner London. The Progress 8 score for all pupils was in-line with National but lower than Inner London.
- Black-Caribbean and Mixed-White & Black-Caribbean pupils have lower levels of attainment than the Islington average at Key Stages 2 & 4. We know these pupils also have relatively low levels of attendance, and low attendance has an impact on attainment.
- Officers clarified that they were not celebrating the range of outcomes, acknowledging that the higher range suggested there were schools with cohorts that were struggling.
- In response to members questions about whether the set and range of results were unique to Islington, officers acknowledged that there were areas for improvement in the results but that they should still be taken in context of the borough's profile, having some of the highest free school meal eligibility and SEND need in the country. It was also advised that further work needed to be done on post-sixteen education.
- It was advised that for Key Stage Five, only 9.2% achieved three A\* to A grades, compared to 15% elsewhere, which officers acknowledged was not high enough.
- Members were also advised that 97% of Islington students went on to employment, education and/or training which was slightly below that of other authorities in London.
- In response to members questions about why Key Stage One cohorts were excelling compared to Key Stage Two, officers advised that they were two different cohorts and that it was the expectation that the Key Stage One cohort would excel in their Key Stage Two results, and the ambition that the results would be above the average for both inner-London and nationally across England.
- Officers acknowledged that Attendance in Islington wasn't at the level that they would like it to be and that this was a picture reflected across the country. Locally, officers have put in place measures such as professional partners to help support schools address the issues behind this.
- Members highlighted that absence had gone from 11% to 21% and that the borough was now performing below that of statistical neighbours in inner London, of whom were facing similar issues, and that this overall data didn't capture the individual performance of schools. Officers responded by stating there would be learning taken from clusters of schools with similar challenges going forward and that best practice identified from this learning could be shared more widely.
- Members highlighted that the range of persistent absence between secondary schools wasn't strongly reflected in the data and asked officers how would the local authority engage academies to share their best practice. In response, officers advised that a pastoral deputy network had been set up which had representation from academies and maintained schools. Officers also advised

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that inclusion hubs had brought schools together to share good practice in terms of attendance.

- Officers stated that one of the key learning points from historical transitions to secondary schools, was that it was essential to maintain relationships with families that may be harder to reach to reduce absence, but that it remained a multi-faceted challenge about doing lots of small things well.
- Other measures being considered by officers included attendance mentors, subject to funding, and an attendance awareness course for parents was being considered.
- Officers were looking to take the school clusters proposal to the Education Board this week, with free school meal eligibility and SEND likely to be the measures these will be based on.
- Best practice would be able to be drawn from Islington professional partners in time for the new school year.
- In response to members concerns about the visibility of the Education Board and the urgency in which they were responding to what was described as the critical issue of attendance, officers acknowledged that there needed to be a shift in accountability, but stated that the board is evolving and to share in the borough's vision, but that the board is evolving and discussions had taken place about making it more collaborative.
- Officers confirmed that flexi learning had been explored for elective home educated pupils, and that one school had been trialling this approach. The arrangements were described to members as being complex, with students that were trialling flexi learning being marked as absent for the days they were being educated at home. It was also a challenge to maintain the continuity of learning. options around flexi learning, part time learning.
- It was suggested that more could be done to collaborate with governors on attendance.
- Officers also cited falling numbers of staff and funding as contributors to schools not being able to tackle attendance and particularly, emotional-based school avoidance.
- Members commented that they were sympathetic to the factors behind poor attendance, highlighting that it wasn't unique to Islington and repeated concerns that the Education Board was not responding to it as an emergency. Members further expressed concern that the best practice being discussed by officers was existing practice that may not fully resolve the issues.
- Letters celebrating parental achievement was suggested as a possible means of engagement, as was attendance awareness courses for young people.
- In response to members questions as to whether there was an economic or geographical factors regarding attendance, officers stated that there was no such correlation and that it was an issue facing every school and cohort, and that the only variable remaining was that it could be attributable to individual school leadership.
- Conversely, there had been new research conducted on assets in the community that showed children that lived in communities with assets such as children's centres, were much more likely to have stronger attainment.
- The proportion of elective home education students taking up assessments were approximately 60/40 in favour, and it was cited that there were generally more families collaborating with officers than not.
- Officers confirmed that the choice of whether to implement SATs for Key Stage One was with the individual leadership of each school.
- Officers confirmed that there was no additional funding being received to support the reintegration of children being electively home educated and that while Islington supported parental choice, it remained the authority's position that all children should be in school.

**RESOLVED:**

That the 2023 School Results be noted.

198

**SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SEN & DISABILITIES TRANSITIONS - 12 MONTHS UPDATE (INCLUDING UPDATE ON BASELINE REPORT FOR SUPPORTED INTERNSHIPS) (ITEM NO. B2)**

Officers presented the item to the committee. In the discussion, the following points were raised:

- In the three years since the scrutiny review, the numbers of children in Islington with an education, health and care plan has gone up 35%.
- The SEND crisis was second only to attendance, and this was a particular focus of concern for officers.
- The scrutiny review's wide range of recommendations had impacted on different groups positively, including strengthening relationships with parents and engaging with service users more about specific concerns.
- Officers advised that Islington was on the right side of the challenges and that it was one of the few local authorities that were in balance regarding its high needs budget.
- Islington was one of the change partners now piloting reforms ahead of rollout and providing feedback on the proposals. Islington had also been featured in an article about the successful approaches to SEND need, which specifically highlighted strong partnerships and relationships.
- Officers were working to ensure that all schools were fully trained in Islington's trauma informed practice model.
- In response to member questions about the differences between schools in terms of accepting SEND pupils due to the pupil's funding not always covering the cost of the specialist provision needed, officers responded stating that they were working on how to share the work between schools more equally, but that the funding system, nationally, was in need of reform.
- Members noted that the offer for SEND children needed to include a more varied offer of activities.
- In response to members' questions about whether staff were coping with the workload, officers confirmed that they were trying to recruit extra staff and utilising funding to do so.
- In response to members' questions about whether there were enough SEN places in Islington, officers stated they were confident that it was. Officers elaborated that Islington had reshaped its specialist provision in the 1990s and 2000s and had many purpose-built sites to cater for the high SEN need in the borough. The provision at Samuel Rhodes School covered all four areas of code of practice in terms of cognition and learning, the provision at The Bridge specialised in autism, and Richard Cloudesley specialised in physical and sensory need. Additionally, there was also New River College and additionally resourced provision facilities (ARPs) spread across other primary schools in the borough.
- Members thanked officers for their presentation and response to the recommendations of the review.

**ACTION**

The Update on the Baseline Report for Supported Internships to be added to the 2024-25 work programme of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.

**RESOLVED**

That the item be noted.

199 **THE CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE - DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS (ITEM NO. B3)**

The Chair opened the discussion by thanking members, officers, and witnesses for their participation in the scrutiny review and highlighted some of the recommendations.

- Members requested that the recommendation on allocations should be directed to Planning Officers as well as Housing.
- Members commented that in responding to the recommendations on staff wellbeing, recruitment and retention, officers may need to be bold in their thinking and to try different approaches.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Draft Recommendations be agreed.

MEETING CLOSED AT Time Not Specified

Chair